

Degeneration Anxieties and Eugenic Contemplations in Modernizing Turkey during the Interwar Period

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ABSTRACT

Eugenics is the practice or advocacy of improving the human species by selectively mating people with certain desirable hereditary traits. Eugenic movement gained importance in the nation-building and modernization processes starting from the late nineteenth century and reached its' greatest popularity in the first half of the twentieth century. This study, by treating eugenic thought as one of the travelling ideas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, explored the origin and the development of eugenics movement and its associated discourse in Turkey in the early republican period. It charts the arrival of the movement and its associated ideas in Turkey and the reasons behind its appeal for the architects of a new republic as well as, how and to what extent was it modified by the intellectual and political milieu and what elements of it, if any, were put in practice. By reading the existing literature on Turkish eugenics and major works of Turkish Eugenicist of the period, this study demonstrates that the early Turkish Republican elite and medical bureaucrats discussed the significance of motherhood, marriage, hygiene, childcare, sports, and physical education to come up with a generation of citizens that would be healthy, strong, and productive. In other words, the discourse of Turkish eugenics aimed to create a healthy and robust Turkish society with a collective national identity with policies adapted from the West to both catch up with the West and prove itself against the West in the process of modernization.

Key Words: Eugenics, Turkey, Modernization, Inter-War Period

JEL Classification: N450

İki Dünya Savaşı Arası Dönemde Modernleşen Türkiye'de Dejenerasyon Kaygıları ve Öjenik Düşünceler

ÖZ

Öjeni, arzu edilen kalıtsal özelliklere sahip insanları seçici olarak çiftleştirerek insan türünü iyileştirme uygulaması veya savunuculuğu anlamına gelir. Öjeni hareketi, on dokuzuncu yüzyılın sonlarından itibaren ulus inşası ve modernleşme süreçlerinde önem kazanmış ve en büyük popülaritesine yirminci yüzyılın ilk yarısında ulaşmıştır. Bu çalışma, öjeni düşüncesini on dokuzuncu yüzyılın sonları ve yirminci yüzyılın başlarındaki dünya çapında tedavülde olan fikirlerden biri olarak ele alarak, erken cumhuriyet döneminde Türkiye'de öjeni hareketinin ve bununla ilişkili söylemin kökenini ve gelişimini araştırmıştır. Hareketin ve onunla bağlantılı fikirlerin Türkiye'ye gelişini ve yeni cumhuriyetin mimarları için çekiciliğinin ardındaki nedenleri ve entelektüel ve siyasi çevreler tarafından ne ölçüde değiştirildiğini ve hangi yönleriyle uygulamaya konulduğunu mercek altına almıştır. Bu çalışma, bu konu üzerine mevcut akademik literatürü ve dönemin Türk Öjenistlerinin önemli eserlerini okuyarak, erken dönem Türk Cumhuriyet elitleri ve tıp bürokratlarının sağlıklı, güçlü ve üretken vatandaşlar yetiştirmek için annelik, evlilik, hijyen, çocuk bakımı, spor ve beden eğitiminin önemini tartıştığını göstermektedir. Diğer bir deyişle Türk öjeni söylemi, modernleşme

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sürecinde hem Batı'yı yakalamaya hem de Batı'ya karşı kendini kanıtlamaya yönelik Batı'dan uyarlanmış politikalarla kolektif bir milli kimliğe sahip sağlıklı ve güçlü bir Türk toplumu yaratmayı amaçlamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öjeni, Türkiye, Modernizasyon, İki Savaş Arası
JEL Sınıflandırması: N450

INTRODUCTION

The term eugenics, first conceptualized by Francis Galton in 1883, is the practice or advocacy of improving the human species by selectively mating people with certain desirable hereditary traits. Eugenic movement gained importance in the nation-building and modernization processes starting from the late nineteenth century and reached its' greatest popularity in the first half of the twentieth century, when it was practiced by many countries in the world and promoted by intellectuals, scientists, institutions, and governments. In this study, we treat eugenic thought as one of the travelling ideas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The idea emerged in United Kingdom during the late Victorian period, yet it was received and discussed beyond the borders of the late nineteenth century English intellectual milieu. Once modern eugenics historiography is examined, an observation can be made that eugenic discourse and practices were formed, and at times, took very radical turns in connection with the socio-economic needs and political milieus of each country. As pointed out by Richard S. Fogarty, "Eugenics was an important force in nearly all industrialized societies and certainly in all of Europe by the early twentieth century. In each case, the particular needs and desires of the prevailing national political and social regime seeking to classify, control, maximize, and marshal its population and human capital, determined its eugenic policies to a large extent." (Fogarty, 2015:237-38). In the following pages we explore development and complexities of eugenic discourse in Turkey and to what extent was this thought, primarily promoted and disseminated by the medical intelligentsia of period, put into practice. Some of the questions that we seek to answer in this study include the following: Who were main figures engaged in Eugenic thought in Turkey? What drew them to it? How did they receive Eugenic thought and to what extent did they appropriate and modify those ideas in the newly established Turkish Republic? In other words, did they adopt this thought originating in the Western Europe and North America without making any changes or did they question some of its assumptions? Which schools of Eugenic thought were their inspirations? Did they push the agenda for positive or negative Eugenic policies?

I. EMERGENCE OF EUGENIC THOUGHT AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

The concept of eugenics dates to the nineteenth century with the growing interest in biological theories. At the time, terms such as 'race betterment' or 'race improvement' came in to vogue. Although the context of "racial improvement" goes a long way back, the term eugenics was conceptualized by Charles Darwin's

cousin, Sir Francis Galton.¹ Before analyzing Galton's studies on eugenics, it might be useful to start with two significant figures of heredity studies which in fact formed the two opposite sides of the Eugenics discourse: Gregor Mendel (1822-1884)² and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1820)³. Mendel, considered to be the founder of genetics, expressed the transmission of hereditary characteristics from generation to generation with his studies on the inheritance of plants. He argued that the inherited traits in humans do not change and transfer through blood to succeeding generations. Lamarck also argued that hereditary traits do transfer to the succeeding generation through blood. However, contrary to Mendel's views, he argued that living creatures acquire new features through their interaction with the environment. These features can transfer on to the next generations. Mendel and Lamarck's studies formed and nurtured two opposing camps of eugenic discourse in the years to come.

As developments in the field of heredity continued, the foundation of Eugenic theories was laid by Galton in 1865. Galton's publication of a two-part article named *Hereditary Character and Talent* investigates the transmission of genius, talent, and character. He analyzed the genealogy of 300 families in England and strove to prove the most qualified people came from several families that were related to each other. Galton sowed the seeds of the eugenics ideas while describing the transitions of heredity. According to Galton, the purpose of "Eugenics is to represent each class or sect by its best specimens; that done, to leave them to work out their common civilization in their own way." (Galton, 1909:37). He was influenced by Darwin's idea of natural selection⁴ to such an extent that in his book *Hereditary Genius* he proposed a system of arranged marriages between men of distinction and women of wealth which would eventually produce a "gifted race". Galton understood eugenics to be the rational planning of, and intervention into human breeding, the application of "selection" to humans, based on statistical

¹ Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911) was an English mathematician, psychometrist, inventor, meteorologist, geneticist, and eugenicist. Galton made numerous contributions to biometrics and statistics, including introducing the concepts of correlation and of regression towards the mean. (<https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/connections/518c1ed54d7d6e0000000002> Date Accessed: 05.10.2021)

² Gregor Mendel (1822-1884) was an Austrian monk who discovered the basic principles of heredity through experiments in his garden. Mendel's observations became the foundation of modern genetics and the study of heredity, and he is widely considered a pioneer in the field of genetics. He studied traits in plants in his paper, "Versuche über Pflanzhybriden" in 1866. (<https://www.biography.com/scientist/gregor-mendel> Date Accessed :05.10.2021)

³ Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1820) was a French biologist, best known for his theory of inheritance of acquired characteristics. He also served as one of the founders of the Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle. For eugenicists, Lamarckian ideas were influential in debates over insanity and degeneracy, particularly in France, and Latin America. It was often compared to Mendelian theories of genetics in eugenics circles. (Kurbegovic, E. (2013). Lamarck, Jean-Baptiste. Retrieved from <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/connections/52336a1d5c2ec50000> Date Accessed: 05.10.2021)

⁴ Galton was impressed by the marriage ideas of Darwin's book called *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Generally, he opposes the marriage of physically and mentally damaged people. He explains his marriage procedure as follows: "Both sexes ought to refrain from marriage if they are in any marked degree inferior in body or mind; but such hopes are Utopian and will never be even partially realized until the laws of inheritance are thoroughly known. Everyone does good service, who aids towards this end. When the principles of breeding and inheritance are better understood, we shall not hear ignorant members of our legislature rejecting with scorn a plan for ascertaining whether or not consanguineous marriages are injurious to man." (Darwin, 1981:403).

probability and on an understanding of the mechanisms of heredity (Bashford and Levine, 2010: 3).

Over the course of years, many eugenicists concerned themselves with issues such as health, family, alcoholism, prostitution, disability and mental illness, in addition to marriage and hereditary characteristics. The advancing eugenics discourse has been dealt with by many scientists, writers, journalists, and novelists in their works.⁵ The eugenicists' focus on different dimensions of the thought brought out different interpretations of the idea of "improvement of the race". This gave rise to two opposite eugenics practices which were termed as positive and negative eugenics. Positive eugenics had the purpose of improving the human race by supporting those with desirable traits to reproduce. Positive eugenics employed public education campaigns that underlined the importance of heredity, healthy living, and "good breeding," as well as promoted public policies that would encourage those "good stocks" to breed through family allowances, tax discounts and 'fitter family' contests. In contrast, negative eugenics included policies aimed at preventing the proliferation of sick and disabled people through measures such as premedical examinations, abortion, sterilization and marriage and immigration restrictions. In negative eugenics discourse, those with mental illness, disability, criminal past and substance abuse were deemed as "unfit" in the society and hence their reproductive rights were either limited or completely taken away. In some instances, those people coming from "undesirable" ethnic groups were also became targets of negative eugenic policies such as Blacks in USA, Jews in Germany and Roma in many Eastern European countries.

Eugenics became an object of study in the social science literature rather late and much of the early focus was on its theory and practice in Britain, the USA and Germany. By the beginning of 1990s, Mark Adams challenged the Anglo-Saxon orientation in eugenics historiography. On the basis of years of research, he conducted in the field, he stated that:

"In the decades between 1890 and 1930, eugenics movements developed in more than thirty countries, each adapting the international Galtonian gospel to suit local scientific, cultural, institutional, and political conditions. In some places eugenics was dominated by experimental biologists, in others by animal breeders, physicians, pediatricians, psychiatrists, anthropologists, demographers, or public health officials. In some places it was predominantly Lamarckian, in others Mendelian." (Adams, 1990:6)

And hence he called for comparative studies in the field not only to understand the "essence" of eugenics thought but also variables and mutations that appeared once the idea travelled across the world. Since Mark Adam's call in

⁵ In this regard, please see David Starr Jordan's *The Blood of the Nation: A Study in the Decay of Races by the Survival of the Unfit* (1906), for the novelists please see, for instance, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1927), H. G. Well's *The Time Machine* (1895), Jean Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1916) and *Dear Enemy* (1915).

1990s, eugenics historiography has grown significantly. We now know, to use Francesco Cassata's perceptive observations, that

“First of all, eugenics no longer appears as a homogenous movement, coherent within itself and essentially reducible to the Anglo-Saxon matrix. Instead, it could be described as a “multiform archipelago,” composed of multiple national styles: the Scandinavian countries, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, but also China, India, and Japan ... Secondly, on a theoretical level, next to Mendelism, which was dominant in the British and North American contexts, neo-Lamarckism has been identified as one of the constitutive elements of the eugenic discourse, above all in several nations, such as France, Russia and Brazil. In parallel, “Nordic” eugenics has been coupled with “Latin” eugenics, widespread in Catholic countries such as Italy, France, Spain, Belgium and some Latin American nations.” (Cassata, 2011:2-3)

In this study, an attempt is made to situate eugenic thought and practices developed by Turkish intellectuals within global context by exploring reasons that drew them to it and the extent to which they adopted this heterogeneous thought and associated practices originating in the West. The literature on Eugenics has been growing significantly in recent Turkish historiography. The pioneers of the field include Ayça Alemdaroğlu (2005), Nazan Maksudyan (2005), Gürkan Öztan (2006), Murat Ergin (2006), Efe Atabay (2009), Sanem Güvenç Salgırlı (2009) and Murat Arpacı (2015). Thus, our study builds upon this very fine scholarship. Yet while the existing scholarship, more often than not, examines eugenics in Turkey in relation to a growing idea of ‘race’ within Turkish nationalism, this study will examine eugenics in relation to degeneracy theory as well in order to demonstrate various concerns of Turkish Eugenicists of that period.

The sources of this study include texts written and translated by physicians and various other scientists of the period as shown in the Table 1 below. It should be noted that many of the physicians and scientists whose works this study rests upon, were important public figures of the period, either serving as leading bureaucrats or politicians. Furthermore, as we underline in Table 1, most of these scientists received their graduate degrees in the West. In addition to writing and translating scholarly works, these intellectuals appeared to have been active in disseminating and legitimizing eugenic discourse through their speeches at the parliament and medical conferences as well as giving interviews to the magazines and newspapers of the time. We also used these public speeches given in various venues. Another set of documents that informed our study includes laws and regulations associated with public health and education.

Table 1: Turkish Eugenicians

NAME	PROFESSION	WORK TITLE and PUBLICATION DATE	EDUCATION
Ali Esat Birol (1901-1999)	Gynecologist, Academician	Eugenic Practice (Öjenik Tatbikatı), 1938	Gulhane Military Medical Academy
Fahrettin Kerim Gökay (1900-1987)	Psychiatrist, Politician	The Essence of 'Eugenique' in National Population Policy (<i>Milli Nüfus Siyasetinde "Eugenique" Meselesinin Mahiyeti</i>), 1934	Istanbul University, University of Vienna
Mazhar Osman Uzman (1884-1951)	Medical Doctor	Öjenik (Eugenics), 1939	Istanbul Military Medical School, Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry
Perihan Çambel (1909- 1987)	Medical Doctor	Thoughts About Eugenics, (Ögenik Hakkında Düşünceler), 1946	Istanbul University, University of Florida
Selim Sırrı Tarcan (1874- 1957)	Physical Education Teacher, Sport Manager, Writer	Physical Education: Game Gymnastics, Sports (Beden Terbiyesi: Oyun Jimnastik, Spor), 1932	Mühendishane-i Berr-i Hümayun, Swedish Royal Central Gymnastics Institute
Server Kâmil Tokgöz (1881- 1943)	Bacteriologist	Eugenics: Race Improvement (Öjenizm: Irk Islahı), 1938	Ottoman Medical School, Paris Pasteur Institute
Şevket Aziz Kansu (1903-1983)	Medical Doctor, Anthropologist	Eugenics Problems, (Öjenik Problemleri), 1939	Ottoman Medical School, Paris School of Anthropology
Şükrü Hazım Tiner	Neurologist	An Overview of the Eugenics, (Öjenik Bahsine Umumi Bir Bakış), 1938	Hamburg University

II. RECEPTIONS OF EUGENICS IN MODERNIZING TURKEY

Over the nineteenth century the idea of an all-pervasive state with power over all social and individual lives became ever more popular. Populations—people and their bodies—increasingly became the business of government, to be “improved” physically and morally (Bashford and Levine, 2010:10). The eugenic thought that emerged in the late nineteenth century became widespread and became a tool in the service of nationalist policies implemented by many nation states. Each country implemented different policies according to its own socio-economic needs, cultural contexts and prevailing political discourse. For example, while it was initially adopted to respond to social problems in Canada,⁶ it was adopted by purifying the population from “inferior races” in a discourse that completely accepted the superiority of the white race in America. Moreover, eugenics policies emerged that advocated to end the existence of people deemed “unfit” in the society e.g. in Scandinavian countries. Whereas, in Brazil, eugenics policies emerged as means of social reform and were adopted as “public health measures”. While the eugenics discourse in Argentina and Spain was blocked by the Catholic Church despite the desire to implement negative policies, Germany, which implemented

⁶ Eugenic policies began in Canada by passing “An Act to Authorize the Erection of an Asylum within this Province for the Reception of Insane and Lunatic Person” by Ontario government in 1839. (<https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/timeline/5321aae7132156674b000> 11.10.2021 Date Accessed)

the most radical eugenic policies, did not have such a pressure from the Church.⁷ In Turkey, on the other hand, eugenic thought became part of the intellectual landscape and was discussed widely in the process of nation-building under the influence of modernization and Westernization, the two concepts being closely connected in the minds of Turkish elite of the time. Turkish Eugenics discourse, which essentially promoted and adopted pro-natalist programs, primarily emphasized creation of the new strong and healthy ideal citizen. Although Turkish eugenics thought were influenced primarily by works of German, Swedish and French eugenicists, the policies implemented by the state itself remained positive as the main goal of the ruling elite of newly established Turkish republic appears to have been the growth of Turkish population which had significantly declined due to the long wars, territorial loses, epidemics and population exchanges that was experienced from the late nineteenth century and up until the first three decades of the twentieth century. According to the census data of 1927, Turkey's population was 13.7 million (Shorter, 1985:421), a low figure compared to many European countries of the time, whose material and intellectual status the new Republican elite saw as a model and sought to emulate.

With the proclamation of the Republic in Turkey, radical changes began to occur in many spheres of life. In this reform period, the state elites were concerned with the reasons for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in order not to make the same mistakes again. In the nation-building process of the new Republic in accordance with modernization zeal, importance was given to science and rationality. The significance given to scientism in fact paved the way for interest in eugenic thought in Turkey. The origin of the eugenics discourse in Turkey is based on the idea of Social Darwinism, which emerged in the late Ottoman period. Various Ottoman intellectuals, such as Beşir Fuad (d.1887), Ahmet Mithat (d.1912), Rıza Tevfik (d. 1949) and Abdullah Cevdet (d.1932) who grew up in the Westernization movement, took the idea of Social Darwinism from German thinkers. They saw the biological development of society as the basis of social progress.

The idea of eugenics became a part of the nation-building process with the establishment of the new Republic. In this period, when the ideological foundations of the Ottoman Empire were being discarded, especially religious thought, science became the only official belief of the new Republic. The centralization of the regime allowed for dictating both ideological and physical aspects in all areas of the society, even those that were previously left to the people. Both the physical and mental development of the citizen, which was encapsulated at the time as *Bedensal Terbiyesi* (body disciplining)⁸ became the business of the state under the influence

⁷ For Eugenics in Canada; (McLaren,1990), for Eugenics in America; (Kline,2005), for Eugenics in Scandinavian Countries;(Broberg,and Roll-Hansen,1996), for Eugenics in Brazil and Argentina; (Stepan,1991), for Eugenics in Germany; (Proctor, 1988).

⁸ As Alemdaroğlu underlines the word *terbiye*, is difficult to translate into English "as it entails a wide range of meanings, including: upbringing, training, educating, maintenance, teaching manners, correction, punishment, culture, good manners, decency, proper way of conduct, socialization, and discipline." Following Alemdaroğlu, we translate *beden terbiyesi* as body disciplining. (Alemdaroğlu,2005:74).

of eugenics discourse promoted primarily by scientists and medical professionals of the period.

The existing literature on Turkish Eugenic discourse suggests that besides the intellectual currents of scientism and Social Darwinism, another significant reason that drew Turkish intellectuals to eugenics had to do with the degeneration theory (Atabay, 2009:78-79). The degeneration theory, which questions the harms of bad habits such as alcohol, opium, prostitution, and gambling, on the human body and society, claims that people with “bad heredity” are more prone to mental and physical diseases. According to this theory, people with bad hereditary cause social and biological deterioration. This theory, which has been the subject of various sciences especially after the 19th century, discusses the negative effects of environmental factors on humans. The main argument of this theory is that some groups such as criminals, prostitutes, the poor and the insane, if allowed to propagate, can cause a moral collapse in society and create ‘regression of the human race’. Although the ideas predate him, it was a French psychiatrist Bénédict Augustin Morel (1809-1873), who first formulated this theory in detail. Morel argues that the use of various “poisons” such as alcohol, opium, drugs etc. leads to gradual physical and moral degradation that is passed down from generation to generation and would ultimately result in an unfit society. He enumerates three core components of his theory: first, that most degeneracies were inherited; second, that alcoholic habits, unhealthy surroundings, or acquired diseases often initiated the hereditary diathesis; and third, that pathologies could be “transformed” across successive generations, often progressively worsening in a predictable series of stages (Woiak, 1998: 106). Morel’s downward spiral of degeneracy would usually start with alcoholism and moral depravities, transforming into criminality, insanity and end with infertility, early mortality and the extinction of the stock (Atabay, 2009: 80).

Turkish psychiatric medicine which developed in parallel with the popularity of the degeneration theory began to question the problem of “unfits” in society. Medical doctors conducted various studies on the sick, alcoholics, and the insane whom they saw as unfit, and questioned their place in society. In particular, the sterilization policy of the exemplary state Germany was supported by some Turkish eugenicists. By drawing attention to the physical and mental harm of alcohol, famous medical intelligentsia and bureaucrats of the period including Mazhar Osman (d.1951), Kerim Gökay (d.1987), Besim Akalın (d.1940), and Sadi Irmak (d.1990) advocated sterilization of alcoholics and the insane. The medical professor Server Kamil Tokgöz (d. 1943) argued that the cacogenic groups which included lunatics, the blind, the mute, the deaf and criminals, alcoholics, and insane should not reproduce in society. He claimed that nonproliferation of these groups should be mandated, and he proposed three solutions to prevent this. The first is to conduct research on human races, the second is to encourage births in certain strata of society, and the third is to limit births in other (undesirable) social classes. Tokgöz, who defends class-based eugenic practices here, says that women from the

poor stratum in the society should not reproduce, while explaining that motherhood is a necessity for rich women:

“Material deprivation in the poor stratum causes the emergence of reasons that disrupt the natural condition of the person, whether during pregnancy or in the first and second child [birth]; it facilitates the acquisition of diseases, provokes social ills and threatens the possibilities of induction. In that case, it would be a necessity to reduce childbirth in this class social layer. On the other hand, it is a national duty to wage a war against the birth deprivation in the higher strata. Because they live a life of luxury in order to raise their children in a way that will be beneficial to the society.” (Tokgöz,1938: 6).

Though being very few in number, the idea that prostitution leads to social and moral degeneration attracted the attention of some of the Turkish eugenicists of the period. Mazhar Osman, one of the most famous psychiatrists of the period, argues that intelligent women do not become prostitutes, and therefore most of the prostitutes are mentally ill (Uzman, 1941:274).

Hence, he suggests that their children should be considered “degenerate” (Kılıç, 2015: 122-123). According to Hulusi Behçet (d. 1948), famous specialist in dermatology and venereal diseases of the period, covert prostitution needed to be controlled in order to prevent the degeneration of future generations (“Bir Tehlike Frengi Artıyor!”, 1931). Dr. Kemal Özsan (d. unk) advocated negative eugenic practices for prostitutes. He considered prostitutes as degenerates because they corrupt the society and thus argued for the sterilization of prostitutes to save “future generations.” (“Kısırlaştırmaya Taraftarız”,1936).

However, the general opinion in the country was that Turkey could not afford to sterilize people due to its low population (“Kısırlaştırma”,1938). Although some professionals and bureaucrats of public health such as Ali Esat Birol (d.1999), Mazhar Osman (d.1951) and Besim Akalın (d.1940) – whose names we already cited above - defended the sterilization of people, the only negative eugenic practice implemented by the early republican Turkish state was the obligatory premarital control and prohibition of marriage under some condition, a topic that we are going to address below. Yet first we would like to look at how the idea of “race” was contemplated within Turkish eugenic discourse.

III. RACE IN TURKISH EUGENIC THOUGHT

Turkey’s quest for a new national identity brought about a process in which the official ideology of the state overlapped with the new concept of a “Turkish race”. A major purpose of the new identity construction, which aimed at disengagement from the Ottoman Empire, was to create a homogeneous Turkish nation. The elites of the period moved away from Islamic thought and embarked on reform movements for a modern identity. Thus, Turkish identity was constructed within prevailing concepts of modernity in opposition to the earlier Islamic ideals. Western influence in the formation of Turkish identity was enormous and was responsible for eugenics becoming popular at the intellectual level. Especially

racial arguments brought forward by the influence of Social Darwinism, which advocates the survival of the fittest, appealed to the new Republican elites who sought to reverse Turkey's image of "sick man of Europe". These racially based theses were derived from Darwin's theory of natural selection and emphasized the significance of race in the world. Theories advocating the supremacy of the white race put Turks in the secondary (Yellow Race) category. Turkey started scientific studies to prove that these theses were not accurate, and that Turks belonged to the white race like Europeans. Modern science of that era served biological racism in many areas. The establishment of an anthropology institute came at the beginning of the studies initiated for this purpose. Anthropological studies were started to prove that Turks belonged to the white race like Europeans and were not barbarians. To this end the Turkish Anthropology Institute was founded in 1925 (Magnarella et al., 1976:265).

The institute aimed to understand and show the place of the Turkish nation among the world's human communities in terms of race. Most scientists who gathered around the Turkish Anthropology Institute were medical doctors inclined towards racist anthropology (Maksudyan, 2005:113). The Institute conducted anthropological studies, to "prove" the ancientness and superiority of the Turkish race. Skeletal and skull measurements were necessary for this purpose; therefore, the necessity of physical anthropology was stressed. Şevket Aziz Kansu, a renowned medical doctor of the period, praised the anthropological studies in Germany for their racial-determining physical nature and argued that German anthropology should be taken as an example (Maksudyan, 2005:127-128). Turkish Anthropology Magazine, the official journal of the institute, published various articles to prove that Turks belong to the white race category based on studies by Turkish anthropologists (Maksudyan, 2005:56). The scientists of the period, who attempted to prove through anthropological studies that the Turks belonged to the supreme race, started to write the history of this race. The new Republic, which aimed to erase the traces of the Ottoman Empire, chose Central Asia as a reference point. The Turkish History Thesis, which contended that the Turks have a wide and rich history extending to Central Asia, was used both to respond to Europe and to consolidate historical and national consciousness, which was one of the desired necessities of national identity. The basis of this new national identity, whose boundaries were being drawn with the history thesis, was "race". The main purpose of the Turkish History Thesis was to show that the Turks are one of the civilized races. To support this, history congresses were held, and topics that would glorify Turkish history were discussed (Yıldız, 2001:190). The history thesis created with national paradigms was further supported by language theories. The founding leaders of the Republic saw the formation of a national language as the most fundamental step for nation-building. In 1928, Latin letters were adopted, and on July 12, 1932, the Turkish Language Investigation Society (*Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti*) was established to carry out studies such as compiling words and extracting words from foreign languages in an organized and centralized manner (Maksudyan, 2005:67). The Sun Language Theory was developed to prove that the

Turkish nation is a very ancient nation and to argue that the Turkish language is one of the oldest languages in the world.

In its bid to modernize, Turkey worked for a common national identity of language, history, and race, which was seen as a necessity for a new nation. Non-scientific historical and racial texts created by using science to answer racial theses in Europe were the answers to the struggle for survival brought by Social Darwinism. These methods for national progress were to establish a new identity in the country. The new Republic, which had undergone radical changes since the Ottoman Empire, formed the concept of “Turkish race” defensively, as a necessity to defend against racial attacks of the West. It should be underlined however that within Turkish Eugenics discourse, which became part of early Republican Turkish intellectual landscape primarily out of a need for a physically and mentally healthier and larger population, the concept of race had an ambiguous place. Turkish Eugenacists of the period appear to use ‘race’, ‘nation’ and ‘generation’ interchangeably, not precisely and definitively. As it is stated by Alemdaroğlu, “The collectivist discourse during the nation-building process, which portrayed Turkey as a nation of unified, classless people sharing the same history, culture and language, was not compatible with the identification of racial or ethnic differences within the society” (Alemdaroğlu, 2006:420).

Consequently, when the eugenics literature of the period is examined, advocacy for negative eugenic policies such as sterilization, are not made by referring to any particular ethnic group living in Turkey but the cacogenic groups. The significant decrease in the population due to the wars caused Turkish eugenic policies to be used for population growth, not for the purification of Turkish race. The aim put forward by eugenacists at the most general level was the creation of a healthy and strong Turkish nation that would work towards national progress. In this sense, the creation of healthy and disciplined national bodies as well as the establishment of the family order was considered not only the necessary condition for national “progress” but also the condition for the reproduction of the existing power (Alemdaroğlu, 2006:420).

IV. EUGENIC POLICIES OF THE EARLY REPUBLICAN TURKISH STATE

Once Turkish eugenic practices are analyzed, what emerges is that Turkish medical intelligentsia and ruling elite of the newly established Turkish Republic had started to construct what is termed as positive eugenics which appears to be more moderate. The reasons behind the implementation of positive eugenic policies can be partly explained by considering socio-economic needs of the newly established Turkish Republic. Due to the significant population decrease as a result of continuous wars from 1880s to 1920s as well as proliferation of contagious diseases, the early Republican elite and medical bureaucrats of Turkey implemented pro-natal policies and strove for constructing modern and healthy citizens.

The idea of eugenics, which was not institutionalized in any way, unlike in Germany, Italy, and England, emerged in Turkey as a body discipline (*beden*

terbiyesi). With the Physical Education Law., which was passed by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1938, sports were officially taken under the protection of the state. With this law, Cemal Tahir Taner (n.d.) was appointed as the general director with the aim of spreading sports infrastructure throughout the country. Taner explained his duty thus:

“The state expects two fundamental purposes from engaging citizens in physical education and sports: 1-The citizen must be a healthy, strong, enterprising, and honest sportsman. 2- He must be able to protect the Republic, the revolution and the independence of the homeland entrusted to him, he must become invincible, decide quickly, act quickly, put the interests of the country above all other interests, and grow up as a patriot.” (Taner, 1939: 2).

The law of Physical Education made the sports activities of the citizens obligatory and aimed to develop the physical and moral abilities of the citizens in accordance with the national objectives (Official Newspaper, 1938, Number:3961). The idea that the preparation of the youth for war with the most effective methods could be carried out directly within the state mechanism with a hierarchical and strictly disciplined organizational structure was influential in the enactment of the law (Akin, 2019:158-159). The law was not concerned with military service per se, but rather with promoting activities that would be needed in military service in the future (Taner as cited by Akin, 2019:160). The body, which was given importance not only for national defense but also for economic benefit, was an important method for increasing the productivity and working capacity of the citizen. Studies were also carried out to encourage women to participate in sports. Selim Sırrı Tarcan (d. 1957) who had introduced various sports branches to the country, wrote encouraging articles in women’s magazines that combined beauty and sports. The ideal woman was considered as a “mother”, and it was mentioned that the mother’s body must also be a healthy to produce a hygienic, strong generation (Geri, 2021:145).

In addition to body disciplining which aimed at producing physically and mentally sturdy citizens, population planning was another area that the state became actively involved in. Due to the devastating loss of life suffered during the Great War, population policies aimed at increasing the population were implemented in the first years of the Republic. In Europe, where most countries had implemented pronatalist policies after the First World War, Italy became a model for Turkey (Erdal, 2011:781). Mussolini’s Population planning policy which aimed at maximizing birth rate and minimizing death rate, became an example to emulate for the young republic. Ziya Nuri Pasha (d.1936) emphasized the significance of implementation of eugenic politics regarding population growth at the first Turkish medical congress in 1926 with the following words:

“The help of medicine is needed to increase the number of the national population and to keep it at an adequate level according to the need, not the arbitrariness. It should be

ensured that our laws on forming a family and preventing sexually transmitted diseases should be complied with from a eugenic point of view, which we can call racial breeding and protecting racial health. It is inevitable that medicine will have more duties in the future than in the present in the fields of public health protection and population policy.” (First Turkish Medical Congress Booklet, 1926:13)

Turkish State of the time in fact implemented a two-pronged population policy: tackling the rampant epidemics, while simultaneously removing obstacles to population growth. The Ministry of Health (*Sıhhiye ve Muavenet-i İçtimaiye Vekâleti*) was established in 1920 to prevent and control epidemics, to regulate the sanitary conditions, and to improve the health infrastructure. Activities were carried out to halt epidemics with emphasis on sexually transmitted diseases that may harm the family institution. In this direction, the Syphilis Commission, consisting of specialist physicians, was established in 1925. With the 1926 Penal Code, any behavior that might lead to abortion was criminalized.⁹ The Public Hygiene Law (*Umumi Hıfzıssıhha Kanunu*) was enacted in 1930. The stated purpose of this law was to improve the health conditions of the country, to fight against all diseases that harm the health of the nation, to ensure the healthy growth of the future generation, and to provide the people with medical and social assistance. Article 152 of this law prohibited the importation, distribution, and sale of all kinds of tools and devices that will prevent pregnancy or help abortion (Official Newspaper, 1930, Number: 1489).

The Public Hygiene Law is of particular importance in terms of population policies since it handled the family and population issue as an element of public policy. With this law, while the duty of protecting the public’s health was assigned to the state, that of the treatment of the sick and the reporting of the untreated to the authorities was assigned to the people. The law banned people with syphilis, gonorrhea, soft chancre, and leprosy from marrying for the protection of the race. Only after the completion of the treatment, were they allowed to marry. While pre-marriage controls were not provided before, with the Family Law decree implemented in 1917, an attempt was made to prevent the formation of unhealthy families by allowing the spouse to divorce in case of syphilis and leprosy. Until this law, women were only able to file for divorce due to sexual inadequacy of the husband, however, with this law; women were given the right to leave their husband if their husband had diseases such as insanity or leprosy (Konan, 2016:345).

As studies in the history of public health revealed the importance of family institution for a healthy next generation, motherhood, childbirth and puericulture became crucial topics of discussion in this regard. Various doctors and politicians

⁹ Turkish Criminal Law, 1926. Article 468 states that a woman who miscarries by using tools and drugs or consenting to be used by someone else is imprisoned for six months to three years. Article 469 states that a person who aborts a child by obtaining a vehicle with the consent of a woman is sentenced to imprisonment from one year to three years. Article 470 states that a person who uses a means of abortion without the consent of a woman is sentenced to heavy imprisonment from thirty months to six years, and from seven to twelve years if the child has miscarried.

of the period put forth their vision of a modern family worthy of the Turkish nation. Arguing that the primary criterion for raising a healthy generation is finding a healthy spouse, Besim Akalın, who established modern obstetrics and gynecology in Turkey, advocated teaching mothers puericulture to raise a healthy generation and gave great importance to childcare and upbringing by saying that puericulture is essential in marriage (Akalın, 1939:209). Furthermore, Akalın advocated financial support for families by following birth-promoting policies implemented in Germany.¹⁰

The position of young girls in social life also received attention. They were seen as the mothers of the future. The Girls' Institutes aimed at raising rational housewives and mothers, lectured girls about motherhood, post-natal education, hygiene, child-care, and home management. The modern mother and housewife were undoubtedly the position that women were asked to aspire to in society. The importance of child-care was explained in the printed material published in the People's Houses, and the articles about keeping children alive, healthy, and robust occupied a large place in the magazines of the period.¹¹ Although they were perhaps the greatest tool of the modernization period; the first duty of women before the state was deemed to be motherhood and companionship. Atatürk's view on Turkish women summarizes the state's expectation of women: "The Turkish woman should be the most enlightened, virtuous and reserved woman in the world. She should be a dignified woman, heavy in morals and virtue, not heavy in weight. The duty of Turkish women is to raise generations strong to protect and defend the Turks with their mentality, strong arms and determination." (Kocatürk, 1984:98).

"Preservation of the race" which was considered crucial to raising healthy future generations was included in the party program of the Republican Peoples Party (RPP) to teach hygiene and disease prevention to the public. As a result of this, the lectures were given in the Public Houses to raise mass awareness about contagious diseases, especially sexually transmitted diseases due to their effect on heredity. Fighting against contagious diseases had value far beyond merely fighting against epidemics. This was a fight whose aim was to form a 'healthy breed'. The increase in prostitution and venereal disease in the Ottoman Empire seems to have started during the First World War, as was the case in much of Europe (Toprak as cited by Türe,2015:48). The increase in venereal diseases and prostitution in these years and the damage it posed to the family life and social structure was reflected in the contemporary press and literary works of the period. Furthermore, works being translated about the 'degeneration of the race' interpreted the spread of prostitution in a social Darwinist paradigm. Moral and venereal diseases, for which "evil women" were held responsible, were considered the greatest threat to the quantitative and qualitative existence of the race. Due to the increasing prostitution

¹⁰ In his book, *How Should One Make the Turkish Child Live?* Akalın confirmed that they did take policies of Germany. He explained German policies on many issues from marriage to childcare, from the social position of women and men to business life and supported them. (Akalın, 1938: 29-32).

¹¹The magazines such as *Çocuk* (Child), *Çocuk Haftası* (Child's Week), *Türk Çocuğu* (Turkish Child), *Gürbüz Türk Çocuğu* (Robust Turkish Child) aimed to instill the healthy child paradigm of the period by addressing the basic issues such as maternity, puericulture, and childcare.

and spread of venereal diseases, the first detailed legislation on brothels and prostitutes, “*Emraz-ı Zühreviyenin Men’i Sirayeti Hakkında Nizamname*” was enacted in 1915 (Yakut and Yetkin, 2011:34). This regulation set many strict rules to control venereal diseases. Although the regulation envisaged serious regulations for women working in brothels, the targeted plans remained confined to theory and could not be put into practice. If prostitution were controlled or prevented, it was thought that the spread of syphilis would decrease in parallel. Therefore, the fight against syphilis became a national duty after the foundation of the Republic as well (“Dahiliye Vekilinin Beyanâtı”,1934). Not surprisingly, the press of the period also advocated strict measures against prostitution to curb the spread of venereal diseases. With the circular order on the “Fight Against Prostitution” published in 1930, it was decided that no new brothels could be opened anywhere in Turkey and that no new women would be admitted to existing ones (“Fuhuşla Nasıl Mücadele Edilecek?”,1930). With the Regulation on Combating Prostitution and Diseases Transmitted by Prostitution (*Fuhuşla ve Fuhuş Yüzünden Bulaşan Hastalıklarla Mücadele Nizamnamesi*) which was enacted in 1933, the opening of new brothels was prohibited, and the control in existing brothels was increased (“Fuhuşla Mücadele”,1933). The new Republic, which took action to prevent the spread of syphilis in this period, made legal arrangements to prevent prostitution while improving the health infrastructure. Nevertheless, these laws and regulations were not carried out effectively in practice. Hence, prostitution, the trigger of venereal diseases, could not be controlled for a long time to come in the newly established Turkish Republic.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the origin and the development of eugenics movement and its associated discourse in Turkey in the early republican period. It charts the arrival of the movement and its associated ideas in Turkey and the reasons behind its appeal for the architects of a new republic as well as, how and to what extent was it modified by the social, intellectual, and political milieu and what elements of it, if any, were put in practice.

Interest in eugenics emerged as the convergence of various trends that had existed since the modernization efforts of the late Ottomans. The intellectual currents of scientism and social Darwinism, that has become part of the worldview of both Ottoman and Kemalist modernizers, prepared the ground for the Turkish medical elites’ attraction to the language of eugenics and attempts to popularize it in Turkey. A scientific attitude and social Darwinist understanding of population and power also became part of the eugenic literature and were reflected in the primary sources. On the other hand, through the scientific language of eugenics the medical elite voiced their anxieties about rapid modernization. They were particularly concerned with family life, the role of women, alcohol use, and venereal diseases. Turkish intellectuals who wrote on the subject of eugenics were mostly surveying European publications and policies and making their policy suggestions based on the European experience. Once we analyze the existing literature on Turkish eugenics and primary sources of the period, what we notice is

that the early Turkish Republican elite and medical bureaucrats discussed the significance of motherhood, marriage, hygiene, childcare, sports, and physical education to come up with a generation of citizens that would be healthy, strong, and productive. In other words, the discourse of Turkish eugenics aimed to create a healthy and robust Turkish society with a collective national identity with policies adapted from the West to both catch up with the West and prove itself against the West in the process of modernization.

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