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EUGENICS AND RACIAL HYGIENE IN THEORY AND POLITICAL THOUGHT OF THE SERBIAN/YUGOSLAV EXTREME RIGHT 1918–1944*

Abstract: This paper is mainly focused on “racial hygiene” and eugenic questions in the context of the ideology of the interwar Yugoslav extreme right and during occupation of Serbia in the World War II. The main historical sources used in this research were racial narratives and journal articles from 1920s and 1930s, together with unpublished archival records originating from the period of occupation. Analysis of sources and literature have shown that racial and eugenic themes were present in Serbian and Yugoslav political thought from the very first days of the new South Slavs state. The term “race” had several different meanings in this country, particularly regarding the “Yugoslav race”, that referred both to the cultural individuality of so-called “Yugoslav civilization”, and to the biological attributes of the Dinaric race. The ideology of (integral) Yugoslav nationalism, strongly promoted during the dictatorship of King Alexander I, encouraged racial and eugenic stances. Affirmative writings on the qualities of Dinaric race from the world-wide famous eugenic authors like Houston Stewart Chamberlain also spurred interests in racial and eugenic discussions in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Since the mid-1930s a number of Serbian eugenicists became close to the extreme political right, placing themselves in the first rows of ongoing ideological struggle between fascism, communism and liberal democracy. Many of them, like Dr. Svetislav Stefanović, Branimir Maleš, Dr. Stevan Z. Ivanić and others, were

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fascinated with the rise of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and were later on involved in the collaboration with the Germans during the occupation of Serbia 1941–1944.

Key words: eugenics, Serbia, World War II, Yugoslavia
Non MeSH: racial hygiene

Introduction

The roots of the inter-war eugenics are to be found in application of Darwin's tenets about existence of superior floral and animal species to human society and the human being as an individual. In that context, Darwin's relative Sir Francis Galton is considered founder of modern eugenics. Inspired by Darwin's *Origins of Species*, he published the book *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (Macmillan Press, London) in 1883 in which the term eugenics was used for the first time. In Galton's original meaning, the term „eugenics“ was used for crossbreeding of the best species or races. Eugenics developed dynamically during the first half of 20th century and it enjoyed great popularity in academic and political circles. Research of races and the question of the co-called „racial hygiene“ developed in the wake of social-Darwinism and classical colonialist racism. [1–4] Scientific and quasi-scientific discussions were going on about racial characteristics and creation of super-races through strict quality selection and crossbreeding within the nation. Large number of scholars, social and political activists, both in totalitarian states and in Western democracies dealt with racial theories, theories of crossbreeding of blood types and people of different ethnic background. Although most of the champions of eugenics throughout the world were prominent medical doctors, biologists and anthropologists, eugenics itself must be termed a quasi-science because it is based on the premises that all people are not (biologically) equally valuable, and that consequently, they don't have an equal right to live. [5]

The eugenic movement in USA enjoyed large financial support of Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations and the discipline was studied by more than 20.000 students at over 370 accredited university programs by the end of 1920s. [6]. Due to large popularity of eugenics during the first three decades of 20th century, mandatory sterilization, limitation of immigration and settlement for immigrants were introduced in America, whereas initiatives aimed at legalizing euthanasia were less successful. [7] In Great Britain eugenics enjoyed support of the academic and political elite of the society: among founders, chairmen and benefactors of the British Eugenic Society (nowadays the Galton Institute) were John Maynard Canes, Arthur Chamberlain, Winston Churchill and others. [2]

Eugenics and racial questions in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia

Large popularity of eugenics in the world during the inter-war period contributed to dissemination of eugenic ideas in the territory of the Kingdom of

the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia. To a certain degree eugenic ideas were present in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia ever since the foundation of the state. [8] At first they had to do with eugenic selection – with the aim of preserving and improving the biological potential of the Yugoslav peoples – whereas the racist context developed only in 1930s under foreign influence. Healthcare system of the Kingdom of the SCS faced extremely hard consequences of WWI from the very beginning, and there was the opinion among intellectuals and designers of healthcare policy that the victory in war was achieved at the price of a demographic catastrophe. Because of that the focus of in observing the health conditions of the people and of healthcare was shifted from curative to preventive medicine – which was also the dominant trend in Western Europe after WWI. As one of the aspects of healthcare policy that was among the most discussed were proactive measures of the authorities with the aim of „creating a healthy society“, with initiatives to „increase biological capital“ and to „eradicate our shortcomings“. [8] One of the most prominent champions of such healthcare policy was the Herzegovinian doctor and politician Dr. Uroš Krulj who wrote already in early 1920s that it was necessary to forbid procreation of „seriously degenerated persons, e.g. born criminals, epileptics, madmen, heavy incurable drunks, persons suffering from dangerous forms of TB etc., since their progeny can by no means be sane“ and proposed that such people be „interned for life in pertinent institutions“. [9] Krulj perceived eugenics as a broad theory of improving the man as a species and most of his views were formed under influence of Sir Francis Galton and other prominent social-Darwinists. Like Dr. Vladimir Stanojević he too strove to be up-to-date and was excellently acquainted with the current eugenical researches and racial theories in the world. The increased interest in eugenics among Yugoslav medical doctors led to foundation of special medical institutions, but it is important to stress that eugenic measures were never codified as laws in the Kingdom of the SCS/Yugoslavia.¹ [10] The blanket institution that was in practical charge of healthcare and hygienic culture of the Yugoslav peoples was the Central Hygienic Institute (Centralni higijenski zavod) that was founded in Belgrade in 1924.² The core of the Institute were the Permanent Bacteriological Station and the Institute of Hygiene that were engaged in scientific research, apart from pursuing medical practice. Some members of the Central Hygienic Institute, as well as some of the Institute for Social Medicine that had been founded a year earlier, dealt with eugenic matters – within the then global tendencies in this discipline. Like the prominent doctors of the older generation,

1 The Bill on Preservation of People's Health that was brought before the Parliament in February 1921 foresaw certain eugenic measures, but it was never passed. The bill foresaw broad health education of population through public lectures, showing special films in cinemas and through introduction of the subject hygiene into school curricula. In the field of eugenics it was foreseen that on the wedding-day couples would be presented with an informative brochure about the importance of health and bad influences of sickness on marriage and family, and prohibition of marriage for all suffering any form of insanity, epilepsy, serious degenerations of nervous system, as well as for people of morally weak character, mentally retarded and acutely ill from TB and venereal diseases. [10]

2 Centralni higijenski zavod is referred to as the Central Hygienical Bureau in translation and articles of some authors (i.e.: Vladimir Petrović and Marius Turda).

they were increasingly interested in the possibility of biologically improving the Yugoslav population, so they published the following books already during 1920s: „Eugenics, the Hygiene of Human Conception“ (Vladimir Stanojević, 1920), „Birth and Rebirth of the Human Race“ (Jovan Kujačić, 1926) and „The Importance of Hygiene for the State and the Nation“ (Uroš Krulj, 1922), and somewhat later also „Birth Rate of the Population of Serbia and its Biological Importance“ (Milan Jovanović Batut, 1932). In mid-1920s Dr. Uroš Krulj entered racist discussions too, pointing out at the primitiveness of the black race, criticizing crossbreeding and even introducing the notion of „racial souls“, meaning acceptance of idealist or materialist world-view by certain races or peoples. He deemed crossbreeding among unrelated races was damaging and that mixing „mixing white and black race yielded the worst results“. [11] Although he too discriminated certain races, Krulj severely criticized the so-called „Germanic Theory“ (the theory of racial superiority of Germanic peoples), calling it haughty and extreme and deeming it the product of „chauvinist-national arrogance of certain German learned circles“. [11] He also criticized anti-Semitic views of some „extreme authors such as Renan, Chamberlain and others“, who denied the Jews „any intellectual, ethic, cultural and creative higher value and who considered them an inferior race“. [11] Thanks to Krulj's espousal, the Department of Racial, Public and Social Hygiene was set up at the Ministry of People's Health of the kingdom of Yugoslavia while he was minister between January and April 1929.³ Unlike him, most Yugoslav eugenicists and medical experts who took part in the discussion about race during 1920s and early 1930s followed the motto „yes to race, no to racism“. [8–10, 12] Wider spread of racist ideas started only when the discussion was joined by politicians and ideologues such as Velibor Jonić or Vladimir-Velmar Janković, who wrote about racial hygiene outside of medical context. Thus Velmar-Janković pointed out that „racial is that which is connected with the notion of eternal, and not with the notion of everyday life...The speech of the race is indirect, speech of silence“. For his part Velibor Jonić was obsessed with „Slavic race“. [13] Treading in Spengler's footsteps („The Decline of the West“) he believed the materialist Western civilization was on its last legs, whereas the Eastern one had already been destroyed by communist revolution. Jonić believed the „Slavic race“ was predestined to preserve human civilization and to renew it in the future. Both Velmar-Janković and Jonić, as well as some other authors during 1930s often interpreted „race“ an insufficiently defined set of civilizational, spiritual and cultural characteristics connected with biological aspects of a people. Because of that, for them the question of „racial hygiene“ was often equated with preservation of autochthonous culture and removal of foreign, especially internationalist, influences. Eugenicists throughout the world were faced with the problem of proving validity of their claims about superiority or inferiority of certain races. Since experiments on human beings were mostly forbidden, adherents of „racial hygiene“ mostly went for measuring volumes of skulls and length of certain bones, trying to prove advantages or disadvantages of some races – as had been done by „classical“ 19th century racists

3 Although he shared a number of prejudices and racist views, Krulj was no anti-Semite – despite his conviction that they belonged to materialist „racial souls“. [9, 11]

in the colonies in Africa and Asia. [5] Such research in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was conducted in the Central Hygienical Institute whose employees Stevan Z. Ivanić (the manager and one of its founders), Branimir Maleš and Svetislav Stefanović were among the leading Yugoslav racists and eugenicists. Criminal experiments such as those Dr. Josef Mengele conducted on concentration camp inmates during WWII, or any other experiments on humans, were not conducted in Yugoslavia during the inter-war period.

Several factors decisively influenced spread of racist and eugenic ideas among adherents of the right-wing ideas in Yugoslavia: the rise of Nazi Germany, the ideology of integral Yugoslavism and foreign eugenicists' laudatory writings about the Dinaric racial type. Eugenic practice reached its peak during the inter-war period in Hitler's Germany, especially after racial laws had been passed in 1935. The great economic and military rise of the Third Reich galvanized spread of eugenics in Europe, which was felt in the Balkans too. Another element favoring racial and eugenic teachings in the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was the ideology of integral Yugoslavism: general developments in the world anthropology during 1920s and 1930s were mirrored in the theory of the Yugoslav race (or with some authors: racial type). Under these circumstances the founder and long-term manager of the Central Hygienic Institute, Dr. Stevan Z. Ivanić joined the far-right, extremely nationalist Zbor movement and became one of its most prominent members, whereas another employee of the Institute, Dr. Branimir Maleš also expressed his opinions in public increasingly more often. [10, 14]

Maleš was fascinated by Dinaric race which he considered a „completely formed and individual race“. [15] The „Yugoslav race“ that was so often mentioned in the texts of the extreme right and of the adherents of integral Yugoslavism, was based, according to most Serbian eugenicists, exactly on the Dinaric racial type. The reason for great popularity of this theory and its presence in academic and cultural discourse during 1930s lies in the fact that world eugenic masters, such as Huston Stewart Chamberlain usually had only praises for this racial type. [16] Chamberlain praised people of Dinaric race believing that they, due to their prominent physical characteristics, had numerous common traits with the Nordic race, with which they, according to him, shared common Germanic origin. Thanks to Chamberlain's high esteem, Yugoslav eugenicists made up a whole myth about the Yugoslav race of Aryan origin. Branimir Maleš went probably the farthest in this, reconstructing racial origin of St. Sava and the Nemanjić dynasty by analyzing frescoes in mediaeval monasteries.⁴ [17]

Dr. Svetislav Stefanović also dealt with racial and eugenic matters. He traversed the whole way from medical researches based on blood types, through anthropological observations to views on the role of race in culture, in civilizational and national development that smacked of metaphysics and mystic. Stefanović pursued medical practice throughout his life, although he is much better known as writer, translator

⁴ Judging by images of Serbian saints and rulers from the Nemanjić dynasty on monastery frescoes, Maleš claimed they (saints and rulers) had belonged to the „Atlantomediterranean race or to the Dinaric race with many Mediterranean influences“.

and politician. [18–19] He graduated from the Medical Faculty in Vienna in 1902 and worked as communal doctor in Serbia and the Kingdom of the SCS/Yugoslavia. He took part in the Balkan wars and WWI in which he aided the Warsaw physician Dr. Hirschfeld set up a bacteriological laboratory for the Serbian army. Dealing with blood types he first came into contact with racial and eugenic problems. From his student days until his death he traversed the whole political specter: he had started as a young socialist, became then a fervent republican, whereas during 1930s he turned into one of the most prominent sympathizers of Fascism and a champion of the corporative state system. [20] For a while he was active member of the Zbor and he published the translation of Mussolini's book „On Corporatist State: Speeches, Doctrine, Legislation“ (*О корпоративної держави: іовори, доктїрина, закони*).

In his interest in racial theories and eugenics Stefanović by far surpassed other Yugoslav adherents of the extreme-right in the inter-war period. Although both Jonić and Velmar-Janković ascribed great importance to racial origin – meaning civilizational, cultural and individual development – Stefanović surpassed them by far both in his assessment of the importance of the race and in the number of texts he published on the matter. He believed all cultures in human history had had racial characteristics [21], as well as that just like there were superior individuals, there must be superior races too. [22] Although in his first articles in the journal „Ideje“ (Ideas) he distanced himself from the Nazi instrumentalization of the racial and eugenic question („far be it from me that I agree with everything that has been said in the German racial literature“) Stefanović nevertheless shared the prevailing Nazi opinion of the Jews as an inferior race, claiming quasi-scientifically, that in mixings of the Jews with members of the Germanic race, degeneration and sterility appear already in the third generation. For him the question of racial purity was of relative character because he claimed racial characteristics partly depended on social and cultural level of the environment in which a race had developed, as well as that there were nations (the Slavs) that were, according to their make-up, mixtures of different races. [23] Still, like Dr. Branimir Maleš,⁵ under the influence of Chamberlain's positive opinion of the Dinaric race, Stefanović also deemed that this race had an excellent character and he predicted its expansion and fulfilment of a historical mission – according to which the Dinaric man could replace the dominant Nordic race. [5, 19, 25]. Otherwise, Stefanović had a lengthy argument with Maleš on the pages of the journal the „Ideje“ during which a large number of articles with racist and eugenic topics was published. (Especially important were Maleš's texts „Nationality and Race“ published in two December issues of the „Ideje“ in 1934 and in the first January issue in 1935.)

5 Branimir Maleš was a Serbian medical doctor, anthropologist and eugenicist, one of the most prominent champions of the racist theory during the inter-war period. He was born in Dalmatia in late 19th century. He worked in the Central Hygienic Institute and at the Belgrade University and was politically always close to the far-right. He took his Ph.D. in 1927. He penned a number of racist text published in the journal the „Ideje“, as well as of several studies in social anthropology. During the occupation of Serbia in WWII, together with his son Ljubomir, he worked for the Gestapo – to which their written delations and reports about the situation among students and the young bear witness. [24]

Eugenics in the Serbian Civilian/Cultural Plan

During the occupation of Serbia in WWII under auspices of the collaborationist Ministry of Education (headed by Velibor Jonić) the Serbian Civilian/Cultural Plan was developed. [13, 26] This project was the brain-child of Vladimir Velmar-Janković (deputy-minister of education under occupation) and was basically a general plan of national life and peace-time development. The project was elaborated with cooperation of several dozens of Serbian intellectuals and the Belgrade University and it contained solutions to 200 key problems of national development that were grouped into biological, spiritual, economic and technical sectors. The problem in the Biological Sector of the Serbian Civilian/Cultural Plan that stood out as controversial, was the sub-project “The Protection of Serbian Blood and of Healthy Progeny”. [27] The University committee dealing with this question was made up of Prof. Dr. Borivoje Milojević, Prof. Dr. Svetislav Barjaktarević, and lecturer Dr. Borivoje Tasovac, all prominent medical experts who were not ideologically close to the occupiers – the fact that is testified by their successful academic and expert careers after the liberation of the country. The post-war Yugoslav authorities unjustly declared the Serbian Civil/Cultural Plan „an attempt at Fascization of the Serbian youth and the society“ implying introduction of Fascist and Nazi ways in the Serbian national development, which is far from truth. The report of the above mentioned University committee suggested introducing eugenic measures into the healthcare system and a kind of social engineering through isolation of the less valuable genetic potential, but it did not follow the Nazi example in this. Referring in their analysis to implementation of eugenic measures in the world and the practice in Nazi Germany, the authors of the study described it as failure. The members of the Committee underpinned their view on the eugenic practice in the world with the following arguments: „Preservation, improvement and upgrading of the quality of the race cannot be imagined today without racial hygiene and its auxiliary branches and means, spiritual, and especially material. In the recent times racial hygiene has taken its special attitude, movement and view-point. Racial-hygienic questions are everywhere on the agenda, both in Europe and outside of it. Eugenic sterilization of mentally less valuable people was introduced in the United States of America, eugenic sterilization in Switzerland, a special eugenic program in Norway, special eugenic efforts in Germany, especially after the National-Socialist revolution etc. However, as experience has shown, eugenic sterilization and castration haven't achieved the desired success in terms of racial improvement of the whole people because its principles could be implemented only in individual cases. Because of that various social-hygienic measures were applied whose main task was to do everything so that the number of healthy and capable (racial) should be increased, and above all, protection of mothers and children was instituted.” [27] Professors Barjaktarević and Tasovac saw the eugenic solution above all in the increased procreation of healthy population and in the more intensive care of the state for mothers and children: „As nature takes care that in every coupling only healthy, racial and pure-blooded creatures are coupled, so should we strove with people too, because that is a precondition for a healthy marriage, for healthy race and for healthy progeny. In

this, protection of mothers, and thus of children is basic. The influence of doctors in preventing marriages whose progeny would be bad, sick and un-racial is very small. On the other hand, there is neither sense of health and hereditary responsibility, nor understanding for it with the people. There is also no understanding and even less consciousness with fiancés. Because of that the citizenry is to be educated about the importance of choosing future husband and wife... Everything should be done in prophylactic way to bring about a healthy marriage.” [27] Collaborators on the Serbian Civilian/Cultural Plan from the Medical Faculty espoused also setting up an Eugenic Institute, a consulting place for the populace, starting eugenic researches of “our man”, as well as passing an eugenic law. The committee also demanded that the project of protection of Serbian blood and healthy progeny be tightly connected with matters concerning care for mothers and children, on which Professor Barjaktarević and lecturer Tasovac also worked.

Conclusion

Eugenic theories and questions of race and racial hygiene appeared in the Kingdom of the SCS/Yugoslavia under the influence of global popularity of social-Darwinist theories and eugenic movement. Certain Yugoslav physicians, some of whom (such as Dr. Uroš Krulj) played certain roles in political power, took interest in matters of improvement of biological potential of the Yugoslav peoples. Their discussions about prevention of procreation of the degenerated, the sick and the criminogenic citizens were part of a global tendency in whose wake some countries, like the United States, introduced forcible sterilization and prohibition of settling down of immigrants. No such measures were introduced in the inter-war Yugoslavia, and no racial laws were passed that would discriminate against certain races, peoples or groups (such as the racial laws in Nazi Germany). The establishment of the Central Hygienic Institute and of the Institute for Social Medicine made spread and popularization of eugenic theories possible. Racist views were not wide-spread in the Kingdom of the SCS/Yugoslavia and were mostly developed under foreign influences. Most Yugoslav medical experts and researchers who were interested in eugenics during the inter-war period adhered to the motto „yes to race, no to racism“. Radicalization of racial theories came about due to the rise of Fascism and Nazism under whose ideological influence eugenic and racial questions started to interest ideologues such as Velibor Jonić and Vladimir Velmar-Janković. For them the racial matter had much broader importance than just biological one, because they connected it with spiritual and cultural characteristics. Their texts on the subject often had a metaphysical slant and were permeated with mysticism. Some of the most prominent eugenic and racist authors of the inter-war period, such as Jonić, Velmar-Janković as well as Dr. Stevan Z. Ivanić, Dr. Svetislav Stefanović and Dr. Branimir Maleš were involved in ideological collaboration and held important posts in the collaborationist administration during the occupation of Serbia 1941-1944. Unlike them, a group of professors of the Medical Faculty working on the Serbian civilian/Cultural Plan showed that Serbian eugenic views had evolved by 1944 in direction that was opposed to practice in Nazi Germany.

Summary

The paper presents a brief survey of development of eugenic and racial theories in the Kingdom of the SCS/Yugoslavia, as well as in Serbia during WWII. It is based on the published narrative sources of eugenic provenance, journals, unpublished archival sources from the period of occupation, as well as contemporary researches of Serbian and world historiography about eugenics. Eugenic views were present in Yugoslavia ever since her foundation. Their bloom was aided by the ideology of integral Yugoslavism as well as laudatory writings of Huston Stewart Chamberlain about the Dinaric race. The eugenic question was perceived in the context of preservation and improvement of biological potential of the Yugoslav peoples, whereas racist views developed somewhat later under foreign ideological influences. Dr. Svetislav Stefanović and Dr. Branimir Maleš conducted a debate about the importance of race on the pages of the journal the „Ideje“, whereas Velibor Jonić and Vladimir Velmar-Janković published a number of texts in which they understood under the notion of race, spiritual and cultural characteristics too. During the whole inter-war period forcible eugenic measures were not introduced and racial laws were not passed. Participation of professors of the Medical Faculty in work on the biological sector of the Serbian Civilian/Cultural Plan showed that Serbian eugenic views had evolved by 1944 in direction that was opposed to practice in Nazi Germany.

Резиме

У овом раду представљен је сумарни осврт на развој еугеничких и расних учења у Краљевини СХС/Југославији, као и у Србији за време окупације у Другом светском рату. Изворну основу рада чине објављени наративни извори еугеничке провенијенције, периодика, необјављена архивска грађа из периода окупације, као и актуелна истраживања српске и светске историографије посвећена еугеници. Еугеничка схватања била су присутна у Краљевини СХС/Југославији од њеног оснивања, а њиховом развоју погодовала је идеологија интегралног југословенства као и афирмативно писање Хјустона Стјуарта Чемберлена о динарској раси. Еугеничко питање схватано је у контексту очувања и унапређења биолошког потенцијала југословенских народа, док су се расистичка схватања развила нешто касније, под страним идеолошким утицајима. Полемику о значају расе водили су, на странама листа „Идеје“, др Светислав Стефановић и др Бранимир Малеш, док су Велибор Јонић и Владимир Велмар-Јанковић објавили више текстова у којима су под појмом расе, поред биолошке, подразумевали и духовне и културне особености. Током целог међуратног периода у Југославији нису увођене принудне еугеничке мере нити расни закони. Учешће професора Медицинског факултета на изради биолошког сектора Српског цивилног/културног плана показало је да су еугеничка схватања у Србији до 1944. године еволуирала у супротном смеру у односу на праксу нацистичке Немачке.

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