



Politics of the Body and Eugenic Discourse in Early Republican Turkey

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Every political regime looks for its own ideal type of citizen. We know the character of the *İstibdat* (autocracy) regime's citizen. The man of our Atatürk regime, of our Kemalist revolution, is fit, intelligent, brave, dignified, frank, cheerful and earnest. This is what we are looking for. The goal of *beden terbiyesi* [body discipline]¹ is the intellectual and moral discipline of citizens. (from the interior minister Şükrü Kaya's speech, delivered in 1938, just before the adoption of *Beden Terbiyesi Kanunu* [the Body Discipline Law] in the Turkish Grand National Assembly)

The single party regime (1923–50) under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk sought to build a modern Turkish nation comparable to contemporary Western Europe. The regime aspired to create a modern nation of fit, intelligent, moral and dutiful citizens out of the remnants of Ottoman society. From clothing to music taste, from reproduction to hygiene, from child bearing to house-keeping, the reformers sought to create a 'civilized' body that relinquished traditional dispositions, internalized the regime's rules and ideals, and adopted civilized manners, taste and aesthetics. As part of its modernization agenda, the state aimed to discipline the human body using a discourse based on science, rationality and medicine.

In this article, I portray how the state elite² imagined modernization and how they sought to rationalize, civilize, modernize and sanitize the 'irrational',

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‘unhealthy’, ‘uncivilized’ and ‘outmoded’ body. I argue that Republican politics relating to the human body involved both hygienic and ethical regulation. As an illustration, I analyse eugenics discourse, that is, the idea of improving the biological qualities of the nation. The article looks at the discourse of the Republican reformers, their political practices and legal regulations. The extent to which the state elite succeeded, that is, how much the desired practices penetrated society and infiltrated people’s daily practices, is beyond the scope of this article. However, I do show how important reforming the human body was to the Republican nation-builders.

Modernization, Nation-building and the Human Body

Although the history of modern Turkey is deemed to begin with the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, modernization as a political project emerged with the reforms of the state administration, judiciary and education during the 19th century. At this time, Western codes of conduct and lifestyles began to spread in some sections of urban Ottoman society and to become symbols of social status. Turkish intellectuals were guided by positivism, that is, they believed that social reality could be objectively observed, known and transformed by the proper application of science and technology. Reformers, both before and after the founding of the Republic, shared many positivist attitudes such as anti-clericalism, scientism, biological materialism, authoritarianism, social Darwinism, intellectual elitism and a deep distrust of the masses (Zurcher, 2001: 54). This reflected the continuum of elite cadres linking the Ottoman reformers of the Young Turk Era to the Republican elite; indeed, Mustafa Kemal, the military commander of the independence war, the leader of the Republican People’s Party (RPP), and the first president of Turkey, had been a member of the Committee of Union and Progress, the dominant political power between 1908 and 1918.

Mustafa Kemal and the state elite, driven by a desire to catch up with Western Europe, wanted to modernize the society along secular and scientific lines. Their political, economic and ideological goals were the creation of an independent nation-state, rapid industrialization and the construction of a modern secular national identity. Mustafa Kemal’s principles of government, namely republicanism, nationalism, secularism, statism, populism and reformism, are called Kemalism. Kemalism took different forms in different periods; the vehement reformatory character of the early period gave way to conservatism, after the death of Mustafa Kemal in 1938 (İnsel, 2001: 17–27). In spite of the changes in Kemalism, the state retained its power to shape and reproduce social relations, through its discourse and institutions. The centrality of the state in Kemalism

lent crucial authority to the state elite in their efforts to effect social and cultural transformations.

The Republican cultural transformation agenda promoted nationalist Westernization (Deren, 2002: 383). The reformers wanted to mould a uniform national identity out of the multi-religious society left over from the Ottoman Empire. They saw religion and tradition as sources of backwardness and sought to eliminate the ideological and cultural baggage of the past in favour of Western culture. The reformers believed that if Turkey could revive its pre-Islamic culture and remove Persian and Arab cultural influences, it would approach the Western European nations. Out of this desire grew the Turkish history thesis, which promoted the idea that Turks and Europeans had a common heritage. In the early 1930s, historians, encouraged by Mustafa Kemal, linked pre-Islamic Turkish history with the origins of Western civilization in Central Asia. In contrast to the European categorization of Turks as members of the 'yellow race', the Turkish history thesis claimed that the Turkish race is a member of the superior Caucasian race family. Şevket Aziz Kansu (1937a, 1937b) used anthropometrical techniques to show that Turkish and European skulls have similar brachycephalic structure. Other major steps towards the production of a new national identity included the replacement of the Arabic alphabet with the Latin one in 1928, and the removal of Arab and Farsi words from the Turkish language. The goal of Kemalist research on the origins of the Turkish race and language was the creation of a strong national identity capable of overcoming feelings of inferiority to Western nations and of promoting national unity.

A sense of common history and national pride were constituents of a strong national identity, yet the reformation of people's everyday practices was also fundamental. Kemalists believed that the transformation of 'the people' into 'citizens' was an important phase in the nation-building process (Cantek, 2003: 33). In their eyes, 'the people' were simple and ignorant; they were bound by traditions and religion, and unaware of the requirements of a modern life based on rational, secular and national principles. The people were in need of a national discipline and a national consciousness to achieve the level of maturity citizenship required. Citizenship was to produce a moral and political identity, a 'new Turk' (Kadioğlu, 1996), who was subservient to the state's 'will to civilisation' (Keyman, 1995). Imagining Turkish society as a national organic unity prioritized the duties of citizens over their rights. The new 'Turk' was imagined on the basis of a series of dichotomies: East/West, uncivilized/civilized and traditional/modern. Mustafa Kemal used the Enlightenment philosophy's body/mind dichotomy to describe the Turkish modernization project: he said that Turks' 'bodies remained in the East while their thoughts inclined towards the West'

(Cantek, 2003: 33–9). In Mustafa Kemal's analogy, the mind refers to knowledge of Western ways of doing things, while the body refers to traditional Turkish society. The unity of body and mind required the mind to transform the body into a new cultural being by purging its inappropriate, 'uncivilized' features (2003: 33–9). Kemalists expressed their mission of transformation as 'enlightening the people', 'bringing the civilization down to the people' and 'training the people'. They wanted the state to discipline society by acting as a father figure who judges, and then rewards or punishes. The new regime aspired to replace old loyalties, which deserved contempt or punishment, with a modern, nationalist consciousness.

One step towards abolishing the old cultural practices was to change clothing styles. Since the 19th century, modernization efforts had targeted clothing because it was a visual symbol of culture. The power struggle over the style of headgear is particularly noteworthy. In 1829, the Ottoman regime banned the turban in favour of the fez. In turn, the Republicans passed the Hat Law outlawing the fez in 1925 because of its association with Ottoman society. In the Republican period, the hat and tie became the uniform of the new regime and a means of suppressing differences in Ottoman society, in which costumes were signifiers of rank, origin and ethnicity (Kandiyoti, 1997: 122). Indeed, wearing a fez became a cause for ridicule. In the following quote, Mustafa Kemal is addressing a man with a fez in a provincial town:

I see a man in the crowd in front of me; he has a fez on his head, a green turban on the fez, a smock on his back and on the top of that, a jacket like the one I am wearing. I can't see the other half. Now, what kind of outfit is that? Would a civilised man put on this preposterous garb and go out to hold himself up for universal ridicule? (Lewis, 1968: 269)

The new regime wanted to free itself from the cultural and political world of the Ottomans, which was centred in Istanbul, by moving the capital to Ankara. With its big boulevards laid out on a grid, the organization of space in Ankara required the inhabitants to perform in an orderly fashion. Workers and peasants were prevented from walking on Atatürk Boulevard, Ankara's most prestigious avenue, because of their unsuitable outfits and uncivilized manners. Burhan Asaf (Belge), a prominent diplomat and author, portrayed the ideal inhabitants of Ankara in the following way: 'In Ankara, there will be a single form of spoken Turkish, a single way of washing a face, a single way of sitting at a table³ and a single meaning attributed to the city' (in Cantek, 2003: 227).

The process of Westernization was not limited to the transformation of daily practices, but also entailed the physical transformation of the human body and the concomitant perception of beauty and aesthetics. The fitness of the population was a significant concern. Falih Rıfki Atay, a prominent Kemalist author,

portrayed the man on the street as crooked, fat, pale-faced, and having nothing in common with the Europeans of Paris, Berlin or Stockholm (in Canteke, 2003: 230). In the same spirit, Selim Sırrı (Tarcan), a pioneer of modern Turkish sports, endeavoured to lengthen and flatten the backs of the ill-shaped Turkish bodies. Selim Sırrı was influential in shaping Republican policies on physical training, which he saw as a pedagogic and psychological tool in the hands of the state. He held discussions on the radio to convince people of the importance of physical training and sports. According to him, a nation of well-trained people was similar to a well-equipped army (Sırrı, 1930). The Kemalists took this to heart and the level of national fitness and strength became a matter of pride or shame. In fact, Burhan Asaf (1933: 72) asserted that those who compared the Turkish nation with more athletic nations were damaging the nation's pride. He argued that the physical state of Turks arose from a century's worth of ill care rather than lack of talent. Indeed, the goal of national sports was to create 'hundreds of thousands of sturdy bodies', rather than merely win international sporting acclaim. To achieve this goal, the parliament passed the Body Discipline Law in 1938 to 'regulate games, gymnastics and sports that improve the physical and moral capabilities of the citizens in accordance with the national and reformist principles'. Article 3 mandated that youth participate in sport clubs and physical training programmes during their leisure time. Furthermore, the law authorized the state to determine the type and duration of sports to be engaged in by different age groups.

The People's Houses, established in 1932, were central to the state's effort to create a modern Turkish nation. Similar organizations in European countries, such as *Dopolavoro* in Italy, inspired the organization of the Houses. By 1950, there were 478 People's Houses and 4322 smaller People's Rooms all over Turkey. The People's Houses were designed to inculcate the Kemalist reforms; to discipline the people with national consciousness; and to activate society by giving inspiration, confidence and pride (Yeşilkaya, 1999). The objective was not only to indoctrinate the masses with Kemalist ideology, but also to organize leisure and to change aesthetic taste. The Houses trained people in literacy, Western languages, science, history, sports, typewriting, accountancy, modern agricultural machinery, floristry, viticulture, apiculture, sewing and embroidery, ironing, hat production.

The People's Houses had an authoritarian approach to society. Recep Peker, the general secretary of the RPP and a famous statesman, expressed the state's authoritarianism using the concept of 'disciplined freedom' (Varlık, 2001: 58). According to Peker (1933: 179), in order to maintain the national order, the state was to promote docility in society. The state disseminated its ideas through journals such as *Ülkü* (Ideal), which were published by the People's Houses.

A glance at the titles of some of the articles published in 1933 – for example, ‘Discipline of Health Protection’, ‘National Festival and People’s Discipline’, ‘Barracks and Village Discipline’, ‘Republican Discipline’, ‘Discipline of the Revolution’, ‘People’s Discipline and Operas’, ‘Village Environment and Child Discipline’, ‘Discipline of Aesthetics’ – illustrates the centrality of discipline. In addition to published material, the People’s Houses used radio and theatre to change people’s perceptions and daily practices. For instance, there was a vigorous effort to promote the appreciation of Western polyphonic music (Tekelioğlu, 2001). For that purpose, the state banned the playing of traditional monophonic music on the radio. Theatres were also instrumental in shaping people’s perceptions of the Kemalist reforms. In 1935, the RPP estimated that the People’s Houses could reach 136,000 people through theatres within one or two days (Yeşilkaya, 2001: 115).

Regulation of the human body in the processes of nation-building and modernization was inevitably a gendered process (Mayer, 2000). Since the beginning of Turkish modernization in the 19th century, the female body was the focus of major political controversies. Women’s increasing public visibility and changing clothing style was seen as a sign of changing morality and emerged as a significant political issue. Conservatives saw the unveiling of women’s bodies and their public visibility as a sign of moral decadence, while reformers saw it as a reflection of development and modernization. In fact, the Kemalist elite considered veiled women to be an obstacle to the civilizing process, and aspired to introduce comprehensive reforms that reinforced legal changes in women’s position in society: the education of girls became mandatory; the participation of women in the labour market was encouraged; polygamy was abolished; and universal suffrage was mandated. However, despite these developments, the nationalist discourse still imposed on women the duty of enlightened motherhood and ‘rationalized’ housekeeping, which provided the ultimate justification for their education (Arat, 1997; Kandiyoti, 1997). In this sense, the Kemalist regime had a double discourse on women. As Yeşim Arat explains:

While the state encouraged increasing involvement by a group of elite women in public life, it gave a different message to a large number of ‘other’ women: they were expected to contribute to the process of modernisation not by becoming elite women professionals but being housewives *à la* the West, bringing ‘order’, ‘discipline’ and ‘rationality’ to homemaking in the private realm. (1997: 100)

In order to ‘rationalize’ women’s functions in housekeeping and childcare and to bring ‘order’ to family life, the Girls’ Institutes were set up under the supervision of the Ministry of Education in 1928 (Navaro-Yaşın, 2000). In these institutes, girls were taught efficient and rational ways to cook, wash, clean, take care of

children and organize space within a house. As many cases of nationalism, Turkish nationalism regulated men and women in different ways, by emphasizing a moral code that mobilizes men to become its guardians and women to become its biological and symbolic reproducers (Kandiyoti, 1991; Mayer, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Nation-states, particularly at times of social, economic and military mobilization, have always been concerned with the human body. In the case of Turkey, the state became acutely aware of the economic and symbolic value of the human body during the modernization and nation-building processes. This new form of awareness led the state to use the strong dichotomy between old and new, civilized and uncivilized human bodies, to construct the national identity.

Hygienic and Ethical Regulation of the Human Body: Eugenics Discourse

Norbert Elias, in his book *The Civilizing Process*, points out a self-contradictory trend inherent in the civilizing process, namely that, in order to make the human habitat a genuine humanistic environment, it must be purged of every trace of the human body's physical existence (Fehér and Heller, 1994). Two significant features of the civilizing process were the hygienic and ethical regulation of the human body. Initially, hygiene and ethics were considered separate: hygiene sought to remedy the problems caused by urbanization and overpopulation, while ethics sought to assert spiritual control over the natural (Fehér and Heller, 1994: 16). As the principle of rationality increasingly took over 'the spiritual', ethical and hygienic objectives merged under the principle of rationalization, which involved:

... the secularisation of culture ... the intellectualisation of everyday life through the control and imposition of scientific reasoning, the calculation and regulation of bodies in the political interest of greater control and more efficiency, and the control of everyday life through the development of micro bureaucratic techniques and practices. (Turner, 1996: 12)

Rationality brought the sublimation of the human body, the disavowal of corporal differences, and the identification of normal and perverse bodies. Rationalization of the body was supposed to provide discipline and control, thereby increasing efficiency and marginal utility of the human body, and strengthening national order and harmony. Throughout the nation-building period, the Republican regime pursued hygienic and ethical regulation of the human body in order to create a large, healthy and civilized populace.

Eugenics discourse, in parallel with similar developments elsewhere, emerged in Turkey as a part of the state's hygienic and ethical regulation. Eugenics in many countries emerged as part and parcel of the wave of progressive social

reform that swept through Western Europe and North America, and then spread to different parts of the world (Kevles, 1999). By the end of the First World War, eugenics had already become influential in Great Britain, France, the USA, Sweden, Germany, Japan, France, Mexico, Denmark, Russia, Brazil, etc. Although the word ‘eugenics’ itself comes from Ancient Greek, modern eugenics developed from the idea of Francis Galton, a 19th-century polymath, that Darwin’s theory of natural selection had important implications for understanding and improving the human species. Galton asserted that talents and virtues of character were inherited along with physical traits, and that the human race could be improved by selective breeding, that is, by encouraging those deemed ‘well bred’ to have more children, and by discouraging or preventing others from doing so. In the heyday of this idea, both progressives and conservatives supported eugenics policies, albeit for different reasons. While progressives emphasized the role of eugenics in improving the health and strength of a nation, conservatives wanted to implement eugenics policies as a bulwark against the proliferation of poor, ‘unhealthy’ or ‘outsider’ populations, which, they argued, cause moral degeneration and impose an economic burden on society.

Historically, the roots of eugenics thought in Turkey can be traced back to the social Darwinism and biological materialism of the Committee of Union and Progress, which was established by a group of medical students at the Royal Medical Academy in İstanbul in 1889. The Unionists, as they were known, saw the biological improvement of society as fundamental to social progress. According to Abdullah Cevdet, a medical doctor and a founding member of the Union and Progress Party, degenerate traits were hereditary and detrimental to social progress (Hanioglu, 1981). Cevdet’s fear of racial degeneration was one reason why he advocated women’s emancipation. He thought that children born to subjugated women would reproduce their degenerate traits (Kandiyoti, 1991).

Eugenics became an element of the Turkish state’s progressive discourse in the 1930s and, similar to French eugenics, went hand in hand with social hygiene, pro-natalist and childcare policies. In the beginning of the 20th century, Turkey was faced with serious population problems due to wars, forced migrations, epidemics and high infant mortality. The new regime took immediate action to better the health and to increase the size of the population. Very shortly after the foundation of the Turkish National Assembly in 1920, three years before the proclamation of the Republic, the new regime established the Ministry of Health in Ankara. The establishment of the ministry triggered an expansion of the state’s medical infrastructure into the towns and villages of Anatolia. In 1930, the regime passed the Public Hygiene Law (*Umumi Hifzıssıhha Kanunu*). The health policies advocated preventive measures to address infant mortality, and diseases

such as syphilis, malaria and tuberculosis. In order to increase the population size, the Turkish Criminal Law of 1926 banned abortion and the Public Health Law of 1930 made the importation, production and sale of contraceptives (except condoms) illegal (Shorter, 2000). The state emphasized the importance of child-care, not only by establishing birth and childcare clinics and taking care of orphans and poor children in the Child Protection Society,⁴ but also by disciplining the nation's mothers through public education and propaganda.

Although Atatürk did not mention eugenics *per se*, he believed that strong and sturdy generations are the essence of Turkey and he promoted participation in sports to protect and improve Turkish racial qualities. These famous excerpts formed the basis of Turkish eugenics discourse (Akalin, 1938; Gökay, 1934). 'Degenerative perils', in Atatürk's words, referred to both health and moral dangers, which were often expressed in terms of medical language, for example the illness of the Ottoman society, the health of the national body. Kemalists drew upon science's moral authority to fight against irrational, traditional beliefs and loyalties; the medical elite in particular condemned traditional healers' methods, such as amulets, Koranic verses and ritual prescriptions (Dole, 2004). In line with this discourse, the state banned the practice of traditional healers, who had religious and political authority in society. The new regime aspired to alter traditional perceptions of hygiene and to acquire moral authority over society by employing a scientific discourse.

Turkish eugenics was primarily articulated by a group of doctors who had a similar education, intellectual development and political career, that is, they were educated in the medical or biological sciences in Europe; they followed Western literature and were inspired by Western intellectual developments; they were influential figures in shaping the state's discourse and public policies concerning hygiene, reproduction, childcare, city administration, etc. The Turkish eugenicists adopted many of their arguments from Western debates and policies. As there was not much research done in Turkey, they employed data from Western Europe and the United States to show the hereditary impact of diseases, the economic burden of the unfit, etc. The eugenicists aspired to convince the public of the importance of eugenics through popular publications and public events, often via the People's Houses. Zeki Galip Yalım (1940), a professor of medicine, delivered a speech in a People's House explaining the hereditary burden of alcoholism. As an example, he discussed research carried out on the 1200 descendants of five daughters of a drunkard fisherman in New York, 300 of whom died in childhood, 310 of whom became 'professional beggars', 440 prostitutes, 130 murderers and 20 burglars.

The basic argument that the Turkish eugenicists employed was that human

bodies were the principal and most profitable capital of a nation-state (Akalin, 1938; Gökay, 1934; Tokgöz, 1938). Hence, human bodies should be sustained and managed to increase national wealth. In ‘The Essence of Eugenics in National Population Politics’ (1934), Fahrettin Kerim Gökay, a psychiatry professor and a prominent advocate of eugenics, claimed that insane and mentally retarded people were economic and hereditary burdens, and harmed a society’s order and peace. The degenerative impact of mental deficiencies, alcoholism and diseases such as syphilis, tuberculosis and smallpox was of primary concern. In his book *Öjenizm* (1938), the medical professor Server Kamil Tokgöz divided society into three categories: the superior, distinguished by their physical ability and morality; the mediocre, the majority of the population; and the cacogenics, which included lunatics, epileptics, the mute, the blind, the deaf, criminals, vagabonds, alcohol addicts, the immoral and the insane, that is, people with bad hereditary traits.

The belief that eugenics could reduce the number of economically burdensome cacogenics led the Turkish state to apply both positive and negative eugenics. Positive eugenics aimed at promoting the fertility of people who were presumed to have good hereditary qualities. Positive eugenics, as applied in many countries, involved family allowances, tax incentives and ‘fitter family’ competitions.⁵ In Turkey, the state constantly promoted population growth through normal and healthy families; the reproduction of healthy generations was encouraged as a national duty. In addition to that, *Gürbüz Çocuk Yarışmaları* (sturdy child competitions) were organized to promote childcare in the country. Negative eugenics, on the other hand, aimed to inhibit the procreation of people who were presumed to have inferior qualities. Negative eugenics espoused the use of pre-marital medical examinations, birth control, pre-natal screening, abortion, sterilization and immigration restrictions. Negative eugenics often had horrendous consequences, such as the forced sterilization of thousands of people in the US, Scandinavia and Germany, and the Nazi extermination of millions of people, including Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and the mentally ill. In Turkey, negative eugenics did not go so far. The state made sterilization illegal in 1936. However, the Turkish Public Hygiene Law of 1930 enforced pre-marital examination of couples and prohibited those with syphilis, gonorrhoea, leprosy, mental illnesses and tuberculosis from getting married.

The Turkish eugenicists were particularly receptive to the German state’s authoritarian eugenic policies that promoted marriage and breeding. Besim Akalin (1938), the father of modern obstetrics and pediatrics in Turkey, praised the German state for promoting and controlling marriages by policies such as not giving jobs to unmarried men or distributing Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, which

emphasized the national duty of procreation. However, the Turkish eugenicists balked at the implementation of some of the more extreme German policies such as sterilization. In a 1934 article, Fahrettin Kerim Gökay argued that although sterilization, as applied in Germany, was an effective method of control, it would have negative consequences in Turkey and similar countries with a low technological level. In place of sterilization, he advocated pre-marital examinations to control the reproduction of undesirable elements in society. In 1938, after attending the European Congress on Mental Health held in Germany, Gökay saw sterilization in a new light. The strong opposition to German sterilization law, which emphasized the fact that misapplications sterilize healthy people, impressed him at the congress. He concluded that, although the role of heredity in mental illnesses is undeniable, pre-marital examinations were proving sufficient for Turkey 'where the number of insane and alcoholics was significantly lower than in European nations' (1938). Similarly, Akalın (1938) argued that, although sterilization might prevent the propagation of negative influences on heredity, it would not prevent poor social conditions from producing such elements anew. He therefore emphasized the primacy of improving social and economic conditions in Turkey.

Although German eugenics policies influenced the debates in Turkey, the Turkish eugenicists' understanding of heredity was more in line with that of the Lamarckian French eugenicists, who believed in the heredity of acquired characteristics (Schneider, 1990). Eugenics in Germany followed the German biologist August Weismann's theory of heredity, that is, that a part of a cell, the germ-plasm, maintained the organic continuity between one generation and the next, regardless of the environment. Even though German and French eugenics were quite different, and were based on different theories of heredity, the Turkish eugenicists did not reflect critically on these differences and instead pragmatically employed arguments and data from both countries. They praised the German state's authoritarian measures and supported pre-marital examinations in Turkey but, in line with the enlightening mission of the regime, they mostly argued for educating the people about hygiene, reproduction and childcare. For instance, Yalım (1940) argued that sexual and moral training for all social classes were required to prevent future generations suffering from social ills.

The collectivist discourse of nation-building that 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 society. Although the Turkish eugenicists often used the racial language of eugenics, their definition of the term 'race' was vague. In most of their writings, 'race', 'nation' and 'generation' were used interchangeably. In compliance with the Kemalist discourse on national unity, neither Turkey's ethnic minorities nor

the neighbouring populations were mentioned as inferior. Instead, they discussed the 'inferiority' of black people, a non-existent population in Turkey. The Turkish eugenicists' use of racial language reflected their reliance on Western literature and the predominant racist hierarchies of the period. There was, however, a point of contention: some Western studies of racial groups placed Turks in an inferior racial category. These studies led to a defensive reaction on the part of the Kemalists. For instance, in response to American intelligence tests on immigrant groups that placed Turks at the lower end of the racial hierarchy, the medical professor Sadi Irmak (1940), who became prime minister in the 1970s, argued that this merely indicated that the emigrants were below average Turkish people. This defensive reaction can also be seen in the Kemalists' research on racial origins and the Turkish history thesis, which claimed that Turks are members of the 'European race'. In the same spirit, Mustafa Kemal claimed the victory of Kerime Halis, a Turk, at the Miss World competition of 1932, as proof of the Turkish race's noble beauty and high racial status.

Although the Turkish eugenics discourse was in line with Kemalist progressivism, the conservative themes, especially cynicism about modern urban life, were very much apparent. Gökay (1934) asserted that the varied challenges of modern life damage the mental health of individuals. Since he believed that the children born to these mentally unstable mothers and fathers would inherit their mental deficiencies, modern life would therefore effectively degenerate the Turkish race. Similarly, Irmak (1940) argued that the mechanization of production and the division of labour spoiled people's physical and mental abilities. He regarded migration from rural to urban areas as a social problem caused by modernization. Irmak believed that, although migrants brought healthy elements to cities, they would eventually be overwhelmed by the prevailing unhygienic living conditions and their fertility would decline as they adapted to urban life.

The conservatism of the Turkish eugenicists revolved mostly around women and their duties. In *How Should One Make the Turkish Child Live?* (1938), Besim Akalın expressed his concerns about the deleterious effects of modern life on women. Akalın argued that women who encountered images of luxury in modern movies had higher material expectations, which increased the cost of marriage, thereby discouraging men from getting married. Moreover, he thought, women who had more access to education and work were less inclined to form families. He argued that if healthy married women do not breed, they waste the potential progeny of healthy men. If such women also occupied jobs that could otherwise be filled by men who had children to look after, the situation was doubly wasteful. Both Besim Akalın and Fahrettin Kerim Gökay claimed that women should avoid working outside the home, which would spoil their natural

talents as mothers and housewives. However, Gökay maintained that because Turkey was suffering from an insufficient population size, working women should also get married and breed.

Eugenicists believed that marriage for the sake of breeding a healthy future generation was everyone's national duty (Akalın, 1938; Gökay, 1934). However, not every marriage was considered equally respectable and well founded. Good marriages were based on the rational choice of healthy partners, while marriages based solely on love or material interests would not necessarily have positive consequences for racial hygiene. According to Gökay, both women and men should investigate the mental and physical health of their partners before getting married. Similarly, Akalın believed that families should keep health records of the past three generations and use them to choose suitable marriage partners.

By drawing up a 'framework of with whom and under what social and legal conditions one may reproduce', nation-states ensure population growth through 'normal' families (Richardson and Turner, 2001: 330, 337). For most nation-states, a 'normal' family is one headed by healthy heterosexual partners. The regulation of reproductive activities imposes a moral framework by which humans are judged (Dean, 1999: 11–12). Furthermore, the state's discourse on sexuality, reproduction and gender plays a key role in the moral construction of a national identity (Mayer, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1997). The following paragraph from a biology textbook for secondary schools elucidates how the nation-building process addressed the issues of morality, health and reproduction.

The Turkish race, to which we are proud to belong, has a distinguished place amongst the best, strongest, most intelligent and most competent races in the world. Our duty is to preserve the essential qualities and virtues of the Turkish race and to confirm that we deserve to be members of this race. For that reason, one of our primary national duties is to adhere to the principle of leading physically and spiritually worthwhile lives by protecting ourselves from the perils of ill health, and by applying the knowledge of biology to our lives. The future of our Turkey will depend on the breeding of high valued Turkish progeny in the families that today's youth will form in the future. (*Biyoloji ve İnsan Hayatı II*, 1934: 321)

The widespread rise of eugenics at the beginning of the 20th century was mostly due to a scientific worldview, which provided nation-states with a justification for controlling the human body. In Turkey, the predominance of eugenics in the 1930s coincided with the new regime's consolidation of political power, and its rising authoritarianism. Eugenics fitted well into the Kemalists' collectivist discourse and provided them with a justification for the state's broader and deeper involvement in matters previously left to individuals. However, the impact of eugenics on people's practices depended not only on the success of the regime in spreading the ideas of eugenics, but also on the interaction between

the new and old meanings and practices concerning hygiene, health, marriage and reproduction. Undoubtedly, people who are exposed to new practices, manners and aesthetic tastes do not fully adopt them. Instead, new ideas and practices are filtered through existing ones. Although the Kemalists imagined a particular form of modernization, a clear break from the past, Turkish modernization proceeded differently and involved a historical and cultural struggle between different segments of society over meanings and values.

Notes

1. Finding the English equivalent for *terbiye* was rather a difficult task, 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. I chose to employ the word ‘discipline’, referring to ‘training which produces obedience or self-control, often in the form of rules, and punishments if these are broken, or the obedience or self-control produced by this training’ (*Cambridge Advanced Learning Dictionary*) or ‘systematic training in obedience to regulations and authority’ (*Collins English Dictionary*). The article will substantiate my choice of translation. *Terbiye* and its multiple usages in the given period deserve further contemplation.

2. By the state elite, I refer to the people who had power over the discursive and institutional practices of the state. Although the state elite was not a homogeneous category with respect to ideas about the level and form of Westernization in modernizing the country, there was a consensus on the need to ‘civilize’ Turkish society.

3. In Turkey, people traditionally used to eat sitting on the floor around a low table.

4. The first national Child Protection Society was established in 1917. The emblem of the Society was a green crescent surrounded by a triangle of three words: health, morals and knowledge. Some of the aims of the Society were to protect children emotionally and physically, to establish institutes for correction of young delinquents and to provide playgrounds for physical activity. Between 1917 and 1920 the Child Protection Society opened branches in many cities. In 1921, the Child Protection Society was established in Ankara on Atatürk’s initiative as a distinct organization, and it remained the central organization after the dissolution of the Istanbul Society.

5. ‘Fitter family’ competitions began in Kansas in 1920. Families competed in small, medium and large categories, and the judgement was based on family history, physical and psychological evaluations.

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