

**“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca  
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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

**Population and modernization:  
The Cluj School of Eugenics during the Interwar  
Period**

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**Keywords:** eugenics, Transylvania, *The Eugenic and Biopolitical Bulletin*, professors, Faculty of Medicine in Cluj, hygiene, biopolitics, heredity, demography, education.

In our historiography, the phenomenon of eugenics has been approached from multiple perspectives, both before and after 1989. While approaches tended to be ideologically entrenched during the communist regime, especially from a medical perspective, after the revolution of December 1989, there have been several focal studies, conducted primarily from a demographic vantage point. A significant contribution that deserves mention in this regard is Maria Bucur's research, *Eugenie și modernizare în România interbelic* [*Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania*], Polirom Press, 2005.

The starting point of this research was the very work of Maria Bucur, which merely outlines the contribution of the Cluj School of Eugenics to the debate of medical and demographic ideas in interwar Romania. Through our undertaking, we have aimed to accomplish a monographic approach to all the representatives of the eugenics trend from the Social Hygiene Institute of the University of Cluj, from among the contributors to the journal *The Bulletin of Eugenics and Biopolitics* and from the clinics in Cluj.

The thematic analysis of the Cluj-based periodical *The Bulletin of Eugenics and Biopolitics* gave us the opportunity to outline the image of the School of Eugenics that developed in the town by the Someș River.

The spectrum of a deterioration of the human race, the threat of a “demographic degeneration” led the specialists in different fields of science and medicine to propose strategies for the regeneration of society. The adoption of populationist policies was a very important episode in the history of the modern states, at a time when scientific ideas began to be applied to social policies. With the onset of the twentieth century, politicians from across Europe shared the belief that based on scientific accumulations in the fields of biology, medicine and eugenics, the state had to intervene in the private lives of its citizens in order to promote the desired biological and social changes. At the head of this kind of debates on demographic degeneration were the eugenicists. The history of eugenics is associated with the name of Francis Galton (the cousin of Charles Darwin), who introduced eugenics as a new discipline, describing it as a science whose social application would entail the improvement of humanity. According to Galton, eugenics was the study of factors that could improve human

racial qualities through social control. He argued that society should not leave evolution to chance, and that scientists ought to help governments to implement measures aimed at biologically improving humans.

Eugenics became thus one facet of an entire phenomenon, a much wider current of ideas, which tended to influence the social and public policies of the states. The twentieth century, in particular, witnessed extreme manifestations related to eugenics and demography, especially as regards the political control of reproductive behaviour (the excesses of the Nazi regime in Germany, which compromised eugenics, are well known).

The emergence of the term eugenics occurred as such in Romania during the twentieth century, when the state attempted, through various laws and regulations, to modernize and bring society to a high level of civilization, similar to that of the developed Western countries. The “pretext” for the emergence of the term “eugenics” in the Romanian mentality came with the outbreak of World War I, in particular the effects generated by this conflict, which shook humanity.

These ideas gaining ever larger ground in Romania, too, during the period prior to World War I, as the care for the quantity and optimal quality of the population increased, but they were to make a career during the interwar period.

**The sources** also represent an important aspect in our work. In order to develop the theme *Population and Modernization: The Cluj School of Eugenics during the Interwar Period*, we used both edited sources and unpublished sources. The main source was the periodical publication *The Bulletin of Eugenics and Biopolitics*, besides which we also consulted funds from the National Archives of the State, County Cluj Branch, and an extensive bibliography in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the subject. The funds of the *Institute of Social Hygiene, King Ferdinand University of Cluj, Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj, Personal fund ‘Dr. Iuliu Moldovan’* rounded off our information about the personalities from Cluj who illustrated, through their scientific concerns and their concrete activities in the university clinics, the science of eugenics. The same archival material gave us information about the curricular subjects, the lectures and the seminars with eugenic applicability and their share in overall training of the students.

In order to capture the mentality of the era, but also to trace the antecedents of eugenics in Transylvania, we resorted to the periodicals of the time. Thus, in our approach, in addition to the historiography of the problem, we used newspapers such as *Libertatea* [Freedom], *Gazeta Poporului* [The People’s Gazette], *Telegraful Român* [The Romanian Telegraph], *Gazeta Transilvaniei* [The Transylvanian Gazette], *Tinerimea Român* [The

Romanian Youth], *Amicul Familiei* [Family Friend], *Revașul* [The Message], *Deșteptarea* [The Awakening], *Românul* [The Romanian], *Drapelul* [The Flag], *Foaia Poporului* [The People's Paper], *Minerva*, *Tribuna* [The Tribune], *Observatorul* [The Observer].

In the years following World War I, a broad circle of specialists contributed to the publication of brochures with various themes, addressed to the rural readership. This was also the case of the series of brochures published under the guidance of Professor Ioan Simionescu from Bucharest. Divided into four series, the publication was suggestively entitled *Cunoștințe folositoare* [Useful Knowledge]. Within it, series B, subtitled *Sfaturi pentru gospodari* [Tips for Farmers], was addressed to peasants. The editorial committee clearly emphasized its importance within the ensemble of Romanian historiography, as it covered a huge gap in Romanian journalism, which lacked works that popularized science. What was also highlighted was the target audience, i.e. the villagers, whose only means of acquiring access to information was through the media.<sup>1</sup> The publication had a fixed number of pages and have a weekly frequency. The topics it approached referred to the problems faced by farmers, such as: the household, health, gardening and animal husbandry.

Moreover, in order to complete our research, we also studied various edited sources, which helped us to get an overview of the subject under analysis. From general studies, we focused on works that addressed the idea of eugenics at the world level, drawing a comparison with the autochthonous area.

### **The presentation of the work**

The work is structured into four chapters, prefaced by an introduction and completed by the related conclusions. The bibliography used rounds off this undertaking. The annexes that accompany the research represent the thematic and chronological index of *The Bulletin of Eugenics and Biopolitics*.

Thus, our research started by drawing a thematic bibliographic index of *The Bulletin of Eugenics and Biopolitics*. Based on the materials published in the aforesaid journal, we outlined then the image of the Cluj "School of Eugenics," by completing the information with published and unpublished sources. The historiography of the problem focused, in particular, on the eugenics movement in the Old Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, on that in Transylvania.

The vast thematic area of the works published in the journal from Cluj led us to expand our research. In order to highlight the role and importance of the journal in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Cunoștințe folositoare. Sfaturi pentru gospodari*, Series B, No. 8, p.97.

Romanian historiographic landscape, we first outlined a brief history of eugenics in the world, in the first chapter. In sketching this image, we started from the definition of the term, then we insisted on emphasizing the origin of its related ideas, portraying the most important promoters of the movement from the eighteenth-twentieth centuries (*Jean-Baptist Lamarck, Thomas Robert Malthus, Bénédict Morel, Johann Gregor Mendel, Francis Galton*, the inventor of the term “eugenics”) and concluding with an overview of the main eugenic ideas. In general, in the pages of this chapter we presented briefly the evolution of eugenics in the world: from an idea to science.

Once the image of the eugenics movement worldwide was outlined, we focused our attention on the history of eugenics in Transylvania, in the second chapter, entitled *The Antecedents of Eugenics in Transylvania prior to 1918*. Our research focused on highlighting the premises based on which the Romanian eugenicists’ concepts developed after 1918. Whether they were imported or autochthonous, these ideas respected local specificity, and the development and evolution characteristics of the Transylvanian space throughout time. Although it found its most convincing form of expression in the interwar period, the eugenics movement in Romania had antecedents that were far from negligible. Therefore, in our study we aimed to review the stages prior to the development of the eugenics movement in Transylvania in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. In an overview, it can be seen that many researchers and journalists wrote about this historical stage and this geographic area.

The next chapter, *Eugenics at the University of Cluj during the interwar period*, aimed to achieve a presentation of the impact that eugenics exerted at the level of specialized higher education and the evolution of the interest this discipline stirred at the level of the medical and social milieus from Cluj. To achieve this goal, in the subchapter “Portraits in time. Personalities of the Medical School in Cluj,” we portrayed some of the personalities that contributed greatly to promoting eugenic ideas, through the various events they organized or through informative papers/bulletins: Iuliu Moldovan, Petre Râmneanțu, Iordache Fcoaru, Mihai Zolog, Ilie Ardelean, Valeriu Lucian Bologa, Ovidiu Comșia, Cornel Crișan, Salvator Cupcea, Iacob Iacobovici, Leon Daniello, Eugen Moraru, Ion Prodan, Leon Prodan, Iosif Stoichiță, Titu Turcu. We completed the information with a brief overview of the curriculum hygiene courses that were taught at the Faculty of Medicine from the University of Cluj in the interwar period. The information in this chapter came mostly from the funds of the National Archives, the Cluj County Branch.

The last and the most consistent part of our work was devoted to the case study of *The Bulletin of Eugenics and Biopolitics*. It is known that the journal was a periodical publication of the ASTRA Society, issued monthly between 1927 and 1947, with a break during the economic crisis, due to lack of funding between 1931 and 1933. Most of the articles published in the journal were the product of the School of Cluj and were signed by physicians, demographers and experts in various fields; they were well documented, with a rich and varied vocabulary. Naturally, there were also authors from Bucharest and Iași, as well as some translations from foreign specialized literature, especially Englishmen, Americans, Germans, etc. The themes captured in this periodical, which we analysed in separate subchapters, were: social work, the women's status, the condition of the young generation, legislation, demography, population studies, the biological theory of population, public health, education, biopolitics, heredity, evolutionist theories, and the racial problem. The unique contribution of our research lies precisely in reconstructing the key moments in the evolution of the journal, of the stages of the transition from positive eugenics to negative eugenics, at least as regards the content of articles translated from the German and Italian literature, or the articles signed by Făcăoaru and Rmneanțu. Using a moderate discourse in their demonstrations, the Cluj-based advocates of eugenics changed their attitude with the outbreak of World War II. Their moderation gradually gave way to racial overtones. Their researches and speeches were no longer focused on increasing the positive biological potential of the Romanian society, but the “purging of undesirable groups from the national body.”<sup>2</sup>

Debates on eugenics have continued to this day. The ideas that animated nineteenth-century researchers are also found in the concerns of our time. As we have seen in the lines above, the theories of eugenics have been a human preoccupation since ancient times, but only in modernity did the science of the improvement of the human race acquire a self-standing character and lay down its principles.

Even though during that period or later, the eugenicists' aspirations were not implemented at the level of policies, the laws and regulations they initiated and the reforms targeting the educational field had long-term consequences, which are still visible in the contemporary period.

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Bucur, *Eugenie și modernizare în România interbelic*, trans. Raluca Popa, Iași: Editura Polirom, 2005, p. 204.