

CHAPTER

## 10 Eugenics and genocide

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### Abstract

This article examines the historical relationship between biopolitics, eugenics, racial hygiene, and genocide globally in this period. It describes that as the historiography of eugenics has broadened out from its Anglo-American core to an international and transnational perspective, so the focus of genocide studies has shifted from the Holocaust as the paradigmatic case to other, often extra-European, genocides. Furthermore, this article examines various policy modalities developed to solve the “problem” of minority and “useless” populations. It shows that mixed-race children pose particular challenges to eugenicists in thrall to ideals of cultural homogeneity, in which case eliminationist policies of assimilation, absorption, or sterilization might be pursued. It suggests that these policies could escalate in a genocidal direction.

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THE relationship between eugenics and genocide is widely presumed to be intimate and logical because of the well-known involvement of German biomedical sciences and practitioners in the crimes of the Nazi regime. German scientists and physicians participated in the sterilization and euthanasia programs, carried out human experiments in concentration camps, and assessed the “racial value” of central and eastern European populations under German occupation.<sup>1</sup> Notoriously, German doctors were the largest professional group in the Nazi party—45 percent of doctors joined up—while they comprised 7 percent of SS members, outnumbering lawyers.<sup>2</sup> Adding to the shock of their crimes is the fact that the vast majority of guilty doctors continued to practice after the war, even publishing findings based on their former human experimentation. It was no coincidence that the first three leaders of the West

German Federal Physicians' Chamber (Bundesärztekammer) had been active Nazis, or that 20 of the 23 defendants indicted by War Crimes Tribunal No. 1 were doctors.<sup>3</sup>

The association between the Nazi regime and eugenics was strengthened by historiographical trends in the 1980s. Feminist historians began to explore the relationship between medical science and the sterilization programs, which affected mostly women,<sup>4</sup> while others reconstructed the social history of the medical profession under Nazism and its involvement in its various schemes. The paradigm of generic racism dominated the literature on Nazi Germany and its exterminatory policies, signified by book titles like *The Racial State*, *Murderous Science*, and *Racial Hygiene*.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between eugenics and the Holocaust itself was made in an influential book by Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of the Nazi Genocide*, which argued that the killings of mentally disabled people prefigured the genocide of European Jewry, because the same euthanasia experts had been sent to establish the gas chambers in the death camps.<sup>6</sup>

This fascination with the Nazi doctors had two important consequences for our topic. One was that the literature linking eugenics and genocide fixated on sterilization, drawing attention eventually also to Scandinavian, British, and North American cases, but giving the impression that eugenics was uniformly Mendelian, with its insistence on the continuity of genetic inheritance and consequent fear of group degeneration. The other consequence was the conflation of eugenics with racial hygiene, birth control, and population policy advocacy. In the rest of the world, however, Lamarckian traditions, which postulated the inheritability of environmentally acquired characteristics, persisted and led to a range of non-eliminationist eugenic policies toward majority and minority peoples.

Closer inspection of the record also shows that eugenics did not necessarily lead to genocide, indeed that the relationship was highly contingent. Only those German racial hygienists who also subscribed to the “Aryan myth” targeted Jews, while others could find no scientific grounds for anti-Semitism. In other words, eugenics and anti-Semitism were not necessarily related, and the Holocaust was motivated more by the latter than the former.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as Alison Bashford and others have argued, eugenics needs to be analytically distinguished from racism and even racial hygiene in order properly to understand historically significant transformations. Thus the preoccupation with racial difference, so characteristic of the lead-up to World War I, was superseded or overlain by a policy focus on supposedly inferior members of one's own “racial” population during the interwar period.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, while German eugenicists began to advance arguments in favor of peace because they perceived World War I to have been “contra-selective” or “dysgenic,” they became obsessed with the quality of their German stock. The problem was, according to the Social Democrat Alfred Grotjahn (1869–1931), “the army of

“beggars, alcoholics, criminals, prostitutes, psychopaths, epileptics, mental invalids, feeble-minded, and cripples,” who were hindering the regeneration of the German people.<sup>9</sup>

To assess whether the sterilization and murder of such people can be understood as genocide, it is also necessary to examine that concept carefully. Neither in the thought of Raphael Lemkin (1900–1959), who coined the term during World War II, nor in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), has genocide ever been synonymous solely with mass murder. Lemkin himself identified eight types of genocidal policies, of which two have eugenic overtones: first, the “biological” policy intended “to decrease the birthrate of the national groups of non-related blood,” while encouraging the birthrate of the related blood group, for example, marriage restrictions, the separation of males and females, and calculated undernourishment of parents. Second, Lemkin referred to the “physical” policy that consciously endangered the health of subject peoples.<sup>10</sup>

The UN Convention adopted some of Lemkin's ideas, defining genocide in Article II thus:

genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

If sections (d) and (e) possess eugenic dimensions, it is important to note that genocide only occurs when such policies are motivated by an intention to destroy, in whole or in part a “racial, ethnical, national or religious group,” in the now outdated vocabulary of the Convention.

Eugenics thus does not necessarily entail genocide, because eugenics was typically conceptualized and practiced with respect to the same group; that is, it was not normally directed against other groups, let alone intended to bring about their destruction, notwithstanding immigration restrictions against or deportations of “unfit” members of other groups.

Is, then, the relationship between eugenics and genocide tenuous, contingent,

or even non-existent? In this chapter, we argue that these phenomena can be related at a deeper, contextual and discursive level. A historical consideration of the relationship entails viewing eugenics as part of a broader “biologization of the social” which characterized modernizing societies since the eighteenth century. This social imaginary became hegemonic in the “racial century,” that is, the one hundred years since the 1870s, when preoccupations with “degeneration,” “racial fitness” and “social hygiene” became paramount.<sup>11</sup> The imperative was collective survival and assertion, driven by anxiety about possible “extinction” in the competition between rival “races” and “nations.” This imaginary manifested itself in a “political biology” that justified both positive and negative eugenics to increase a society's “efficiency” and “vitality,” often understood as reproductive potential and military viability.<sup>12</sup> Genocidal, or at least eliminationist, thinking tended to arise when societies were subject to pressures on resources and when their leaders felt that their survival was at stake. Thus the sterilization of the “feebleminded” in Sweden—as in Germany—in the 1930s was justified by a Social Democratic politician with the argument that without such measures “our people's imminent disappearance” was at hand.<sup>13</sup> The context of crisis radicalized—and actualized—policy potentials in the logic of eugenic thinking. This chapter examines the historical relationship between biopolitics, eugenics, racial hygiene, and genocide globally in this period. Just as the historiography of eugenics has broadened out from its Anglo-American core to an international and transnational perspective, so the focus of genocide studies has shifted from the Holocaust as the paradigmatic case to other, often extra-European, genocides.<sup>14</sup> In the following sections, we examine various policy modalities developed to solve the “problem” of minority and “useless” populations. We will see that “mixed-race” children posed particular challenges to eugenicists in thrall to ideals of cultural homogeneity, in which case eliminationist policies of assimilation, absorption, or sterilization might be pursued. We do not suggest that these policies or discourses were genocidal per se, but that they could, in certain circumstances, escalate in a genocidal direction.

## Assimilation and Absorption

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If eugenicists in all countries shared assumptions about the importance of “selective breeding” and “biological laws” in determining the health and fitness of later generations, they were operating in very different environments and intellectual contexts. The striking variety of eugenically justified public policies testifies not only to the heterogeneity of the eugenic movement but also to the fact that, as Frank Dikötter has observed, “eugenics belonged to the political vocabulary of virtually every significant modernizing force between the

two world wars.”<sup>15</sup>

Nowhere were the distinctions between eugenic projects more evident than in Latin America between the world wars. In a series of Pan-American Congresses, Latin American doctors, eugenicists, and feminists consistently resisted the entreaties of their North American counterparts to support coercive policies of racial population categorization, selective marriage, and sterilization.<sup>16</sup> As Maria Sophia Quine and Patience Schell's chapters in this volume show, they felt an affinity with French and Italian colleagues, making for a “Latin” brand of eugenics that was geared to the demographic challenges of their societies. Neo-Lamarckian notions of the inheritability of acquired traits led to an emphasis on improving the environment of parents and children, especially since very high rates of child mortality prompted the medical profession to call for state intervention to “modernize” society.<sup>17</sup> Policies of sanitation and public health trumped North American calls for strict reproductive regulation. The scrutiny of marriage was limited to counseling, prenuptial testing, mandatory prenatal care, and eugenic identification cards.<sup>18</sup> In general, then, neo-Lamarckianism was suited to contending with Latin America's Catholic, racially diverse, poor, and rural population.

Mendelianism, by contrast, with its anti-environmental, hereditary fundamentalism, reflected the embattled sense of superiority possessed by Anglo-Saxon Protestant populations. For them, racial mixing often entailed what the U.S. senator Samuel Shortridge in 1930 called “mongrel or hybrid races.” Perhaps the most famous North American representative of this dogmatic Mendelianism was the eugenicist Madison Grant (1865–1937). A conservationist as well as a eugenicist—he was concerned with threatened species, whether they were white people or rare animals and plants—he held miscegenation to be “a social and racial crime of the first magnitude,” and therefore opposed marriages based on individual preference rather than eugenic criteria.<sup>19</sup>

Such notions found their way into social policy. Segregationist laws preventing the intermarriage of whites and blacks, and sometimes with Native Americans and Asians, were passed in dozens of U.S. states in the interwar years.<sup>20</sup> Since black Americans ostensibly could not be absorbed by intermarriage, some—such as Edward Eggleston in his *The Ultimate Solution of the American Negro Problem* in 1913—speculated that they might die out in competition with superior whites.<sup>21</sup> In general, the prejudice against miscegenation meant that Native American children were to be assimilated by attending separate boarding schools, where they would be taught “civilization.” Other commentators, however, were confident that Native American “blood” would not “damage” the majority white gene pool, and hoped that Native Americans would eventually disappear via incremental “amalgamation”—that is, “interbreeding”—with the majority white population.<sup>22</sup> Whether a strict Mendelian

approach was invoked depended on the population group in question. For the minority white population of South Africa, there was no question of absorbing or assimilating the majority Africans. In keeping with Anglo-American eugenics, the discourse of degeneration was turned inward, as poor whites were thought to be endangered by contact and competition with Africans. As one writer put it in 1911, the policy should be “the segregation of the races as far as possible, our aim being to prevent race deterioration, preserve race integrity, and to give both opportunity to build up and develop their race life.”<sup>23</sup> If this brand of segregationism, based on Mendelian premises, seemed to respect difference, it was only because the large majority status of Africans told against eliminatory fantasies, let alone absorptionist possibilities.

What if the population balance was reversed? In central and southeastern Europe, where the foundation of nation-states after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire coincided with the establishment of eugenics associations, bourgeois elites understood the state as the instrument of the dominant ethnicity—at the expense of national minorities. Such “racial nationalism” sought to raise the level of the majority population with the usual array of positive eugenic measures while actively discouraging minorities, although calls for outright sterilization and population transfer were not realized until the Nazi occupation decades later. As in Germany, all these racial nationalisms regarded Jews as an inassimilable and dangerous minority. Whether a minority was assimilated and absorbed or subject to discrimination and segregation depended on its perceived “cultural level” in relation to the majority. Thus Romanian eugenicists hoped to absorb ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania by proving they were really Romanian, while the Polish state thought it could “Polonize” Ukrainian peasants living within its borders. Ethnic Germans and Jews, however, were not considered absorbable and were subject to policies of dissimulation.<sup>24</sup>

The same, frankly colonial, considerations about cultural level were entertained by Zionists with regard to “Oriental” or Arab Jews (also known as Sephardim and Mizrachim) who came to Palestine and later Israel.<sup>25</sup> Prominent Ashkenazi (European Jewish) theorists of Zionism like Arthur Ruppin (1876–1943) were greatly influenced by German *völkisch* and even Nazi race theorists and were contemptuous of the cultural and ethnic status of Jews living in the Middle East. Yemenite Jews, for instance, were at best “human material” to be imported as “natural workers” to compete with Arabs, who comprised the overwhelming majority in mandate Palestine.<sup>26</sup>

As might be expected given these assumptions, the immigration of almost half a million Arab Jews to Israel after 1948—the population of the country virtually doubled in a few years—prompted anxiety about the Zionist character of the new state because the newcomers were widely regarded, as the first president David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973) put it, as a “melange and human dust without a



language, without education, without roots and without drawing on the tradition and vision of the nation.”<sup>27</sup> They also came with many illnesses, overwhelming the medical system, and sparking an intense debate about the medical selection of immigrants. There was also considerable concern about “negative selection,” because the wealthiest Jewish families migrated to the United States, France, Australia, and Canada rather than Israel.<sup>28</sup> The Arab Jews, especially those from Yemen, were to be absorbed—the name of the government agency responsible for assimilating immigrants was the “Absorption Department of the Jewish Agency”—inter alia by an authoritarian regime of hygiene that would inculcate European civilization by teaching modern practices of washing, child-rearing, and even sexual intercourse. In the enormous camps established in 1949 to accommodate the immigrants, babies were routinely taken from their mothers for medical treatment, and hundreds disappeared into the health system, pronounced dead, though apparently adopted to Ashkenazi families “for their own good.”<sup>29</sup>

Because this heavy-handed policy of assimilation and absorption aimed to efface the Arab cultural heritage of these Jewish immigrants, the question of “cultural genocide” might be raised.<sup>30</sup> Not only does the UN Convention omit “cultural genocide” from its provisions, Lemkin himself did not think that assimilation amounted to genocide. Referring to the terms used in the interwar period, he wrote that “Germanization,” “Magyarization,” and “Italianization,” which connoted “the imposition by one stronger nation (Germany, Hungary, Italy) of its national pattern upon a national group controlled by it,” did not constitute genocide because they left “out the biological aspect, such as causing the physical decline and even destruction of the population involved.”<sup>31</sup> Arab Jews were still regarded as Jews, after all, sometimes even more “authentic” (if uncivilized).<sup>32</sup> Yet if, according to Lemkin, a policy of genocide aims, by a range of coercive measures, to tip the demographic balance in favor of the occupier, then the function of “Oriental” Jewish immigration in countering Arab labor in the interwar period needs to be brought into the equation. The eugenically inspired Zionist project of regenerating the Jewish people did not occur in a vacuum; as a settler colonial project, it necessarily entailed the supplanting and large-scale destruction of Palestinian society, which some have called “politicide.”<sup>33</sup>

The settler colonial model clearly applies to Australia, where geographically and racially diverse contexts issued in absorptionist, assimilationist, as well as segregationist policies. Generally, the more anxious that whites felt about the viability of their society, the more likely they were to implement authoritarian measures. Asians, for instance, who resided in northwest Australia and the Northern Territory, were almost always classed as a dangerous “alien” race, and were treated much like ethnic Germans and Jews in interwar Poland. The colonial gaze fixed upon the supposedly weaker indigenous populations. The

situation with children of European-Aboriginal unions—so-called “half-castes”—varied according to location. “Half-castes” outnumbered “full-bloods” in the southern states, while the reverse pattern obtained in Western Australia, the Northern Territory, and Queensland. “Full-bloods” were generally thought to be “dying out” of their own accord, in view of their catastrophic decline in the nineteenth century, and were therefore not a policy priority, although the question whether the authorities engaged in willful blindness and calculated neglect in their treatment of remote indigenous communities warrants further consideration.<sup>34</sup>

Race anxiety was especially acute in the Northern Territory where the white population was outnumbered by full-bloods, half-castes, and Asians. Its Chief Protector of Aborigines, Dr. Cecil Cook (1897–1985), indulged in dire predictions about the fate of white civilization there, as “the preponderance of colored races, the prominence of colored alien blood and the scarcity of white females to mate with the white male population, creates a position of incalculable future menace to purity of race.” It was possible, he continued, that one day there might be “a large black population which may drive out the white.”<sup>35</sup> He and his counterpart in Western Australia, A. O. Neville (1875–1954), were particularly concerned about the “mating” of “half-caste” women and Asian men—a concern first expressed in nineteenth-century Queensland<sup>36</sup>—who they thought abused their concubines and, more significantly, introduced an alien, unabsorbable bloodstream into the Australian population.

To combat these threats, they systematized and integrated a number of existing policies during the 1930s: the prohibition of marriages between Asians and Aborigines and the removal of “half-caste” children from their families and their placement in institutions, where they could be raised as whites and the girls married off to white men. Such interbreeding would “stamp out”—a widely used term at the time—the black blood over the course of three or four generations. With the remaining “full-bloods” either dying out or themselves yielding half-caste children, so the thinking went, the presence of indigenous people could be eliminated within fifty years by a guided process of “breeding out the black.”<sup>37</sup>

The Protectors of Aborigines in each state and some academic anthropologists, who theorized that Aborigines were in fact “Caucasian” and not “Negroid,” developed similar policy solutions to the perceived “half-caste” problem. By the 1930s, the unexpected appearance and expansion of the “half-caste” population threatened “White Australia.” Even if the “full-bloods” were thought to eventually wither away in accordance with the widespread “dying race theory,” the racial ideal to which all mainstream political parties and policy-makers were committed was now endangered by the mixed-race “half-caste.”<sup>38</sup> At a national conference in 1937, the Protectors of the other states agreed,



particularly in the child removal provisions, affirming the motion “that the destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full-blood, lies in the ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth.” The policy should ensure, as Neville rhetorically asked, that “we...forget that there were ever any aborigines in Australia?”<sup>39</sup>

The accusation of genocide was made by a government inquiry in 1997, occasioning a vitriolic public debate in Australia about the applicability of the term. Even if the inquiry controversially labeled the postwar assimilation policies as genocide—biological absorption effectively ceased as a policy ideal with the retirements of Cook and Neville in 1939 and 1940, respectively, although child removal continued under different legal aegis until the 1960s—contemporaries in the 1930s were in no doubt that the policy aimed to eradicate Aborigines over time.<sup>40</sup> Whether policies were driven by eugenics, which was concerned with the “fitness” of immigrating whites in this period, is another question. Indeed, some eugenicists opposed Neville's absorption policy on Mendelian grounds, alleging that such miscegenation would corrupt the purity of “White Australia.” This was also the stance taken by the state of Queensland, which declined to follow the absorptionist line, holding fast to its segregationist regime.<sup>41</sup>

The Nazis, too, engaged in the absorption of those considered racially proximate. The offspring of German soldiers and Slavic women, and the children of eastern Europeans considered potentially “racially valuable” were “racially screened” and successful candidates adopted out to German families. Though the eugenic rationale of absorbing “related” blood is the same as in the Slavic, Zionist, and Australian cases discussed above, the Nazis took this logic to its extreme conclusion, hoping to denude Slavic countries of their “best” (i.e., “Aryan”) racial stock while strengthening their own. The policy was not justified by individualist rhetoric of “rescuing” the half-caste child—“for their own good,” as one book about the Australian case is called. The survivalist imperatives of the race trumped any such considerations.<sup>42</sup>

## Eugenic Sterilization

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Central to the eugenic project in many countries—in the days before gene therapy and fetal screening—was the question of sterilization. Categorizing the “unfit” and then preventing them from breeding was the greatest ambition of eugenicists, who argued that modern civilization—with its poor laws, welfare legislation, and Christian ethics—had brought about a dysgenic condition in which the “inferior stocks” of human beings were out-breeding the “superior.” In the Anglo-American context, this fear was largely class-driven, though it intersected with anxieties about race in many ways—from worries about the

outcome of miscegenation to broader fantasies about biological “pollution.”<sup>43</sup> Fantasies about “interbreeding,” fears of the deleterious effects of the tropics on the health of the “white race,” or of the sexual proclivities of “natives” are especially significant here; they provide links between the metropolises and the colonies that suggest an increasing “racialization” of eugenics as one moves further from the metropole. However, the focus of such “race thinking” was the dominant racial group rather than colonized “others.” Eugenics was not inherently racist but, in practice, tended toward a racial view. As Arthur Keith (1866–1955), one of Britain's leading social Darwinists put it during a Eugenics Society discussion just after the Great War, “National spirit is really a modified form of racial feeling, which becomes stronger still when peoples have dealings with one another who are altogether different in feature and colour.”<sup>44</sup> This claim is hardly surprising, given that racial categories were part of the normal mental tool kit of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But it implies that the connection between eugenics as science and racial phobias was more than contingent. We will return to this in the section on population management and modernity.

In Britain, despite the efforts of civil servants and experts—who often pushed their arguments in favor of sterilization further than the scientific evidence warranted<sup>45</sup>—no major eugenic legislation was enacted between the wars, with the exception of some aspects of the Mental Deficiency Acts of 1913 and 1927.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, as the birthplace of eugenics, British eugenicists enjoyed cultural capital at home and on the international stage that was incommensurate with their numbers or power.<sup>47</sup> In the early-twentieth-century “white settler colonies,” eugenics societies often looked to London for scientific approval, and there was considerable interchange of ideas and personnel between the metropole and its former colonies, for example, correspondence between eugenics societies in Britain, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, or the influence of individuals, such as Lancelot Hogben (1895–1975), who developed his critique of eugenics and distaste for racism in the period (1927–1930) he spent as professor of zoology at the University of Cape Town. With the rise of Nazism, the Eugenics Society in London straddled an awkward line between tentative admiration for Nazi resolve in pushing ahead with sterilization and anxiety that the illiberal context of the legislation was not to be emulated.

Thus, although Britain retained its status as central to debates and research on eugenics, it was overtaken between the wars—first, by the United States and, second, by the far-reaching implementation of eugenics-inspired legislation across the world, legislation that saw hundreds of thousands of people sterilized without consent and with eugenic intent. The question here is whether this attempt to control people's right and ability to reproduce constitutes, or in some senses led to genocide.

Sterilization legislation was enacted across the globe, aimed, as Thomson's chapter in this volume documents, at the “feeble-minded,” inmates of state institutions, and criminals. It did not usually target “racial” or ethnic groups, as such, even if particular racial groups (for example, Aboriginal people in Canada) were often vastly overrepresented in those institutions. If the American example is the best known, many chapters in this volume show that sterilization was debated and in some cases implemented throughout the world. In Scandinavia, sterilizations were carried out by technocratically minded Social Democratic governments until the 1970s.<sup>48</sup> Even in France, where it is not surprising to discover that Catholic sensibilities prevented the adoption of sterilization laws, vigorous debates on the subject nonetheless took place.<sup>49</sup> In Italy, despite the Fascist regime, religion prevented the adoption of sterilization, as well. After World War II, one finds cases of poor women in the United States demanding to be sterilized as a means of obtaining permanent birth control, even if this meant being stigmatized as “feeble-minded.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, eugenic sterilization was not always carried out with a racial intent, even if it had a racial effect. Where eugenics has been condemned as genocidal, this is largely as a consequence of this racial effect, but the reality is more complex.

Eugenics was, as Bashford's chapter details, an international affair, complete with international conferences, journals, and scholarly networks. American and Danish (1929) sterilization legislation influenced the Nazis' sterilization law of 1933, and the 1935 amendment was justified partly on the basis of the rising numbers of sterilizations taking place in the United States, even as eugenicists were beginning to acknowledge that such surgery could do little to prevent the appearance of undesirable recessive genes in the population. But no other country carried out the law so vigorously as Germany; by the outbreak of World War II, some 300,000 people had been subjected to sterilization, and a further 100,000 by May 1945—one percent of the German population aged between 14 and 50.<sup>51</sup> The figure includes some 30,000 women who underwent eugenic abortions with compulsory sterilization.<sup>52</sup> Paul Weindling suggests that with the drift from sterilization to “euthanasia,” and with the specific targeting of ethnic groups, such as the so-called “Rhineland bastards” (children born of German mothers and French–Moroccan occupation soldiers in the early 1920s), Jews, and Romanies, “medicine became part of genocidal policies of extermination and resettlement.”<sup>53</sup>

It is clear, then, that if the attempt to control reproductive sex by the state, primarily through sterilization, was not usually in itself genocidal, it certainly encouraged the proliferation of a eugenic vocabulary of “inferior” and “superior” stocks. The proliferation of organic metaphors, like that of the state as a “garden” that needs to be “weeded,” was commonplace in these debates.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, in Britain one can argue that advocates of sterilization actually contributed to the *decline* of mainstream eugenics (because they represented a

more progressive, more technocratic, and less dogmatically hereditarian mindset than the first generation of eugenicists).<sup>55</sup> And in general, one sees that sterilization was implemented less to eradicate people considered as external racial pollutants or otherwise biologically dangerous than to “cleanse the racial self.” In the United States, Kline documents that the vast majority of sterilizations before World War II were performed on “feebleminded” white women with the aim of purifying the “white race” by eliminating “racial poisons,” sexual perversions, and other negative traits<sup>56</sup> (although after 1945, non-consensual sterilization continued to be practiced on Hispanic women in the Western states). And in South Africa, Klausen shows that eugenicists worried far more about “lower class whites,” mostly Afrikaners, than they did about non-whites, at least until the late 1920s.<sup>57</sup>

This is also how we should understand the Nazi “euthanasia” program, whose focus was the removal of undesirable traits from the “Aryan” gene pool. It was not central to the “Jewish Question.” If there were continuities of personnel and technology from the euthanasia killing centers to the Operation Reinhard death camps (Belzec, Sobibór, and Treblinka), those links are insufficient to explain the killing of the Jews as a solely eugenic undertaking.<sup>58</sup> By contrast, when it came to the occupation of eastern Europe and the Holocaust, genocide was committed against Slavic nations such as the Poles primarily because of the desire for *Lebensraum* (living space). And against the Jews, genocide was committed out of fear that the “international Jew” would destroy “Germandom.” These genocides were justified on the basis of vague eugenic slogans about the inferiority of the Poles (hence it was necessary to send out racial experts to identify children who could be “re-Germanized”) and, in the case of the Jews, the strange mix of their alleged racial inferiority alongside fear of their perceived worldwide power. In other words, we see in Nazi genocide the sharing of a mental space with eugenic language, but more a paranoid racist than a strictly eugenic program per se.<sup>59</sup> Hence in the Warthegau, the area of western Poland incorporated directly into the Third Reich after 1939, racial politics was less strictly enforced than one might expect, and Poles could be tolerated as long as they knew their place in the racially determined hierarchy. If Nazi Germany enacted the most radical program of sterilization seen in the twentieth century—more people were sterilized in Germany than in all other countries combined—this should be confused neither with the Holocaust nor with the genocidal occupation of eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, this distinction between Nazi sterilization and Nazi genocide should not blind us to the fact that there were of course significant historical links between them, especially on the general level of racial fantasies and dreams. The idea of purifying the race (which cannot legally be defined as genocide) clearly drew on the same reservoir of racial visions and blueprints as the elimination of racially defined “enemies” (which is genocide). The two went

hand in hand.

Despite this apparent path from eugenics to genocide through sterilization and euthanasia, it is vital to remember that, in the 1920s and 1930s, sterilization was considered a progressive measure, akin to preventive medicine, and was presented as cost-saving in comparison with long-term institutionalization and even, in some quarters, as “‘liberating’ women from the biological determinism of the past” because it left women's sexual feelings intact.<sup>60</sup> Those advocating it would have been astonished to learn that they have been labeled *génocidaires*. The issue we must turn to, then, is the relationship between science, the state, and population management in the context of modernity.

## Conclusion: Science, the Modern State, and Population Management

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We have learned that eugenics was not tied in a neat correlation to the emergence of Mendelian genetics or to the hardening of the distinction between nature and nurture; and we have learned that eugenics was not necessarily racist, reactionary, or tied to the political Right.<sup>61</sup> Although genocide claims are sometimes made at a popular level, one could not argue that the sterilization of 2,834 people in Alberta, Canada, under the aegis of the Alberta Eugenics Board between 1929 and 1972, constitutes genocide.<sup>62</sup> The same is true even of the more extreme cases of Native American women in the 1970s or Puerto Rico, in which about a third of all women were sterilized until the 1980s. These cases have historically and recently been linked to genocide,<sup>63</sup> but all, though racist, were not genocidal, for one sees not an intention to eliminate the group as such but to “improve” it.

In many instances, this was a policy that was authoritarian, yet Janus-faced, for it often met with the approval of relatives and even the “patients” themselves. For example, it is perhaps no surprise that “eugenicists' desire to control women's sexuality and prohibit the ‘degenerate’ from having children may have converged with the interests of some impoverished women to control childbearing and improve their health.”<sup>64</sup> And even, in the case of Puerto Rico, one should add, and some wealthy women. In Japan, eugenic legislation from 1940 to as recently as 1996 has been understood in terms of protecting the reproductive health of mothers.<sup>65</sup> This is a long way from genocide. Where, then, does the relationship lie?

What eugenics shares with genocide is state intervention at the level of the population, whether actualized or desired. One does not need a state for genocide to take place—a common misconception about the UN Genocide Convention—but, historically speaking, one sees in the twentieth century the convergence of state-directed eugenic assimilation and sterilization policies

with the targeting of ethnic and racial groups, as they were defined by the authorities. From Alberta to Puerto Rico, and Denmark to Japan, the modern state operated to control its population's freedom to reproduce.

Is there a connection between this state ambition and the Holocaust and therefore between eugenics and genocide? Not for nothing have theorists of biopolitics like Michel Foucault and, especially, Giorgio Agamben, seen in the Nazi state the apogee not only of racial thinking (a notion common in liberal historiography for decades), but also of the racist constitution and illiberal nature of the nation-state per se.<sup>66</sup> But whereas Foucault saw Nazism as the ultimate expression of modern biopolitics, Agamben goes further and sees Nazism—in particular, the concentration camp—not only as exemplifying modern biopolitics, but as “the *nomos* of the modern” and “the bare essence of politics as such.”<sup>67</sup> Our analysis of the relationship between eugenics and genocide would tend to support Foucault's position more than Agamben's, for it is clear that while modern states have developed (and continue to develop) technologies for intervening at the level of the population, it would be too reductive of the multiple variations of eugenic practice to claim that their intersection with genocide represents their logical or necessary telos.<sup>68</sup>

Equally, in the colonial context, there was no necessary connection between eugenics and genocide. Colonial genocide was not a rare occurrence, but it usually resulted from more immediate short-term crises, even if long-term background ideas of racial superiority were vital ingredients; and colonial eugenics was, as we have seen, often aimed at segregating settler and indigenous populations or “purifying” the settler community from “enemies within,” such as the feeble-minded, alcoholic, or syphilitic colonists (or prospective migrants from the metropole). Eugenics and genocide have thus never been synonymous, but eugenics (indeed, biopolitics as such) has fed genocidal programs in nations where biopolitics has not been one aspect of state management but central to the self-conception of the regime. In other words, the eugenic concern with the “fitness” of its own population was conjoined with a discourse of racial hygiene about perceived dangerous “racially alien” others. This is the genocidal conjuncture, and what historians need to ask is in what circumstances it develops. This is not a question that can be answered by studying the history of eugenics alone. The answer lies in the geopolitics of national and imperial competition and racial anxieties about “extinction.” Take the case of Japanese imperial schemes in the early twentieth century. Here eugenic ideas were promoted among the Japanese themselves for the reason that “the popularization of eugenics, race hygiene, and eugenic endogamy as elements of quotidian life was a (bio) powerfully effective method of national mobilization.”<sup>69</sup>

The Holocaust has not only overshadowed the discussion of eugenics and genocide.<sup>70</sup> It has helped dissociate eugenics and race science from cases of



genocide where it was more profoundly involved. In other words, while eugenics should not be equated solely with Nazism or the Holocaust, one can see that eugenics is in fact deeply implicated in the history of genocide once it is placed in a wider context. Furthermore, linking eugenics solely or primarily with Nazism prevents one from seeing the continuities in worldwide eugenic thought from the late nineteenth century through to the twenty-first, as can be shown, for example, by the ways in which eugenicists in the United States in the 1940s diverted their attentions “away from public and legislative arenas and into the intimate domain of domesticity and the family.”<sup>71</sup> Looking beyond Nazism, we need to rethink the standard periodization of eugenics that sees a collapse of “mainline” hereditarianism in the wake of the Third Reich's radical biopolitics.<sup>72</sup> The history of sterilization, reproductive practices, and assimilation policies across the world, and especially in colonial settings, was not necessarily genocidal, and we are not arguing for a strong or overdetermined link between them. Yet, where such practices were aimed at particular “racial” groups, as in Australia or North America, there is indeed a good *prima facie* case for arguing that, even if those implementing the policies thought that they would ultimately benefit the “natives” and/or the nation as a whole, the race-science that underpinned those policies led logically to genocide: the nullification of peoples.

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