

*An Unholy Union?*  
*Eugenic Feminism in the Nordic*  
*Countries, ca. 1890-1940*

*Merle Weßel*



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## Abstract

The interest of first-wave feminists into eugenics was widespread internationally but the Nordic countries showed an especially keen engagement with these ideals. This link between eugenics and feminism is a controversial one, since eugenics is often thought to restrict women's reproductive choices, whereas feminism empowers women's reproductive choices. This dissertation examines the engagement of Nordic feminists with eugenic ideals between 1890 and 1940. It investigates prominent feminists and feminist organizations from Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland. I analyse if, and to what extent, Nordic feminists believed eugenics to be an appealing ideology to support their goal of female empowerment

This study draws upon theories of the body, intersectionality and biopower to illustrate how eugenic feminists defined, middle class women as valuable, who contributed positively society with their reproductive function as opposed to questionable women from the working class and under class who were unable to contribute to the nation. Using content analysis, this dissertation examines the public writings of eugenic feminists and feminist organizations, such as medical and sexual health advice books, articles, pamphlets, lectures, and magazines. In order to demonstrate the widespread use of eugenic rhetoric by Nordic feminists.

The dissertation's main findings are that the Nordic eugenic feminists supported the notion of women as mothers in society and as such defined female civil rights around the concept of motherhood. They argued that women were not only mothers to their own children but were foremost mothers of the nation. As such, the appropriate women needed to contribute their own reproductive function responsibly, preventing degeneration, to the success and survival of the nation, understood in the context of the race struggle and nationalism.

This study paves the way for further research on eugenics and its connection to other social movements, as well as the impact of eugenic ideologies on women and welfare policy after the Second World War.

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*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair"*

A Tale of Two Cities, 1859, Charles Dickens

Although Dickens was not talking about writing a dissertation, I feel there could not be more fitting words to describe this journey. Working on this PhD dissertation had many stages, some of them happy, some of them not so happy, and a few of them desperate. But, despite all that, the many people who were involved in this process deserve the expression of my deep gratitude.

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## 1. Introduction

*"It is in the nature of things that the population question is to some extent also a women's questions. (...) It is part of our time that women have great power when the population question is burning - but they also have a great responsibility."*

Andrea Andreen-Svedberg, 1935

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, eugenics was a science that focused on the improvement of the individual for the benefit of the collective. At the same time, feminism, as a social movement, sought to improve the situation of women in Western societies, not only for the individual's sake but also for the greater good of society. In this study, I analyse the connection between women's movements and eugenics from their simultaneous appearance in the late nineteenth century until the implementation of the eugenics-influenced sterilization legislation in the Nordic countries – Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland – in the 1930s. The interest of feminists in eugenics during the early twentieth is a concept known as eugenic feminism.<sup>1</sup> It was not only a Nordic phenomenon but was also observed in most countries that had an interest in eugenics and feminism, for example Germany, the United States or Canada. However, the Nordic countries are noteworthy for the reason that feminists had a stronger involvement with policy- and decision-making. This led to the introduction of female and feminist topics into the public discourses far earlier than other countries

Several studies have discussed the sterilization practice in the Nordic countries between 1929 and 1976.<sup>2</sup> However, it must be mentioned that sterilization and eugenics were not necessarily the same. Sterilization was one method of eugenics, but it was not the most common. Negative eugenic methods such as segregation, institutionalization or marriage restrictions, as well as positive eugenic methods, such as maternal and child benefits, and contraception, were far more popular. Negative eugenics was considered to be any method which would restrict or prevent individuals from

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. Ziegler, Mary, "Eugenic Feminism. Mental Hygiene, the Women's Movement and the Campaign for Eugenic Legal Reform, 1900-1935." In: *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender* 31 (2008), p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Tydén, Mattias, *Från politik till praktik. De svenska steriliseringslagarna 1935–1975*, Stockholm 2002; Roll-Hansen, Nils, "Den norske debatte om rashygiene." In: *Historisk Tidsskrift* (1980), pp. 259–283; Mattila, Markku, *Kansamme parhaaksi. rotuhygienia suomessa vuden 1935 sterilointilakiin asti*, Helsinki 1999; Koch, Lene, *Racehygiejne i Danmark 1920–56*, Copenhagen 2000; Karlsdóttir, Unnur, "Sterilization Policy in Iceland." In: Rømer Christensen, Hilda, Lundberg, Urban, Petersen, Klaus (eds.), *Frihed, lighed og tryghed. Velfærdspolitik i Norden*, Aarhus 2001, pp. 179-190.

reproduction. These could be implemented either permanently or temporarily, and such methods included marriage restrictions, institutionalization, sterilization or contraception. Positive eugenics encouraged individuals to reproduce, for example through allowances or other systems of family support, health care or birth control (birth control was also a method of positive eugenics, because it allowed for the control of reproduction which could benefit the qualitative outcome of reproduction). Further, it must be emphasized that only a small number of sterilizations were carried out in the Nordic countries for eugenic reasons. Especially after the Second World War, the most prominent reason was medical and not eugenic, although the indications often overlapped.<sup>3</sup>

I situate this study in the growing field of international research about eugenic feminism. The Nordic countries serve here as a case study of an overall Western phenomenon; the engagement of feminists in positive and negative reproduction debates in the early twentieth century. Yet, eugenic feminists in the Nordic countries may be distinctive in their strong interaction of science and policy-making, and the opportunity for them for eugenic feminists to have an active influence. Nevertheless, the interest of some feminists in eugenics was not unique and followed widely international trends.

### 1.1. Approaches from Previous Research

#### 1.1.1. Research on Eugenics and Feminism in the Nordic Countries

Research about Nordic eugenics frequently situates the emergence of eugenic ideas in the Nordic countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which coincided with the late industrial development, high emigration, and rapid social changes. Gunnar Broberg and Nils Roll-Hansen, in their anthology *Eugenics and the Nordic Welfare State*, provide an overview of the differences and similarities of eugenics in the Nordic countries.<sup>4</sup> Similarly to them, I argue that in the Nordic countries eugenics has several similarities, but the different national histories influenced key variations between the countries. Most other studies about eugenics are specifically nation-based and as such frequently written in the national language limiting their audience. Mattias Tydén, Maija Runcis and Maria Björkman have examined Swedish eugenics.<sup>5</sup> Maija Runcis introduced gender as a category and emphasized the focus on women as targets in Swedish eugenics.

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<sup>3</sup> See Broberg, Gunnar, Roll-Hansen, Nils (eds.), *Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, East Lansing 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Tydén, *Från politik till praktik*; Runcis, Maija, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, Stockholm 1998; Björkman, Maria, *Den anfrädda stammen. Nils von Hofsten, eugeniken och steriliseringarna 1909–1963*, Lund 2011.

Lene Koch discusses eugenics and sterilization in Denmark.<sup>6</sup> Nils Roll-Hansen and Per Haave focus on Norwegian eugenics, in particular during the occupation period in the Second World War and the sterilization of minorities in Norway.<sup>7</sup> In Finland, Markku Mattila and Marjatta Hietala have studied eugenics in the context of the emergence of an independent Finnish state.<sup>8</sup> Iceland stills lacks a comprehensive discussion of its eugenic past, though researchers like Unnur Karlsdóttir have taken the first steps in this direction.<sup>9</sup>

Previous research into eugenics in the Nordic countries focused strongly on the eugenic-inspired sterilization legislation between the 1930s and the 1970s. In their comparative study about eugenics in Nordic welfare states, Gunnar Broberg and Nils Roll-Hansen illustrate that eugenics as science was always also connected to social policy.<sup>10</sup> Though the book promises to show eugenics in the welfare state context, they focus upon the development of sterilization policies in different Nordic countries and skirt around the connection between welfare state ideology and eugenics.

The criticism can also be levied against Maija Runcis' study on sterilization in the 'folkhem' ('people's home') in Sweden. Runcis focuses more on sterilization than on the discussion of eugenic ideology. What is particularly noteworthy about her research is that she introduces gender as category of analysis and problematizes the peculiarity that women were the main target of eugenic measures in the Nordic countries, in comparison to for example German eugenics, where no particular gender bias can be detected.<sup>11</sup> This contributed to a more diverse understanding of eugenic sterilizations in Sweden from a gendered perspective and paved the way for more intensive study on the role of gender in eugenics and sterilizations. Additionally, other studies of the Nordic countries, for example by Lene Koch, Nils Roll-Hansen or Markku Mattila, connect eugenics broadly with the sterilization legislation but do not paint a wider picture of the long-term societal effects of eugenics in the Nordic welfare state.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Koch, *Racehygiejne i Danmark 1920–56*; Koch, Lene, *Tvangsterilisering i Danmark, 1929–967*, Copenhagen 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Roll-Hansen, "Den norske debatte om rashygiene"; Haave, Per, *Sterilisering av tatere 1934–1977*, Oslo 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Mattila, *Kansamme parhaaksi*; Kemiläinen, Aira, Hietala, Marjatta, Suvanto, Pekka (eds.), *Mongoleja vai germaaneja? Rotuteorioiden suomalaiset*, Helsinki 1985.

<sup>9</sup> Karlsdóttir, "Sterilization Policy in Iceland."

<sup>10</sup> Broberg, Gunnar, Roll-Hansen, Nils, "Preface." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Roll-Hansen, Nils (eds.), *Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland*, East Lansing, 2005, p. ix.

<sup>11</sup> e.g. Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*.

<sup>12</sup> e.g. Koch, *Tvangsterilisering i Danmark*; Roll-Hansen, "Den norske debatte om rashygiene"; Mattila, Markku, *Laadukasta väkeä. rotuhygienia suomessa ennen valtiovallakiinnostuksen heräämistä*, Tampere 1997.

After the first wave of research on Nordic eugenics in the late 1990s and early 2000s, interest seems to have decreased. The studies listed above focus on the scientific research about racial biology and its political impact before 1930 and the later on sterilization legislation from 1929 onwards. In contrast, this dissertation contributes to the cultural understanding of eugenics in the Nordic countries. As I argue in the next chapter, eugenics was not only a political ideology or science, but also a cultural and social ideology of lifestyle. Eugenics could, as was propagated by some eugenic feminists, have a direct impact on how people live their lives in the context of domestic and personal hygiene, decisions about reproduction, or the rationalizing and automatization of work. Furthermore, I expand upon Runcis' discussion of the role of gender in eugenics in the Nordic countries.<sup>13</sup> I focus on female actors in eugenics to show that women were not only victims of eugenic measures but were also active advocates for them.

Since the connection between eugenics and feminism is the subject here, previous research about feminism in the Nordic countries has to be taken into account. Feminism, gender and equality have been researched extensively in the Nordic countries and the region is often presented as a role model for feminist development and gender equality. Relevant research includes the work of Anette Borchorst and Birte Siim, Nina Lykke or Pirjo Markkola.<sup>14</sup> I have been particularly influenced by the Swedish historian Yvonne Hirdman and Norwegian political scientist Helga Maria Hernes. I take a critical stance towards Hirdman's discussion of the lack of a feminist input in policy-making in the Nordic countries.<sup>15</sup> By arguing that eugenic feminists contributed to the positioning of female bodies and sexuality in the public discourse as well as shaping the location of women in the discussion of their civil rights, I demonstrate that eugenic feminists played a vital role in contributing to policy-making in the Nordic countries.

I find Hernes' discussion of gendered citizenship most useful in the context of eugenic feminism. She argues that social democratic citizenship, which became relevant in the latter period of this study, considered the man to be a citizen worker who

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<sup>13</sup> e.g. Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, p. 90ff.

<sup>14</sup> e.g. Borchorst, Anette, Siim, Birte, "Woman-Friendly Policies and State Feminism. Theorizing Scandinavian Gender Equality." In: *Feminist Theory* 9 (2008), pp. 207- 224; Lykke, Nina, *Feminist Studies. A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing*, New York 2010; Markkola, Pirjo, "Women in Rural Society in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries." In: Manninen, Merja, Setälä, Päivi (eds.), *The Lady with the Bow. The Story of Finnish Women*, Helsinki 1990, pp. 17-29.

<sup>15</sup> e.g. Hirdman, Yvonne, "Kvinnor – från möjlighet till problem? Genuskonflikten i välfärdsstaten – den svenska modellen." In: Nagel, Anne-Hilde (ed.), *Kjønn og velferdsstat*, Bergen 1998, pp.116-149.

provided for the family and the woman to be mainly a mother citizen and a domestic carer. In her role, Hernes argues, she was protected and supported by the paternalistic state.<sup>16</sup> Building on this argument about gendered citizenship, I show that feminists interested in eugenics supported, or perhaps even introduced, this form of gendered citizenship by arguing that, as mothers and wives, women have to gain civil rights to fulfil their national duty of motherhood. Thus, I demonstrate the importance of intersectionality and biopolitics for understanding the role of women, their bodies and sexuality as Nordic citizens.

### 1.1.2. Research on Eugenics beyond the Nordic Countries

Eugenics is certainly not an under-researched topic. The wave of studies about eugenics began in the 1980s and peaked in the 1990s. The vast majority of this research focuses on eugenics as a science before the 1930s. Peter Weingart and Sheila Faith Weiss, for example, look at the research of the German physician Wilhelm Schallmeyer and the work of the *Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaften* [Kaiser Wilhelm Societies] as centres for eugenic research in Germany prior to 1933.<sup>17</sup> Weingart argues that the discussion about eugenics must be seen in two ways. Firstly, in a scholarly way: eugenics must be situated in the history of science to understand its intellectual development in the social and political context. Secondly in a moral way: the identity of eugenics as science must be understood to draw the dividing line between good and bad science and clarify the situation of eugenics in this discourse.<sup>18</sup> Weingart primarily focuses on the scientific effects of eugenics. I take his discussion of the scientific implications of eugenics as starting point to understand the later political and cultural influence of eugenic thinking.

Research on eugenics is also dominated by national socialist eugenics in Germany between 1933 and 1945. Leading scholars include the British historian Paul Weindling and German historian Gisela Bock. Recently Weindling has focused on the crimes of national socialists in relation to eugenics, such as human experiments in the name of science in concentration camps.<sup>19</sup> Bock's main subject is the effects of the

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<sup>16</sup> Hernes, Helga Maria, *Welfare State and Woman Power, Essays in State Feminism*, Oslo 1987, p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> e.g. Weiss, Sheila Faith, *Race Hygiene and National Efficiency. The Eugenics of Wilhelm Schallmeyer*, Los Angeles 1987; Weingart, Peter, "Eugenik – Eine angewandte Wissenschaft. Utopien der Menschenzüchtung zwischen Wissenschaftsentwicklung und Politik." In: Lundgreen, Peter (ed.), *Wissenschaft im Dritten Reich*, Frankfurt/ Main 1985, pp. 314-349.

<sup>18</sup> Weingart, "Eugenik – Eine angewandte Wissenschaft", p. 164.

<sup>19</sup> e.g. Weindling, Paul, *Victims and Survivors of Nazi Human Experiments: Science and Suffering in the Holocaust*, London 2014.

national socialist regime on women. She describes the sexism of the racial hygiene created in Germany, which denied all women control over their bodies in different ways, predominantly related to class. Bock argues that in particular eugenic sterilization, as form of control of reproduction, imposed gender-specific societal roles on both men and women and rated valuable life in the context of gender-specific work and productivity, described in social, medical and psychiatric terms.<sup>20</sup> Bock hints here at an important aspect of eugenics, not only in national socialist Germany, but also in the Nordic countries. Eugenics must be understood as a science that aims to better humankind, which had a great impact on the social and cultural perception and positioning of men and women in societies and nations. This often happened in a sexist fashion. The dominant focus of eugenics on the positive and negative effects of reproduction on the overall societal and cultural development of a nation centred national eugenics discourses on the social categories of sex as well as gender. As Bock convincingly shows, class was also a leading category which positioned the individual in the eugenic discourse alongside other categories such as race, education, age, location and ability. Eugenics, although it was based on scientific research in the first place, impacted on the societal and cultural development in general.<sup>21</sup>

Since eugenics was an international, perhaps even a global movement, it is also important to take into consideration work from scholars examining other countries. Marius Turda works in eugenics in South Eastern Europe and the so-called Latin eugenics.<sup>22</sup> Garland Allen published in the 1970s and 1980s on eugenics in the United States alongside Mark Largent and Alexandra Stern.<sup>23</sup> Mark Adams has researched extensively on eugenics in Russia and the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Bock, Gisela, "Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany. Motherhood Compulsory Sterilization and the State." In: Briedenthal, Renate, Grossmann Atina, Kaplan, Marion (eds.), *When Biology became Destiny. Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, New York 1984, pp. 271-274.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275ff.

<sup>22</sup> Turda, Marius, *The Idea of National Superiority in Central Europe, 1880-1918*, Lewiston 2004; Turda Marius, Gillette, Aaron, *Latin Eugenics in a Comparative Perspective*, London 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Allen, Garland E., "Genetics, Eugenics and Society. Internalists and Externalists in Contemporary History of Science." In: *Social Studies of Science* 6 (1976), pp. 105- 122; Allen, Garland E., "The Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor, 1910- 1940. An Essay in Institutional History." In: *Osiris*, 2. Series, Vol. 2 (1986), pp. 225- 264; Largent, Mark, *Breeding Contempt. The History of coerced Sterilization in the United States*, New Brunswick 2008; Stern, Alexandra, *Eugenic Nation. Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*, Berkeley 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Adams, Mark B., "Ideology, and Structure. The Kol'tsov Institute, 1900- 1970." In: Lubrano, Linda L., Gross Solomon, Susan (eds.), *The Social Context of Soviet Science*, Boulder 1980, pp.173-204; Adams, Mark B., "Sergei Chetverikov, the Kol'tsov Institute, and the Evolutionary Synthesis." In: Mayr, Ernst, Provine, William B. (eds.), *The Evolutionary Synthesis*, Cambridge 1980, pp.242-278; Adams, Mark B. "Eugenics and Social Medicine in Revolutionary Russia." In: Gross Solomon, Susan, Hutchison, John F. (eds.), *Health and Society in Revolutionary Russia*, Bloomington 1990, pp. 200-223; Adams, Mark B.



Scholars outside the Nordic countries seem to be a step ahead in paying attention to the larger picture of eugenics. In 2004, art historian Christina Cogdell published a discussion of the effects of the eugenic ideology on architecture and design in the 1930s. She argues that several industrial designers, like Norman Bel Geddes, developed an interest in eugenics and incorporated ideas about evolution and streamlining into their designs.<sup>25</sup> Clare Hanson shows in her book *Eugenics, Literature and Culture in Post-War Britain* that eugenics and the British Eugenic Society had a strong influence in British policy making. She argues that this influence did not stop after the Second World War as it is often assumed, but impacted British social policy also after 1945.<sup>26</sup> Several scholars have drawn attention to the overlapping of eugenics with other modern ideologies; for example, Mary Ziegler's discussion of eugenics and feminism in the United States, Nikolai Krementsov on eugenics in the Soviet Union, or Geoffrey Russel Searle's introduction into Fabianism and eugenics in Great Britain.<sup>27</sup>

### 1.1.3. Approaches to Eugenic Feminism

Research on eugenic feminism in the international context is currently divided into two areas: literature studies, and the history of women and feminism. Especially in the United States in the last decade, several scholars began to read feminist literature from a eugenic point of view and detected the eugenic, and often also racial, implications of work by first-wave feminist writers. Asha Nadkarni has published several books and articles about the impact of eugenics in American and South Asian first-wave feminism. For example, Nadkarni analyses the book *Mother India* by the American historian Katherine Mayo (1867-1940).<sup>28</sup> Nadkarni and Alys Eve Weinbaum researched the eugenic implications in the books of the American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who I discuss more in detail in the following chapter.<sup>29</sup> According to Weinbaum, Perkins Gilman thought that there

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"Soviet Nature-Nurture Debate." In: Graham, Loren R. (ed.), *Science and the Soviet Social Order*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 94-138; Adams, Mark B. (ed.), *The Wellborn Science. Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil and Russia*, New York 1990.

<sup>25</sup> Cogdell, Christina, *Eugenic Design. Streamlining America in the 1930s*, Philadelphia 2004, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Hanson, Clare, *Eugenics, Literature and Culture in Post-war Britain*, New York 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Ziegler, "Eugenic Feminism", pp. 211- 235; Krementsov, Nikolai, "Darwinism, Marxism and Genetics in Soviet Russia." In: Numbers, Ron, Alexander Denis (eds.), *Ideology and Biology. From Descartes to Dawkins*, Chicago 2010, pp. 215-246; Searle, Geoffrey Russel, "Eugenics and Class." In: Webster, Charles (eds.), *Biology Medicine and Society 1840- 1940*, Cambridge 1981, pp. 317-243.

<sup>28</sup> e.g. Nadkarni, Asha, "World-Menace. National Reproduction and Public Health in Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*." In: *American Quarterly* 60/ 3 (2008), pp. 805-827.

<sup>29</sup> e.g. Nadkarni, Asha, "Eugenic Feminism. Asian Reproduction in the U.S. National Imaginary." In: *Novel. A Forum for Fiction* 39/2 (2006), pp. 221-244; Nadkarni, Asha, "Reproducing Feminism in Jasmine and 'The Yellow Wallpaper'." In: *Feminist Studies* 38/1 (2012), pp. 218-244; Weinbaum, Alys Eve, "Writing

was something fundamentally wrong with the reproduction process in the United States in the early twentieth century.<sup>30</sup> She had radical feminist ideas about motherhood and the role of mothers in nation building. Women, with their reproductive function, were responsible for contributing to the betterment of the nation.<sup>31</sup>

Historical research about eugenic feminists often analyses their maternalist arguments. Ann Taylor Allen looks at feminism and motherhood, which also includes a discussion of eugenic arguments, in Western Europe, especially Germany, France and Great Britain.<sup>32</sup> For example, Christoph Sachße discusses the demand for a higher recognition of motherhood for eugenic reasons from the bourgeois women's movement at the turn of the century in Germany.<sup>33</sup> Mariana Valverde and Angelique Richardson examine the maternal agenda of eugenic feminists in Great Britain.<sup>34</sup> Valverde also emphasizes the role of the first British female physician, Elizabeth Blackwell, in eugenic feminism.<sup>35</sup> This is also an important aspect of this study, because several of the feminists discussed were also trained physicians and used their medical education to accentuate their eugenic agenda.

English-speaking scholars from various fields, like history, literature studies or law, outside Europe have developed a strong interest in eugenic feminism in the last decade. Mary Ziegler, for example, delivered a ground-breaking study about eugenic feminists in the United States and established the term eugenic feminism as concept (though it was already used before, for instance by Angelique Richardson).<sup>36</sup> Erin Moss and Hendrikus Stam have discussed eugenic feminism in Canada, especially in the context of mental health and the notion that this was in decline.<sup>37</sup> Cecily Devereux shows

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Feminist Genealogy. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Racial Nationalism, and the Reproduction of Maternalist Feminism." In: *Feminist Studies* 27/2 (2001), pp. 271-302.

<sup>30</sup> Weinbaum, "Writing Feminist Genealogy", p. 271.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>32</sup> Allen, Ann Taylor, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe 1890-1970. The Maternal Dilemma*, New York 2005; Allen, Ann Taylor, "Feminism and Eugenics in Germany and Britain, 1900-1940. A Comparative Perspective." In: *German Studies Review*, 23/3 (2000), pp. 477-505.

<sup>33</sup> e.g. Sachße, Christoph, "Social Mothers. The Bourgeois Women's Movement and German Welfare-State Formation 1890-1929." In: Koven, Seth, Michel, Sonya (eds.), *Mothers of a New World. Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare State*, New York 1993, pp. 136-158.

<sup>34</sup> e.g. Valverde, Mariana, "'When the Mother of the Race is Free'. Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism." In: Iacovetta, Franca, Valverde, Mariana (eds.), *Gender Conflicts. New Essays in Women's History*, Toronto 2002, p. 3-26; Richardson, Angelique, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century. Rational Reproduction and the New Woman*, Oxford 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Valverde, "'When the Mother of the Race'", p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Ziegler, "Eugenic Feminism", p. 211.

<sup>37</sup> e.g. Moss, Erin L., Stam, Hendrikus J., "From Suffrage to Sterilization: Eugenics and the Women's Movement in 20th Century Alberta." In: *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie canadienne* 54/ 2 (2013), pp. 105-114.

the radical ideas about motherhood and eugenics by the Canadian feminist Nellie McClung, while Marilyn Lake demonstrates how eugenic feminists in Australia planned to introduce a special citizenship only for successful mothers.<sup>38</sup>

All of these studies demonstrate that eugenic feminism was not a minor feature of the feminist movements at the turn of the century, but rather constituted one pillar of feminism in the Western world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Certainly, eugenic feminism was shaped by the national context and as such could significantly differ. However, eugenic feminists were also united in the idea that their reproductive function made them somewhat special in society and this needed to be recognized.

There is a lack of comprehensive studies which discuss the engagement of Nordic feminists in eugenic ideas. Maija Runcis focused on the female victims, she argues that the Swedish women's movement remained rather passive in the sterilization question.<sup>39</sup> Mattias Tydén mentions the involvement of Swedish women's organizations and their lobbying for sterilization policy. He suggest that eugenics was on the one hand a maternal ideology and on the other hand an area of female activity, since the sterilization policy touched women's topics.<sup>40</sup> Tiina Kinnunen mentions Ellen Key's interest in eugenics in her study about Key's participation in the German Kaiserreich.<sup>41</sup> Ilpo Hélen has discussed maternal policies and the role of mothers in Finland between 1880 and the 1960s but does not focus exclusively on eugenics.<sup>42</sup> Also Marjatta Hietala and Lene Koch refer to feminists within the eugenic movements in Finland and Denmark.<sup>43</sup> However, this is usually no more than a small point in the overall discussion of Nordic eugenics. Eugenic feminism in the Nordic countries and the effects of the perception and role of women and motherhood in the Nordic welfare state have not yet been analysed in depth.

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<sup>38</sup> e.g. Devereux, Cecily, *Growing a Race. Nellie L. McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism*, Montreal 2006; Lake, Marilyn, "A Revolution in the Family. The Challenge and Contradictions of Maternal Citizenship in Australia." In: Koven, Seth, Michel, Sonya (eds.), *Mothers of the World. Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, New York/ London 1993, pp. 378-395.

<sup>39</sup> Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, p. 93.

<sup>40</sup> Tydén, *Från politik till praktik*, pp. 536/ 542-544.

<sup>41</sup> Kinnunen, Tiina, "Eine der Unseren" und "Königin im Neuen reich der Frau." *Die Rezeption Ellen Keys in der Frauenbewegung des deutschen Kaiserreiches*, Tampere 2000, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Hélen, Ilpo, *Aidin elämän politiikka. Naissukupuolisuus, valta ja itsesuhde Suomessa 1880-luvulta 1960-luvulle*, Helsinki 1997.

<sup>43</sup> Hietala, Marjatta, "From Race Hygiene to Sterilization. The Eugenics Movement in Finland." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Roll-Hansen, Nils (eds.), *Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland*, East Lansing 2005, pp. 228ff; Koch, *Racehygiejne i Danmark*, p. 127.

## 1.2. Aims of the Study and Historical Background

Eugenics internationally was strongly influenced by female actors. Women, as carers for the home and family, were considered responsible for dealing with the social problems stemming from reproduction. My primary research question is, in what way did feminists engage in public health, sexual education and women's bodily well-being, related to ongoing discourses about eugenics, and what were the motives behind this engagement? Further, I ask if eugenic feminism was used as a method for including and excluding women from citizenship. Did eugenic feminism create an unholy union in including one group of women into society by excluding others?

On the one hand, I focus on the intellectual feminist debate in the Nordic countries to show the impact of feminists interested in eugenics on the development of several eugenics laws, for example the marriage legislation around the time of Great War and the later sterilization legislation in the 1930s. I analyse the impact of eugenic ideas on the feminist movement and the ideas of feminists regarding femininity and womanhood. Eugenics is used here to provide a new perspective on feminism and women in Nordic societies.

I take all five Nordic countries, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland into account, in order to detect if a regional pattern can be observed or if eugenic feminism in the Nordic region was defined in national contexts. Furthermore, I elaborate on the impact eugenic feminism had on the public health discourse in the early Nordic welfare state. The role of women as wardens of the family was essential in the context of health and hygiene. I discuss how this role shaped the experience of female bodies and sexuality in Nordic societies. I argue that patriarchal structures were not exclusively responsible for placing women at the heart of the eugenic debate, but the engagement of the women's movements had a substantial impact on the social positioning of women in the context of eugenics.

I examine eugenic feminism as phenomenon with the example of the Nordic countries. Eugenic feminism was not only a Nordic but also a Western phenomenon and showed many similarities across national borders. In this introduction, I present a way of thinking or a feminist ideology and not a piece of Nordic or Swedish, Danish, Finnish, Norwegian or Icelandic history in isolation. I then discuss the methodological and theoretical challenges of this approach.

The perception of the Nordic region is marked by two camps. In one view, the different nation states of the Nordic region were defined by many similarities, such as

the Nordic welfare state, early approaches to equality, strong states, the Lutheran Church, agricultural foundation and late industrialization.<sup>44</sup> However, in this context the notion of a common model must be carefully examined. The idea of a Nordic model in the singular form is critically discussed by Pauli Kettunen. He warns that to speak of one model or the welfare state might provide a too static image of a dynamic process of change within the Nordic countries. Kettunen continues that the idea of a single Nordic model might not even be useful as an analytical tool, because it restricts the researchers' view on the institutional and political differences between the countries.<sup>45</sup> Kettunen argues further that the time when one can possibly speak about one Nordic model is in the 1970s, at what time the most common features can be detected between the Nordic countries, at least on a political level.<sup>46</sup> Mary Hilson, on the other hand, argues that it is helpful to consider the Nordic region as a historical region in which different countries within a joint framework to detect similarities and differences.<sup>47</sup>

Though I sympathize strongly with Kettunen's concerns and agree that even using the Nordic welfare state in a singular form as an analytical tool must be considered carefully, I think the aim of a study must be considered to define the use of the term. In this study, I research the Nordic region as a whole and the aim is not as such to describe national history but the history of a region. In this context to use the Nordic welfare state as an analytical tool is most helpful. It is not possible to describe the dynamic processes of change in individual countries, but it is possible to describe the dynamic processes of change regionally, which is the goal here. From this point of view, it seems legitimate to speak about a Nordic welfare state as an analytical tool and a concept in this study, while likewise being aware of the difficulties behind this approach.

The Nordic countries however showed many differences. Denmark and Sweden were the oldest nation states, looking back on a long history of different state territories in the Nordic region. In contrast, Norway, Iceland and Finland achieved independence much later: Norway in 1905, Finland in 1917, and Iceland in 1944. In my view, the development of eugenics and feminism as a combined approach, can be identified in the Nordic region. The Nordic countries had strong feminist movements,

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<sup>44</sup> e.g. Sørensen, Øystein, Stråth, Bo (eds.), *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, Oslo 1997; Esping-Andersen, Gøsta, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge 1990.

<sup>45</sup> Kettunen, Pauli, "Reinterpreting the Historicity of the Nordic Model." In: *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* 2/4 (2012), pp. 22-23.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> Hilson, Mary, *The Nordic Model. Scandinavia since 1945*, London 2010, p. 13.

which were very often marked by a large number of professional women who had access to high-ranking political institutions. In this sense, Nordic feminists were successful in implementing their ideas of equality and empowerment early on in policy making. General suffrage was partly implemented rather early, for example in Finland already in 1906. Denmark (1915) and Norway (1913) followed shortly afterwards. Sweden implemented suffrage a little bit later in 1919, which followed the overall European trend. Nordic feminists were active in engaging with their Nordic sisters and other European feminists, and eager to exchange ideas.

The history of eugenics also developed in comparable ways in the Nordic countries. Eugenics as science experienced an early acceptance in the scientific and social community in the Nordic countries. From its inception, the states supported the development of research institutions, like the Norwegian *Institutt for arvelighetsforskning* [Institute for Heredity Research, 1914], led by the first Norwegian female professor, Kristine Bonnevie, or the *Statens institut för rasbiologi* [State Institute for Racial Biology, 1922] in Sweden, led by racial biologist Herman Lundborg. Though the state supported eugenic research in other Western countries, for example in Germany with the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes or the Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbour in the United States, the Nordic countries disproportionately emphasized the new science of selective breeding in comparison to their size and industrial development.

The question why the Nordic countries showed such a great interest in eugenics as both a science and an instrument of policy-making is discussed in the next chapter. I argue that not only the political, but in particular the social, economic and cultural development in the Nordic countries stimulated the interest in eugenics as a political method. The Nordic countries are often seen as latecomers in the transition from agrarian to industrial societies. Despite the fact that growing industrial and urban centres can only be observed at the turn of the century, industrial development was very rapid.<sup>48</sup> This came as a shock to the people. As Marius Turda describes, the period between 1870 and 1940 was marked by territorial, social and national transformation in Europe; from imperial to democratic, communist, authoritarian and fascist states. This development placed eugenics on the larger biopolitical agenda.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Broberg, Gunnar, "Scandinavia: An Introduction." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Roll-Hansen, Nils, *Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, East Lansing 2005, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Turda, Marius, *Modernism and Eugenics*, London 2010, p. 2.

Industrialization was accompanied by a growing economy, an increase and modernization of living standards or more political participation. As well as bringing with them a manifestation of a permanent sense of crisis, as Edward R. Dickinson shows.<sup>50</sup> The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a time of extremes; new technical developments, new social structures and new states emerging. This was an overall Western phenomenon, but the Nordic countries might have experienced more concentrated because industrialization took place much faster. Dickinson argues that people were haunted by a permanent sense of crisis in this period. They were caught between belief in progress and the constant fear of chaos and degeneration.<sup>51</sup> Degeneration was the fear of a gradual decrease of the population quality in mental as well as physical terms, accompanied by an increase in the population size. It was constituted by the idea that the wrong kind of people, often defined along class and race categories, procreated much more than the socially and culturally valuable people and thus the unfavourable ones will surpass the favourable ones.<sup>52</sup>

This is a very striking description of the situation in most Western countries during this period. Modern societies were fascinated but also frightened by progress. Scientific development seemed to make everything possible, people could travel faster and more widely, taller buildings could be built, previously incurable diseases could be cured. However, the progress of science and medicine meant that more people survived to adulthood, who would have died previously due to their poor, physical conditions. Eugenicists feared that more unfit individuals, with less access to modern contraceptive methods as well as ideology, would transmit their degenerate (unfit) genes to the next generation, while the desirable and fit individuals used modern methods of contraception – to prevent endless strings of pregnancy. Furthermore, industrialization not only meant new jobs but due to the growing use of machines, needed fewer workers. Unemployment and economic crisis struck repeatedly everywhere in Europe in the early twentieth century. All of this was accompanied by mass immigration. During the first half of the twentieth century it was often perceived that all the good people had left, and only degenerate individuals were left behind.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Dickinson, Edward Ross, "Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy. Some Reflections on our Discourse about Modernity." In: *Central European History* 37/ 1 (2004), p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> e.g. Broberg, Gunnar, Tydén, Mattias, "Eugenics in Sweden. Efficient Care." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Roll-Hansen, Nils, *Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, East Lansing 2005, p. 80.

<sup>53</sup> e.g. Broberg, "Scandinavia", p. 3.

As I discuss at length in the next chapter, eugenics was not only understood as an isolated phenomenon of the early twentieth century, which was based on underdeveloped research regarding heredity, leading to misconceived policies of restricting reproduction that were revised only after the horror of the Holocaust. I argue that eugenics was also a lifestyle ideology. In so far as eugenics provided people with an opportunity to bring order to the chaos of their time. Through the ideas of control, streamlining, rationality and order, eugenics could combine the advantages of the new sciences with the desire and longing for the order of past times. As Christina Cogdell argues, eugenics was a central pillar of modernism and eugenic ideas can be found in many ideologies and movements of the period. It influenced debates about birth control, prohibition, free love, immigration, segregation, feminism, socialism and maternalism.<sup>54</sup>

Eugenics was not isolated from social developments but interacted strongly with them. It was not only interesting for fascist or authoritarian regimes but found support in all political camps, from socialism to capitalism. Eugenics was also of interest for the large number of social movements that appeared at the turn of the century and in the interwar period. The temperance movement used eugenic ideas to prove the poisonous effect of alcohol on the individual and society; the workers' and socialist movements used eugenic ideas to demonstrate the degeneration of the upper classes and demand a workers' revolution. Activists for sexual liberation argued that eugenics could help to make people aware about their sexuality and thus end the ongoing degeneration due to ignorance of biological facts.

Feminist movements also engaged intensively with eugenic ideas to emphasize the importance of female empowerment in the new societal order. However, the feminist movements in the early twentieth century were neither united in the Nordic countries nor in the global context. Social categories, like class, race, ethnicity, social geography or education influenced the topics and aims in several feminist and women's movements during the period of this study.

First of all, the term feminism must be defined. Since the term was more widely used only in the second wave of Western women's activists in the 1960s and 1970s and not so much in the early twentieth century, it could be seen as anachronistic for this period. However, I decided to use it, firstly, because some women during the first wave used this term to describe themselves. Secondly, I understand the term as more

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<sup>54</sup> Cogdell, *Eugenic Design*, p. x.



embracing. As Ulla Manns argues, the term women's movement implies a form of organized working group to better the situation of women. The organization can have various forms and background, interest groups, women's corps or as part of political parties.<sup>55</sup> Yet, to call eugenic feminists a women's movement it would, according to this definition, require an organized form that did not exist. The feminists discussed here mostly were organized in different kinds of form due to similar interests or political ideas but not according to their interest in eugenics. So, it would simply be too far-fetched to call eugenic feminism a women's movement.

Feminism on the other hand, as Manns shows, can relate to individuals as well as groups. The term feminism was firstly used in the 1890s in France and spread quickly internationally. Feminists are mainly concerned with structural inequality between the sexes. Furthermore, feminism can be understood as a critique of the male dominance in the society.<sup>56</sup> From my perspective, this definition seems suitable to argue that the use of the term feminism in this study is more appropriate than women's movement. Eugenic feminists often constituted individuals, which, as I argued in the previous paragraph, were not organized based on their interest in eugenics. However, they were concerned with the structural inequality between the sexes, especially between the mother and the working man. Additionally, they strongly opposed the notion of the man being a superior human being but argued that the woman, with her reproductive function, was much more important in a society facing degeneration.

Eugenic feminists constituted a very specific section of the early twentieth century feminist movements. None of the women discussed here understood themselves to be eugenic feminists as such; research posthumously applied this term. They were rather feminists who were also interested in eugenic ideas and considered eugenic rhetoric to be useful in their struggle for female empowerment. Still, these women showed certain characteristics which separated them from other parts of the feminist movement in the Nordic countries.

Nordic eugenic feminists were usually white and middle class, which might also be considered an international definition of eugenic feminists. Most of them lived in the urban centres of their countries, like Stockholm, Helsinki, Copenhagen and Kristiania (from 1925 onwards Oslo). Additionally, Nordic eugenic feminists were usually educated women who had a profession. They were among the first women attending universities

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<sup>55</sup> Manns, Ulla, *Den sanna frigörelsen. Fredrika-Bremer-förbundet 1884-1921*, Stockholm 1997, p. 25.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

in their countries, receiving degrees in medicine or becoming teachers. Furthermore, their political orientations varied from liberal to conservative, and also for some, socialist. In Sweden for example, many of the feminists interested in eugenics were members of the liberal-conservative feminist organization *Frisinnade Kvinnor* [Liberal Women]. Others were members of local councils or the parliaments for conservative and liberal parties. Though eugenics also had supporters among the socialist movement, eugenic feminists were found more often in the bourgeois classes.

These women were not only defined by their societal position but also through their intellectual ideology, which separated them from other feminists. The starting point of their discourse for female empowerment and equality was the female reproductive function. They had the idea that motherhood did not receive enough social, political and economic recognition in their societies. Eugenic feminists argued that the responsible mother needs to be recognized as a valuable member of society, just like the working man. Since she also contributes to the success of the nation with her reproductive function. The aim was to raise the status of motherhood to at least the level of productive labour, or even higher, to make the mother equal to the father. They argued that women needed equal rights, because without them they could not fulfil their reproductive work to the fullest. While they should be equal, women were not seen as the same as men. Eugenic feminists did not seek to change traditional family and social structures. A woman's place was at home, but the home was extended to the public sphere; the mother was not only the mother to her own children but to the children of the nation. The feminist liberation sought by eugenic feminists was the strengthening of the traditional role of women as the carer for the family and the nation. They were frequently critical towards the participation of middle class women in the labour market and identified this as rejection of their female role.

Their argumentation was mainly directed at their own identity group, white middle class woman. While they did recognize the struggle of for example working class women, as I show in the fifth chapter, and tried to improve their living situation. Eugenic feminists frequently criticized the double burden of housework and labour outside the house, which they saw as forced upon working class women by the capitalist system. They actively tried to improve the lives of working class women by demanding political support and benefits for them, as well as offering them aid, for example by providing birth control and abortion, child education and health care, improvement of living conditions or better nutrition. However, this all happened with middle class norms in

mind and finally resulted in a re-education aim of working class women in middle class terms.

### 1.3. Intersectionality, Body Theory and Biopolitics beyond Foucault

The theoretical framework of this study is drawn from three distinct parts; intersectionality, body theory, and biopolitics. In this dissertation, they come together to provide a complementary framework that enables the comprehensive analysis of the topic. Due to the location of eugenics at the intersection of body, population and politics, a multifaceted theoretical framework is needed. Intersectionality, a theory Kimberlé Crenshaw developed to raise awareness about the diversity of female experience, relates to the theories of the body, here mainly represented by Susan Bordo and Elizabeth Grosz.<sup>57</sup> Crenshaw discusses how the intersection of gender and race create institutional inequalities. Bordo's discussion of the objectification of the female reproductive body is relevant here in the context of the discourse about the definition of motherhood through eugenic feminists.<sup>58</sup> Grosz' notion of the sexual body as cultural representation and the discussion of the understanding of dirt and cleanliness help to understand the characterisation of the eugenic body.<sup>59</sup>

Biopower, described by Michel Foucault as a "set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power,"<sup>60</sup> interlinks intersectionality and the body theories under the umbrella of political power. Since Foucault never developed biopolitics/biopower into a comprehensive theoretical framework, other scholars have sought to take his work in new directions. Particularly useful here, is Jemima Repo's work on biopolitics and gender, which examines gender as a technology of biopower.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, Foucault aimed to provide a methodological toolkit rather than a

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<sup>57</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberlé, "Mapping the Margins. Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour." In: *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1990- 1991), pp. 1241-1299; Bordo, Susan, *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, Berkeley 2004; Grosz, Elizabeth, *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington 1994.

<sup>58</sup> Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 76ff.

<sup>59</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 196ff.

<sup>60</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, New York 2007, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Repo, Jemima, *The Biopolitics of Gender*, Helsinki 2011; Repo, Jemima, *The Biopolitics of Gender*, Oxford 2016.

comprehensive framework which would serve as a useful analytical prism to examine social and political phenomenon.<sup>62</sup>

### 1.3.1. Intersectionality

In the early 1990s, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced her critique of the limitations of feminist theory regarding other social categories beyond gender, although her approach remained somewhat limited. Crenshaw's discussion, despite opening up a new perspective on female identity, focused very much on the interaction of race and gender in the United States. However, intersectionality constitutes an important tool to understand the identity diversity among women.

Leslie McCall builds on Crenshaw's discussion but suggests a wider understanding of intersectionality as a methodology. She introduces three different methodological approaches to intersectionality: anti-categorical, inter-categorical and intra-categorical complexity.<sup>63</sup> McCall's intersectional approach proved useful from a methodological point of view for the material analysed here.

The anti-categorical approach argues that social life is too complex to be defined in fixed categories. It aims to deconstruct analytical categories altogether, since the simplifications, which are inevitably generated by categories, create finally inequalities in the process of producing differences. McCall defines it as the most successful approach in conquering the demand of complexity.<sup>64</sup>

Secondly, which will be most relevant in this study, is the inter-categorical approach. The inter-categorical approach accepts categories as social constructs and recognizes their limitation but at the same time makes use of them to document relationships of inequality among constituted social groups within one society.<sup>65</sup> The leading question of this approach is how relationships in social groups have changed. Race and gender form the anchor points for the analysis, but their usage is flexible and further categories can be added as needed. The focus is on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories. To conquer the

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<sup>62</sup> e.g. Weaver, Cai, "Biopoliittinen hallinta ja homoseksuaalisuus Pietarissa." In: *Idäntutkimus* 1 (2016), pp. 16-31.

<sup>63</sup> McCall, Leslie, "The Complexity of Intersectionality." In: *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture* 30 (2005), p. 1773.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1773.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1773.

problem of size and complexity of this approach just the subject group will be discussed in detail and the other related groups are homogenized.<sup>66</sup>

The intra-categorical approach is defined by McCall as a compromise between the two approaches. On the one hand, it acknowledges the existence of stable and durable relationships but on the other it remains in a critical distance to the categories. It focuses on a particular social group from the neglected points of the intersection.<sup>67</sup>

This study looks at several different countries as well as variety of people and organizations, which presents certain challenges and limitations. A broad comparison looks at a phenomenon on the macro level to understand its scope, in the context of its implications and effects. Indeed, comparing five countries over half a century demands a lot from both the reader and the writer. It should be clear that it is not possible to give a comprehensive description of the historical context and social setting of every nation, nor is that the aim of this work.

However, McCall's framework helps me to overcome these challenges. She argues that a narrative can only represent a set of intersections but never the entirety of social relations. In her view, a case study can be helpful to detect invisible groups through the intersection of social categories. In a case study, the subject group constitutes the main focus, which is analysed in all its diversity. Other groups, which certainly had an effect on the subject group and were likewise important, have to be homogenized in this approach to be able to focus entirely on the inequalities and invisibility of the subject group. My goal here is to present the social, political and cultural influence of eugenic feminists on women in the Nordic countries. In order to achieve this, I have to homogenize the position of men and other political or social actors to a certain extent, to provide a setting for my own analysis without going beyond the scope of this study.

The focus of the inter-categorical approach is to show relationships of inequality among social groups, here the group is "women". To demonstrate these inequalities, social categories are required as measures. McCall uses two main categories, race and gender, as already suggested by Crenshaw. She argues that these categories are flexible.<sup>68</sup> I add class as a third category to my analysis. Since eugenic feminists specifically used class to measure the value of women in a eugenic society, as well as race and gender. As I show, middle class women were more often and easily accepted

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<sup>66</sup> McCall, "Complexity of Intersectionality", p. 1781.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 1773-1774.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 1785.

more eugenically valuable than working class or class women.<sup>69</sup> Other social categories which support this analysis include age, sexuality, education, social geography or ability.

### 1.3.2. Theories of the Body

Female bodies and their reproductive ability stood at the centre of the eugenic feminist discourse. Eugenic feminists considered the female reproductive function as a method of empowerment, not as a restriction of female possibilities. However, this did not mean that the female body or reproduction was liberated but the dependence and objectification shifted from the family to additionally include society. Still, the female reproductive body became an active object of empowerment. Elizabeth Grosz argues that patriarchal oppression was frequently justified through a closer connection of the woman to her body than the man to his body. She illustrates that social and economic restrictions on women were traced back to biological terms. According to Grosz, this had both negative and positive effects. The negative perception of female bodies was an argument for inequality between men and women. The positive view of female bodies claimed that women had special abilities through their biology which men were lacking.<sup>70</sup>

I demonstrate that eugenic feminists used the close connection of women to their bodies to argue that this connection provided women with special abilities which demanded female empowerment within patriarchal boundaries. I suggest that equality between men and women did not arise from the notion that men and women were identical but that both have a unique but equal place in society, defined for women through their biological ability to reproduce. Eugenic feminists used the argument for patriarchal oppression to turn a disadvantage into an advantage, strengthening the positive view of the female special, biological ability and arguing that this was the predisposition for equality, not a limitation.

Nevertheless, I demonstrate that this attempt at empowerment through the female body was not successful on all grounds and also created new limitations. Here Grosz's discussion of the clean and unclean body is helpful. Grosz argues that the distinction between clean and unclean women is fundamental in modern societies. She

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<sup>69</sup> The under class constituted a separate class, or rather a social group, which were formerly the paupers. The concept grouped individuals who were mostly not able to provide for themselves but relied in different ways on external support, for example mentally and physically disabled, mentally ill, feeble-minded, asocial individuals, such as work-shy people, prostitutes or individuals with substance abuse problems. The concept is discussed in detail in chapter 5.1.

<sup>70</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 14.

argues that dirt meant a disruption of order, stability and harmony.<sup>71</sup> Eugenic ideology aimed to create a clean and streamlined society. Cleanliness meant here physical, mental and moral purity. The concept of cleanliness was, as I show, very much gendered. The cleanliness of women as main actors in the selective breeding process was especially demanded. The male role in the reproduction process was in many ways ignored.

The exclusion of men from the discussion of cleanliness becomes self-evident when looking at Grosz. She argues that men had excluded their body fluids from their self-representation.<sup>72</sup> This was different from women, as I argue, who in the context of eugenic feminism, embraced them as self-representation. Grosz continues that by discounting their bodily fluids men can mark their bodies as clean and pure. However, in order to do this, men transmitted their body fluids to the female body. This resulted in two outcomes. Firstly, the female body cannot be clean and pure, because it contains both male and female body fluids. Secondly, through the transmission of the male fluids into it, the female body becomes the nesting place for the male product. This gives the man the right to possess the female body because she is carrying his commodity.<sup>73</sup>

Following Grosz's argument, the wide exclusion of men from the selective breeding process seemed natural, since the man had nested his fluid in the female body and she was now responsible for breeding.<sup>74</sup> The man had no further influence on the propagation of offspring. In context of the eugenic feminist argument, this resulted in liberations as well as restrictions, proclaimed by eugenic feminists. As mentioned above, eugenic feminists used the dominant role of women in reproduction and the lack of possible male influence for their demand for equal rights and empowerment. Conversely, this was also an argument for restriction and control, not only by the patriarchal society but also by the eugenic feminists themselves. Women who did not use their reproductive function to the full, due to a lack of children or unfortunate breeding results, became objects of control and restriction through negative eugenic methods, such as segregation, institutionalization or sterilization. Furthermore, female reproduction was not embraced as empowerment without control. Eugenic feminists were active in supporting many positive welfare measures for women and mothers, like maternal, health and child care,

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<sup>71</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 201.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>74</sup> It should be mentioned that men, in particular men outside the heteronormative scope, like disabled or homosexual men, have been discussed in similar terms to women. See for example, Wessel, Merle, "Castration of Male Sex Offenders in the Nordic Welfare State in the Context of Homosexuality and Heteronormativity, 1930–1955." In: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40/5 (2015), pp. 591-609.

protection at work, contraception or education. Yet these methods were also used to control the success of the breeding process, with concern not only for the individual, but also the collective. Eugenic feminist empowerment through reproduction and the female body meant an interaction between the collective and the individual, in which the former was always prioritized.

This resulted in the objectification of the pregnant female body, as discussed by Susan Bordo. She argues that the pregnant body, in particular of the poor woman, is objectified for the advantage of the foetal well-being. The woman becomes a breeding place and support system for the foetus and her own wishes and well-being are subordinated.<sup>75</sup> Bordo continues that in particular medical experts shape the normative conceptions of a pregnant woman's behaviour. The subsuming of her own subjectivity is expected by the pregnant woman.<sup>76</sup>

The objectification and subjectification of the pregnant female body and of the woman herself proved to be a conflict in the eugenic feminist discourse. Though the eugenic feminists sought an empowerment of women through their biological function with raising awareness of their subjectivity, this was rather unsuccessful. Eugenic feminists – who were often medical experts themselves – created norms and limitations for pregnant and reproductively available women. This was supposed to enable successful breeding as a foundation for eugenic female empowerment. Ideas about clean and pure behaviour, for example regular cleaning of the sexual organs, preventing masturbation, the right clothing to avoid damaging the female abdominal area, or protection from heavy or dangerous labour, did not help women to become a subject, but objectified women as the sole breeding place – just with feminist support.

### 1.3.3. Biopower and Biopolitics

Eugenics can be understood to be an instrument of biopower to control and regulate the size and quality of the population. Michel Foucault introduces the concept of biopower as characteristic of the modern nation state. Biopower explains the use of political technology to control, regulate and normalise the population of a state through their bodies. Therefore, the population's biological features become part of the strategy of power. As Foucault argues, the bourgeois modern system works through methods of exclusion in the context of medicalization of sexuality. The individual him/herself was

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<sup>75</sup> Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 77.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 79.



not important but rather the political and economic profit which could be generated from that individual.<sup>77</sup>

This shift in perception was part of the emergence of biopolitics and biopower as discussed by Michel Foucault in his lectures *Society must be defended*. Foucault argues that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries new techniques of power emerged which concentrated on the individual body. He describes this as the basic phenomenon that power over man as a biological living being was transferred to the control of the state. While in premodern times the sovereign held sway over death, the modern state controlled not death but also life and everything in between, including reproduction, fertility and the environment.<sup>78</sup>

At the same time, eugenics was one method of deploying biopower and biopolitical functions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The individual body and its effects on the overall society became more important than ever. As described by Foucault, new techniques and mechanisms provided new possibilities to rationalize and control the individual body. While the premodern authorities were mainly concerned with birth and death, now the whole life of the individual was of interest to the new constituted state.<sup>79</sup>

However, Foucault does not consider gender in his biopolitical discourse separately. Jemima Repo builds up on this. She argues that gender is the apparatus of biopower because control of sexual reproduction is crucial in the modern nation state to adjust the population to economic requirements. Following the Foucauldian understanding, eugenics can be considered as the essence of biopower, since it is accessed at the nexus of sexuality and controls what must live and what must be left to die. It is the control over the quality of the population. Methods like sterilization aimed to regulate and restrict the body, to correct a disordered, asocial human being and transform it into an individual conforming to the societal order.<sup>80</sup>

Repo continues that the mother was central to Western capitalist and democratic social structures. The role of the mother in the home as carer, she argues, was the foundation of a productive and democratic society. Non-productive and otherwise

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<sup>77</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Society must be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976*, New York 2003, p. 32. See also, Hansen, *Eugenics, Literature and Culture*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>78</sup> Foucault, *Society must be Defended*, pp. 239-240.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>80</sup> Repo, *Biopolitics of Gender*, p. 18ff.

deviant behaviour was quickly traced back to bad mothering.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, biopolitics, as she shows, created the sexual division of productivity and reproduction. Yet, the feminist project aimed to regain dominance over women's own reproduction from men.<sup>82</sup> As Repo further elaborates population policy in the period before the Second World War was dominated by eugenic ideas of quantity and quality of the population. The fear of depopulation stimulated a pro-natalist feminism, which argued that degeneration could only be stopped through maternal welfare and social policy.<sup>83</sup>

Eugenic feminists were at the centre of this discourse. It was their aim, using eugenic rhetoric, to emphasize the importance of motherhood in the population struggle and demand that the extension of maternal rights to equal civil rights could in turn prevent the continuation of degeneration. Motherhood became a biopolitical force of empowerment and restriction at the same time. On the one hand, the reproductive function gave them power in the population struggle for the survival of the nation and supported the demand for equal rights. On the other hand, it caused biopolitical limitations. Women and their reproductive function were perceived as having such a great impact on the population quality that they needed to be closely monitored, because their reproductive function was not only of benefit to society – it could also harm. The whole biological success of a society, which during this period was equalized with economic and political success, lay firmly on the shoulders of its women. This was not imposed by the patriarchal structures, but widely self-chosen and proclaimed by eugenic feminists, who considered this argumentation helpful in the struggle for female empowerment. This resulted, on the one hand, in greater attention to women and their struggles in society and in greater protection of their needs, in the context of welfare and social policy. On the other hand, it backlashed in a greater observation and regulation of women, their bodies and sexuality. Biological failure was seen as a failure of women, men were excluded from their biopolitical responsibility.

#### 1.4. Methods and Materials

This study is concerned with ideas which constituted an ideology of how one should live one's life. The discussion of individuals and organizations takes place in the light of the discussion of ideas and ideologies. Most of the people and organizations considered here

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<sup>81</sup> Repo, *Biopolitics of Gender*, p. 17.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

have been researched well before and my aim is to provide a new perspective on the issues they raised. I use previous research to provide more background about the individuals and organizations beyond eugenic feminist ideas and position them in their historical context.

Content analysis, as it is defined by Klaus Krippendorff is an appropriate method from which to approach my material. It is used to identify patterns or certain word frequencies in a text. In my analysis I am focusing on text which includes words, which can be related to eugenic ideology, like for example race, degeneration, unworthy life, motherhood or uncleanness. Although some of the authors did not use the word eugenics as such, associated words can be an indicator for a eugenic rhetoric without using the term eugenics itself. Firstly, Krippendorff argues that text do not have a single meaning but can be read from different perspectives.<sup>84</sup> This is especially important for my analysis, because most of my texts have been studied in depth before but with other questions in mind or from another perspective. My aim here is to shed new light on them by showing their, until now not discussed, eugenic tones.

Secondly, Krippendorff further argues that analyse the content of a text a context is required.<sup>85</sup> My aim here is to provide with the context of eugenics a new perspective on the writings of well-known feminists. These women can clearly be understood also in other contexts and as such, content analysis will yield different results. However, by looking at them through the lens of eugenics, gives me the possibility to analyse their perspective on one of the most significant social and scientific movements of their time.

Thirdly, Krippendorff explains that texts, or data as he calls it in a wider sense, are not intended necessarily to be read by analysts but often by ordinary readers, like for example newspaper articles.<sup>86</sup> This is an aspect which is crucial in the reading of the materials chosen here. None of it is research material as such but popular books and articles, pamphlets and similar text forms which were directed to educated women. They were not supposed to be analysed but rather provide information and education for women, and men, about various topics in context of the body, sexuality and health. My analysis detects subconscious meanings in the texts, which might have been self-evident for the contemporary reader but are surprising for us today. This helps to provide a fuller

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<sup>84</sup> Krippendorff, Klaus, *Content Analysis. An Introduction to Its Methodology*, Thousand Oaks 2004, p. 22.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 30-31.

understanding of the demands of feminists in general and their interest in eugenics in particular.

My material consists of two parts. Firstly, I utilise publications by individual feminists. Secondly, I discuss magazines published by women's organizations. The focus is on the individual material, in particular since many of the individuals were part of the organizations and also contributed there. I use the material to support my argument that the individual views were not only single expressions but indeed found support in the organizations. Many other voices are used to supplement the discussion of key women and magazines presented here.

The choice of my material is a qualitative one, based on several criteria. Firstly, I focus on publications designed to serve the general public and a wider audience; for example, the organizations' magazines, books, pamphlets or articles. I exclude any kind of private material, like diaries or letters, because these were intended for private use only, though they certainly constitute a highly interesting and relevant resource for detecting eugenic ideas among feminists. My focus here is on the public, not the private, proclamation of eugenic feminist ideas, since I aim to demonstrate the impact of these ideas on ideological, social and cultural concepts and the Nordic welfare state.

Secondly, in many cases I choose well-known and widely discussed feminists, like Ellen Key, Alva Myrdal or Katti Anker Møller. This is to demonstrate that eugenic feminism was not simply a niche idea of a few radical feminists but rather that eugenic ideas, due to their omnipresence in general public discourse, were also widely discussed by known feminists. Furthermore, the choice of well-known feminists demonstrates the influence eugenic feminists had on social and political developments and the welfare ideas in the 1930s in the Nordic countries.

As defined above, feminists in this study refers to a woman (or man), who raised awareness to structural inequality between the sexes. This can take place from various perspectives. Ulla Manns shows with the example of the Swedish feminist movement that some organizations, like the Fredrika-Bremer-föbundet approached this issue from a political perspective. Manns argues that the organization demanded equal rights for men and women on the grounds of political participation and social inclusion, for example in form of equal education and work opportunities.<sup>87</sup> However, during the early twentieth century not only the political perspective on the women's question was

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<sup>87</sup> Manns, *Den sanna frigörelsen*, p. 194ff.

popular but also the biological-evolutionary. International feminists, like the US-writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman, proclaimed that women need equal rights due to their special societal role as mothers and carers for the family. This perspective was often seen critically by other feminists, internationally as well as in the Nordic countries. However, it also found many followers. This created conflict, as Manns explores using the example of the *Fredrika-Bremer-förbundet* [Fredrika-Bremer-Association] and its relationship to the Swedish writer Ellen Key, who took a biological-evolutionary stand towards the woman question.<sup>88</sup>

In this study, I choose actors that approached the women's question merely from a biological-evolutionary perspective, which made the eugenic ideology with its background in heredity for them most appealing. This does not mean that they did not accept or take on the political perspective as well. Yet, I argue that the biological perspective on the women's question was pivotal in shaping their understanding of equality and patriarchy, as well as the woman's place in the Nordic society.

Some of the women, discussed here, like Ellen Key, Karolina Widerström, Dida Dederding or Julia Kinberg, were self-proclaimed feminists. They were politically active members of feminist organizations and identified as suffragists and women's activists. However, this did not apply to all women I discuss as feminists. Other individuals, for example Karolina Eskelin, Alva Myrdal, and groups, like the Finnish, bilingual housewives' organization *Martha*, were not part of the organized feminist movement. I still claim that they are feminists here, despite not being part of a political form of feminism, due to the fact that they still sought to improve women's life through work: Eskelin through her work as physician, and Myrdal as social reformer.

During the process of collecting the material, another interesting connection between the women appeared: most had a medical education or were at least interested in medical perspectives on sexuality and social problems. This goes a long way to explaining their interest in eugenics, since it was mainly introduced as a method of selective breeding from a biological point of view and then combined later with social ideas.

The selection of my material is not even for every country, which is also not necessary since this study does not aim to provide a comparison between the Nordic countries as such. However, for each country I have identified two or three main actors

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<sup>88</sup> e.g. Manns, *Den sanna frigörelsen*, p. 198ff; Manns, Ulla, "Gender and Feminism in Sweden. The Fredrika Bremer Association." In: Paletschek, Sylvia, Pietrow-Ennker, Bianka, *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century. A European Perspective*, Stanford 2004, p. 161.

who spoke most about eugenic ideas, and which were then supplemented by other feminists, who also discussed eugenic ideas or were influenced by them, but not as much.

#### 1.4.1. Denmark (and Iceland)

In Denmark, I focus on two feminists, who differed in their political ideas, the physician and conservative Dida Dederding (1889-1955) and the psychoanalyst and socialist Jo Jacobsen (1884-1963). Dida Dederding was born into a bourgeois family and studied medicine in Copenhagen. In 1923, she opened her own medical practice there. She was not only a physician but showed a special interest in sex education. Together with her colleagues Johanne Næser and J. H. Leunbach (who was a close friend of the writer Thit Jensen (1876-1957) and whose material supplements the Danish discussion in this study), she was actively involved in the demand for reforms of sexual politics in the 1920s in Denmark. Dederding was member of *Dansk Kvindesamfund* [Danish Women's Society]<sup>89</sup>, the national Danish women's organization, which organized the majority of feminist work in Denmark. Dederding wrote two key books, *Kvinden omkring de halvtreds* [Women around their Fifties, 1939] and *Sundhedslære for unge kvinder* [Health Education for Young Women, 1941], to provide women insights into their bodies, sexuality and how to keep both pure and healthy.

Jo Jacobsen played a special role in the feminist discourse: she was one of the few non-bourgeois feminists in this study and showed a strong interest in Marxist ideas. However, that did not prevent her from using eugenic ideas, just with a Marxist twist. Jacobsen was born into a fishing family and at the age of 20 she climbed up the social ladder by marrying the director of the Carlsberg brewery. The marriage was very unhappy, and she left her husband in 1917. Jacobsen moved to Copenhagen and teamed up with the writer Thit Jensen in the aim to educate women about voluntary motherhood and sexuality. Though she considered herself a feminist, she was not part of *Dansk Kvindesamfundet*, but opposed their bourgeois views. She spent several years in Germany studying Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis. Here I use two of her sex education books for women, *Seksualreform. En social fremstilling af populær seksualoplysning* [Sexualreform. A Social Version of Popular Sexual Information, 1932] and *Kærlighedslivets labyrint. En bog om seksualsind og seksualsundhed* [The Labyrinth of the Love Life. A Book about the Sexual Mind and Sexual Health, 1942], as well as her

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<sup>89</sup> Non-English names of organizations, books etc. are translated in the first mentioning and then used in original names. All translations are by the author herself.

pamphlet on legalizing abortion, *Fosterfordrivelserparagraffen § 241, Tvangsfødsel eller forebyggelse* [The Abortion Law § 241, Forced Birth or Prevention, 1930].

Besides the work of these two women, I also draw on material from the official magazine of *Dansk Kvindesamfundet*, called *Kvinden og Samfundet* [Women and Society, 1885-1912, 1921-1932/1939], as well as the magazine *Hvad vi vil* [What we want, 1888-1894], published by the early Danish radical feminist group *Kvindelig Fremskridtsforening* [Women's Progress Association].

Iceland is treated as a special case in this study, since first of all Iceland was not an independent country but part of Denmark during the period of this study. Secondly, the Icelandic material is very limited and overlaps in many ways with the other Nordic material. I approach Iceland mainly through secondary literature and mention when there are significant differences to the other Nordic countries.

#### 1.4.2. Sweden

Sweden provided the most material available, which can probably be attributed to the size of the country and its feminist movement. It was a challenge to choose the main Swedish actors for this study: I decided to focus on the works of Karolina Widerström and Julia Kinberg<sup>90</sup>, as well as of Ellen Key.

Karolina Widerström (1856-1949) is especially interesting and unfortunately not much research has been done about her yet. Widerström was the first female physician in Sweden. She studied in Uppsala and Stockholm, and then opened her own gynaecological practice in Stockholm in the 1890s. She was the first female doctor, educated in Sweden. From early on, Widerström was interested in women's health, female sexuality and education, not only from a medical but also from a political point of view. She published the two education books *Kvinnohygien I* [Women's Hygiene I, 1899] and *Kvinnohygien II* [Women's Hygiene II, 1905] and various articles. She was member and leader of several women's organizations, including *Landsföreningen för kvinnans politiska rösträtt* [National Association for Political Voting Rights for Women, 1918-1921] and *Kvinnliga akademikers förening* [Women's Academic Association, 1910-1918]. Most important here was her membership in *Frisinnade Kvinnor*, the Swedish liberal-conservative women's organization, in which most Swedish feminists discussed in

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<sup>90</sup> Julia Kinberg was born Julia Rosenbaum. During her marriage (1898-1915) to Olof Kinberg, she called herself Julia Kinberg. After marrying Axel von Sneidern in 1917, she was also referred to as Julia Kinberg von Sneidern. I refer to her always as Julia Kinberg.

this study were active. The organization also published the journal *Tidevarvet* [Our Age], which constitutes an important part of my material. Widerström was also member of the Stockholm city council between 1912 and 1915 for the liberal party *Frisinnade landsföreningen*. She engaged herself in questions about abortion, prostitution, contraception and the general living conditions of women from the middle and lower classes.

Julia Kinberg (1874-1945), like Widerström, was born into a bourgeois family and studied medicine in Uppsala. Afterwards she worked as paediatrician and physician in different hospitals in Stockholm. From 1898 to 1915 she was married to the psychiatrist Olof Kinberg, who was a keen eugenicist and researched on the idea of the innate criminal. In 1914, with the Swedish physician Ada Nilsson (1872-1864) Julia Kinberg co-founded in *Frisinnade Kvinnor*, the core organization for eugenic feminists in Sweden. Kinberg published several sex and health education books which I will analyse: *Handledning i sexuell undervisning och uppfostran* [Tutoring in Sexual Education and Enlightenment, together with Alma Sundquist, 1924] and *Sexuell etik* [Sexual Ethics, 1931]. Kinberg was an integral part of the Swedish, liberal women's movement and worked closely with Widerström in the prostitution, abortion and the contraception question.

Another Swedish feminist, who was controversial but likewise fascinating, was Ellen Key (1849-1926). Since much of her work was already published in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, Key is somewhat outside the time frame of this research. However, in many ways she shaped opposition to the general Swedish women's movement with her ideas about sexuality and motherhood, and as such needs to be included here. Key was born into an aristocratic family and grew up in the Swedish countryside. She later moved to Stockholm and worked as a teacher. In Stockholm, she was in contact with the mid-nineteenth century women's movement, in particular the Fredrika-Bremer Association. However, Key's ideas about the importance of sexuality and biological difference created tension between her and the movements. Key published numerous articles and books about various aspects of the women's question. Here I focus in particular on *Kvinno-psykologi och kvinnlig logik* [Women's Psychology and Feminine Logic, 1896], *Barnets århundrade* [The Century of the Child, 1900] and *Die Frauenbewegung* [The Women's Movement, 1909].

Beside individual feminists, women's organizations also had a strong impact in Sweden. Most of the feminists discussed here were members of the liberal



organization *Frisinnade Kvinnor*, so their magazine *Tidevarvet* is one important source considered here.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, I also use articles from *Dagny*, published by the *Fredrika-Bremer-föbundet* (1886-1913) and the follow-up magazine *Hertha*, published from 1914 until today. Though I focus predominantly on the bourgeois feminists, since they showed the greatest interest in eugenics, in the case of Sweden I also examine the social democratic women's magazine *Morgonbris* [Morning Breeze] as it provided some interesting insights into eugenic feminist approaches of the working class.

#### 1.4.3. Norway

In Norway, I focus on the works of the sex educator Katti Anker Møller (1868-1945) and her daughter, the physician Tove Mohr (1891-1981). Møller was a teacher by training. After the early death of her mother through exhausting endless pregnancies, she took a great interest in women, their bodies and sexuality. She held lectures, which constitute one source for this study, about the decriminalization of abortion in Norway, contraception and advocating the free choice to motherhood. Since her brother-in-law was the labour politician Johan Castberg, she had direct influence on policy-making, and used it, for example supporting Castberg in the development of the child protection laws, or Castberg laws, in 1915. She also opened an advisory office for mothers in Oslo in the mid-1920s, where she offered contraception as well as other advice about motherhood and childcare to working class women. The office was inspired by the clinic of the prominent British birth control activist Marie Stopes, who shared the eugenic interest with Møller and whose clinic Møller visited in 1922.<sup>92</sup>

Tove Mohr followed in her mother's footsteps and supported her in her work. A trained physician, she was also member of several governmental commissions to prepare legislation on social and family policy. Both, Møller and Mohr were frequent contributors to the biggest Norwegian women's magazine, *Nylænde* [New Frontiers], published by *Norsk Kvinnesaksforening* [Norwegian Association for Women's Rights] between 1887 and 1927. *Nylænde* was the leading mouthpiece of the Norwegian feminist movement in the early twentieth century in their struggle for suffrage and awareness-

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<sup>91</sup> See for a detailed discussion of the organization, Knutson, Ulrika, *Kvinnor på gränsen till genombrott. Grupporträtt av Tidevarvets kvinnor*, Stockholm 2004.

<sup>92</sup> Allen, Ann Taylor, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe 1890-1970. The Maternal Dilemma*, New York 2005, p. 165.

raising for women in society. Most Norwegian feminists contributed to the magazine and it constituted an important part of my Norwegian material.

#### 1.4.4. Finland

Finland was different in many ways due to its bilingual context. This also defined the feminist movement and, though not completely separated, the Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking feminists often took different approaches. In context of eugenics the Swedish-speaking ones appeared to be more active than the Finnish-speaking feminist movements.<sup>93</sup> I consider whether this may have been racially-motivated and due to the anxiety that the Swedish minority in Finland would lose its former dominance after independence, though this claim needs careful consideration. However, what can be said is that the Swedish-speaking feminists were usually from a middle class background and eugenic feminism was in many ways a bourgeois phenomenon.

Here I focus on two women: the first female physician in Finland, Karolina Eskelin (1867-1936) and the female physician Ellen Ahlqvist (1870-1920). Both might not be considered feminists as such but, through their medical work, they tried to improve the lives of women and create awareness about the situation of women in society, also using eugenic ideas. Thus, I consider them at least women's activists, although they can probably not be understood as political feminists like the others.

Eskelin's biography showed many similarities to Widerström's in Sweden. Eskelin was also the first female doctor in her country. She worked in several hospitals in Tampere and Helsinki, and, with Ellen Ahlqvist, spent several years in the United States (1903-1905 and 1912). Eskelin was not specialized as a gynaecologist as such but interested in women's issues, as well as problems of health and hygiene in general. She published several health advice books in Swedish and in Finnish, which I use here as material, in particular *Gynekologisk sjukvård* [Gynaecological Healthcare, 1924] and the bilingual *Personlig hälsovård med särskild hänsyn till bostad* [Personal Healthcare with the Special Consideration of the Home, 1925/ *Henkilökohtaisesta terveydenhoidosta*, 1927].

Ellen Ahlqvist was a close companion of Karolina Eskelin. They worked during the same time in Tampere and moved to the US together. Ahlqvist's main interest was in the care and prevention of tuberculosis. She was particularly active in preventive

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<sup>93</sup> e.g. Kemiläinen, Aira, *Suomalaiset, outo pohjolan kansa. Rotuteoriat ja kansallinen identiteetti*, Helsinki 1993.

work against tuberculosis in Swedish-speaking children. She was also interested in venereal diseases and wrote several pamphlets about them, which constitute her material here, including *Om de veneriska sjukdomarna. Folkeligt föredrag för kvinnor* [About Venereal Disease. A Popular Lecture for Women, 1906] and *Kansan terveys, esitelmä naisten yleisessä siveellisyysskokouksessa* [Public Health. Presentation in a Women's General Meeting on Morality, 1918].

Additionally, I also use two women's magazines, one Swedish-speaking *Husmodern* and one Finnish-speaking *Naisten ääni*. The former is the journal *Husmodern/ Emäntälehti* [The Housewife, available both in Swedish and Finnish], published by the *Martta/Martha* organization. Until 1924 the *Martha* was a bilingual organization in Finland but then split into Finnish (*Marttalitto*) and Swedish (*Finlands svenska Marthaförbund*) speaking branches.<sup>94</sup> It aimed to provide advice on home economics and improve health and well-being through the education of housewives. The *Martha* organization was a major organization for women in Finland: in the 1920s and 1930s it had up to 84,000 members, mostly rural women.<sup>95</sup> I focus in this study on the Swedish material published by the *Martha* organization, which was directed towards Swedish-speaking housewives in Finland. Though the organization might not be considered feminist as such, since it advocated rather patriarchal values, it also tried to improve the situation of women and their families, which was the essence of eugenic feminism, as defined above. The *Martha* organization sought to improve the life of the woman at home by providing practical advice, like for example cooking classes, but also advice through their magazine.

The second women's magazine I use here is *Naisten ääni* [Women's Voice], published from 1905-1907 by *Naisiasialiitto Unioni* [Women's Union] and from 1907 onwards taken over by *Suomalainen Naisliitto* [Finnish Women's Alliance]. Both organisations overlapped in topics and memberships but *Naisiasialiitto Unioni* was, like the *Martha*-organization, also a bilingual association. *Naisten ääni* was certainly an important mouthpiece of the Finnish women's movement. The content was more political than *Husmodern* and the articles dealt with issues like women's suffrage, women in working life and social issues.

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<sup>94</sup> I concentrate here on the Swedish-speaking material but frequently the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking edition of *Husmodern* contained the same articles just in translation.

<sup>95</sup> Ollila, Anne, "Women's Voluntary Associations in Finland during the 1920s and 1930s." In: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 20/2 (1995), p. 97.

### 1.5. Chapter Outline

This study is divided into four main chapters. The first chapter, *Eugenics and Feminism*, provides historical and theoretical background. I discuss my cultural approach of eugenics as lifestyle ideology as new perspective on eugenics in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, I show the diversity of first-wave feminism in an international context, focusing mainly on the United States, Germany and Nordic examples, to demonstrate that first-wave feminism was not a coherent movement but influenced by many different social ideas. I discuss the conceptualization of race in eugenics and how it was important for eugenic feminists. Additionally, I introduce the concept of eugenic feminism and show why this union was not as surprising as it might seem at first glance.

The second chapter, *The Modern Woman, the New Woman and the Eugenic Woman* then concentrates on the Nordic region. Here I discuss the transformation of the female societal role and the idea of a new, modern woman. I argue that the new, modern woman was a concept with positive and negative connotations, depending on its perspective. On the one hand, in the eyes of eugenic feminists, the new modern woman could abandon all patriarchal female values of home and family and want to be independent or non-attached, for example as a working woman, disregarding her social and natural duty of motherhood. On the other hand, the new modern woman could also embrace her natural and social role as mother, wife and housewife to support the greater good of society through her maternal role, but in a modernized way. By looking at different aspects of the life of modern women, including education, labour market participation, legal rights, the role of the housewife and motherhood, I show both the great diversity and the uncertainty of the role of the new, modern woman from a eugenic feminist perspective. I demonstrate that eugenic feminists sought to find a new valuable role for women in society by embracing patriarchal but modernized values of maternity, to situate women through their maternal role as productive members of capitalist societies.

The third chapter, *Eugenic Bodies and Sexuality*, focuses on the bodily aspects of the role of women from a eugenic perspective, which affected the social recognition of female bodies. Here I discuss the perspective of eugenic feminists on social discourses regarding the body, including reproduction regulation, hygiene, masturbation and sex education. I discuss how and why the influence of eugenic feminists shaped these discourses and added new perspectives and ideas. I argue that health and sex education

were the primary means by which eugenic feminists sought to instruct other women in eugenically correct behaviour. Further, they were often strong advocates of reproduction regulation and supported abortion and sterilization in order to provide healthier reproduction for eugenically valuable women. In contrast, they thus supported a permanent restriction on reproduction for eugenically unfit women.

The last chapter of this study, *The Enemy Within – Eugenically Excluded Women*, concentrates entirely on eugenically unfit women. First of all, I define who was actually seen as part of this group. In the Nordic countries, unlike other states such as Great Britain, this social group was the under class, defined by their societally threatening behaviour or genetic predisposition. I examine various subgroups of society including prostitutes, the mentally ill and disabled, and individuals with venereal diseases, to conceptualize the role of the female eugenic polluter and the notion of degeneration. I demonstrate that it was not the aim of eugenic feminists to exclude these people totally from society but rather to educate and integrate them into it, making them as valuable as they could possibly be, even if this involved harsh methods or force. In the conclusion I give an outlook if there can be seen still effects of the eugenic feminist work in today's Nordic societies.

## 2. Eugenics and Feminism

### 2.1. Eugenics beyond Sterilization – A Lifestyle Ideology

The First World War showed the monstrosity of the industrial development. According to Eric Hobsbawm, "the decades from the outbreak of the First World War to the aftermath of the Second, was an Age of Catastrophe for this society."<sup>96</sup> More people than ever could be killed with new weapons and entire countries could be invaded faster than ever. Industrial progress was a double-edged sword, which did not only bring progress to the people but forced them to make long-term adjustments to their lives. In this climate of catastrophe and crisis, eugenics found its peak as both science and a social and cultural ideology aiming to improve the individual for the sake of improving the whole society, and ultimately the nation. The political, social and cultural changes left the people with a sense of crisis and uncertainty. The world seemed to tumble in a downward spiral. Eugenics, the belief in improving the population quality by methods of science, social policy and medicine, appeared as a tool which served to bring order in chaos. This tool was not fixed in its conceptualization but very flexible and also uncertain in its content as well as its use.

This chapter will introduce the concept of eugenics used in this study, because this differs in some ways from the understanding of eugenics in previous research. Furthermore, it shall provide not exactly a historical overview, at least not in a comprehensive way, but rather an alignment of my understanding of the significance of eugenics as ideology in the Western world during the time before the First World War and particularly in the interwar period, which constitutes the core period of the thesis, and its extensive influence of radical social, cultural and political changes. On the one hand, this sets the later discussion of Nordic eugenic feminism in a wider international context and demonstrates that eugenics and eugenic feminism were not only Nordic phenomena, but similar ideas were the zeitgeist in the whole Western world. On the other hand, it also makes it possible to highlight the differences of eugenics and eugenic feminism in the Nordic countries, which set them apart from the rest of the Western world. Though Western similarities can certainly be detected, every region or nation marked eugenics with their own historical experiences, situating it in the current political, social and cultural situation.

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<sup>96</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Extremes. A History of the World, 1914-1991*, New York 1996, pp. 6-7.

### 2.1.1. The Development of Eugenic Ideas

The control of human reproduction for the overall betterment of society has a long history, probably as long as the history of humankind.<sup>97</sup> However, a more precise time frame would probably locate the origins of modern eugenics with the publication of *Essay of the Principle of Population* by the British cleric Thomas Malthus in 1798, Darwin's theory of natural selection in the mid-nineteenth century, which together with the Mendelian Laws constituted the scientific foundation of eugenics, and the invention of the term eugenics by Darwin's cousin Francis Galton in the 1860s. In his book *The Man of Genius*, published in 1889, the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso demanded the elimination of the unproductive.<sup>98</sup> Thus, rather than originating on a precise start date, eugenics began with a collection of international developments which stimulated the rising interest in the betterment of people. During the early years, the idea of the scientific and social control of human reproduction was largely discussed on the philosophical and theoretical level. Only in the late nineteenth century, with the reinforcement of the experience of the social effects of the industrialization, urbanization and modernization in the Western world in the form of poverty, slum-building or a restructuring of societal structures, did eugenics increasingly start to appear in the political and social context as possible solution to modern problems.<sup>99</sup>

This development was discussed in the book *The Prevention of Destitution* by the British Fabian couple Sidney and Beatrice Webb. They argued that not poverty, but destitution is the problem of modern societies. Destitution is, according to them,

the condition of being without one or the other necessities of life, in such a way that health and strength, and even vitality, is so impaired as to eventually imperil life itself. Nor is it merely a physical state. It is, indeed, a special feature of destitution in modern urban communities that it means not merely a lack of food, clothing and shelter, but also a condition of mental degradation.<sup>100</sup>

They concluded that destitution is a social disease which can be cured through science.<sup>101</sup> Science became a method of solving social problems. Eugenics was one of the new

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<sup>97</sup> Carlson, Elof Axel, *The Unfit. A History of a Bad Idea*, Cold Spring Harbor 2001, p. 17.

<sup>98</sup> Pick, Daniel, *Faces of Degeneration. A European Disorder, c. 1848- c. 1918*, Cambridge 1989, p. 126.

<sup>99</sup> e.g. Turda, *The Idea of National Superiority*, p. 3ff.

<sup>100</sup> Webb, Sidney, Webb, Beatrice, *The Prevention of Destitution*, London 1912, p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-5.

sciences which seemed to provide scientific solutions to social problems based in the human biology. As we can already see in Sidney and Beatrice Webb's work and I will discuss in more detail in relation to the social reformers Gunnar and Alva Myrdal in Sweden, the idea of social experts of various professions was that the nation was infected by a social disease. This disease was inflicted by industrialization, urbanization and poverty. Since it was caused by modern phenomena, also a modern cure must be found. Eugenics arose here as a firstly scientific, later social and political, approach that seemed promising enough to overcome the threat of decline in population quality.

During the twentieth century, eugenics became a more and more popular ideology. The First World War marked a turning point. Before the war, eugenics was bound merely to the scientific community, but the outbreak of the conflict and the interwar period marked an increasing interest of the public and policy-makers into eugenic ideas.<sup>102</sup> In the first two decades, all over the Western world eugenic societies were founded. Only to name a few, these included the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene* [German Society for Racial Hygiene, 1905], *Eugenic Education Society* in Great Britain (1907), *Svenska Sällskapet för Raskhygien* [Swedish Society for Racial Hygiene, 1909], *French Eugenics Society* (1912), and *Italian Eugenics Committee* (1914).<sup>103</sup> From this time onwards, eugenic ideas were situated in the public discourse and policy-making. The numerous marriage regulation and restriction laws, implemented in the Western world at the dawn of the First World War, were the first harbingers of the biopolitical force which would overrun the Western world after the Great War. In the United States, the state of Connecticut enacted the first marriage restriction law in 1896 and many other states followed. Marriage was banned for people with mental illnesses or disabilities, as well as individuals with venereal diseases or a criminal record. Sweden passed a similar law in 1915, Norway in 1918, Denmark in 1922 and in Finland as late as 1929. The aim of these laws was to prevent the spread of defective genes. The legislation was based on the normative and bourgeois idea that sexuality and reproduction could only be found in marriage, which later needed to be revised.<sup>104</sup>

After the Great War, eugenic ideas were more integrated into policy-making than before. To name just one example, the Johnson Act of 1924 regulated the

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<sup>102</sup> e.g. Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism Democracy", p. 2ff; Roll-Hansen, Nils, "Conclusion. Scandinavian Eugenics in the International Context." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Roll-Hansen, Nils (eds.), *Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland*, East Lansing 2005, p. 260ff.

<sup>103</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 33.

<sup>104</sup> e.g. Broberg, Roll-Hansen, *Eugenics and the Welfare State*.



immigration policy of the United States with eugenic and racial ideas in mind by favouring immigrants from Northern and Western Europe over people from South-Eastern Europe.<sup>105</sup> Soon afterwards, the first sterilization legislation, national and municipal, was implemented in Switzerland and the Nordic Countries.<sup>106</sup> The involvement of eugenics in state policy found its peak in the *Nuremberg Laws* (1935) implemented in Germany, which extensively regulated the reproductive life of German citizens by eugenic and racial measures.

### 2.1.2. The Concept of Race in Eugenics

Race was a leading concept in eugenics. This becomes in particular evident when looking at the original terms for eugenics in Germanic and Nordic languages, which often included race in the term, German Rassengygiene, Swedish rashygién, Norwegian rasehygiene, Danish racehygiejne and Finnish rotuhygienia. Thus, the use of race as part of the concept of eugenics was not necessarily unproblematic. The conceptualization of race was not straight forward but defined by the same uncertainties as the overall notions of eugenics. The hereditary theory of the English scientist and one of the fathers of eugenics Francis Galton did not provide a clear definition of the concept of race. He defined that a group of people with similar physical and mental traits, which were inherited from generation to generation constituted a race.<sup>107</sup>

Most prominent in a historical perspective is the German term Rassenhygiene. The use of the term Rassenhygiene was deeply connected with the purification of the nation through the national socialist regime in Germany between 1933 and 1945, the Second World War and the Holocaust. In Germany, the national socialists used racial hygiene as synonym for the perception of the superior Nordic race as leader of civilization. The argument of racial superiority was used by national socialist eugenicists in particular, but also already by racial theorists during the Weimar Republic.<sup>108</sup> In 1931, two years before the national socialists came into power, the

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<sup>105</sup> Allen, "The Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor", p. 249.

<sup>106</sup> The Swiss canton Vaud implemented its sterilization law in 1928 on a municipal level and Denmark in 1929 on a national level. Both laws cannot be considered as eugenic legislation as such, but eugenics was one ideology which influenced the development of these laws. Sweden and Norway enacted the first sterilization law in 1934, Finland in 1935 and Iceland in 1938.

<sup>107</sup> Wessel, Merle, "The Concept of the »Nordic Race« in German and Nordic Racial-Theoretical Research in the 1920s." In: Nordeuropaforum (2016), p. 34.

<sup>108</sup> e.g. Wessel, "The Concept of the 'Nordic Race'"; Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 62-79.

German racial researchers Eugen Fischer, Erwin Bauer and Fritz Lenz argued for example that

[...] it is not exaggerated when one claims that the Nordic race marches at the peak of humanity regarding mental ability. It is also generally superior in creative intellectual ability to the Near Eastern and Oriental races, though not always in the context of receptive intelligence.<sup>109</sup>

Fischer, Bauer and Lenz created here a clear racial hierarchy, in which the Nordic race, was superior to other races in quality, mental and physical ability. In the name of this superiority, the national socialists committed crimes at the German as well as other nations to create a racially pure and advanced nation, leading the civilised world.<sup>110</sup> Yet, not only in Germany the hierarchy of races was discussed. Lawyer and racial theorist Madison Grant and historian and journalist Lothrop Stoddard suggested in the United States in the interwar period the hierarchy of the European races. They argued that the Nordic race was the highest which led to civilization. A decline of the Nordic race in a nation meant a decline of the civilization.<sup>111</sup>

In Nordic eugenics, the use of the term race was not uncontested. The Finnish physician Harry Federley warned that the Swedish term *rashygien*, based on the German *Rassenhygiene*, can have unfortunate connotations. He feared that the word *ras/race* might be understood in this context as different human races in a hierarchical order but not as the human race overall. He argued that different human races cannot be positioned in hierarchies as such and that this would not express the intention of rational eugenics. He suggested that it would be better to speak of *arvhälsovård*, roughly translated as genetic or hereditary health care.<sup>112</sup> Despite, Federley being concerned here with the understanding of race as hierarchically concept, it would be too far-fetched to claim that

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<sup>109</sup> "[...] es nicht [sic] übertrieben ist, wenn man sagt, dass die nordische Rasse hinsichtlich der geistigen Begabung an der Spitze der Menschheit marschiert. Auch der vorderasiatischen und orientalischen Rasse ist sie an schöpferischer Kraft des Geistes im Durchschnitt wohl überlegen, wenn auch nicht an aufnehmender Intelligenz." Baur, Erwin, Fischer, Eugen, Lenz, Fritz, *Menschliche Erblichkeitslehre und Rassenhygiene*, München 1931, p. 547. All translations of direct quotes are by the author herself.

<sup>110</sup> e.g. Weingart Peter, Kroll Jürgen, Bayertz Kurt, *Rasse, Blut und Gene. Geschichte der Eugenik und Rassenhygiene in Deutschland*, Frankfurt 1988; Weingart, "Eugenik – Eine angewandte Wissenschaft"; Weindling, Paul, "German Eugenics and the wider World. Beyond the Racial State." In: Bashford, Allison, Levine, Philippa (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, New York 2010, pp. 315-331; Weindling, *Victims and Survivors of Nazi Human Experiments*.

<sup>111</sup> e.g. Grant, Madison, *The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History*, New York 1916; Stoddard, Lothrop, Grant, Madison, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy*, New York 1920.

<sup>112</sup> Federley, Harry, "I sterilisationsfrågan." In: *Rikollisuus ja sen vastustamismahdollisuudet. Rikollisuuden vastustamisviikolla Helsingissä tammikuun 7-12 Päivinä 1934*, Helsinki 1935, p. 179.

Federley considered all human races, like Asians, Africans and Europeans, as equal. It might be argued that he was concerned with a hierarchy of white races.<sup>113</sup> Thus, he probably did not consider even all white races, for example Southern and Eastern European, as equal to the Nordic race. However, his proposal to focus on the hereditary aspects in eugenics, more than on the racial ones, should be seen in the context of his work for the advancement of the health, physical, mentally and also genetic health especially of the Swedish-speaking population in Finland.<sup>114</sup>

Not only in Finland but also in Norway was the use of race in context of eugenics problematized by contemporaries. The Norwegian research community split into two groups; one led by the pharmacist Alfred Jon Mjøen, and the other by the first female professor in Norway and biologist Kristine Bonnevie and professor of anatomy Otto Los Mohr. Mjøen emphasised in his book *Rasehygiene* [Racial Hygiene, 1914] similar like German Fischer, Lenz and Baur, the hierarchical differences of human races. According to Mjøen, the Nordic race was the leading human race and any mixture between the human races would provide unfavourable genetic, mental and physical results.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, he argued that biological heritage and genetic disposition of individuals was responsible for social problems, like alcoholism, mental defects or tuberculosis.<sup>116</sup> Mjøen's racist understanding of eugenics was very much contested in Norway and his research colleagues Bonnevie and Mohr branded him as racist and unscientific.<sup>117</sup>

Nevertheless, the use of the term race in racial hygiene and eugenics was not only different from a linguistic point of view but indeed, as I have partially shown already, was also conceptually important. Federley's fear about the misleading understanding of the term race, as well as the Norwegian discourse was related to the notion that race and population was often considered closely intertwined in the eugenic discourses in the early twentieth century.<sup>118</sup> Not for all racial theorists and eugenicists was race synonymously with population (e.g. the German term *Volk*, or the Swedish *folk*, or the Finnish *kansa*). Eugen Fischer argued that a *Volk* or population was joint by non-

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<sup>113</sup> Roll-Hansen, "Conclusion", p. 259.

<sup>114</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 107.

<sup>115</sup> Mjøen, Jon Alfred, *Rasehygiene I*, Oslo 1914, p. 70

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, p. 50; Wessel, "The Concept of 'Nordic Race'", p. 35.

<sup>117</sup> Wessel, "The Concept of 'Nordic Race'", p. 35; Mjøen, Alfred, "Segregation av lavværdige raceelementer. Svar til professor i zoologi Bonnevie." In: *Tidens Tegn* (23. April 1915), pp. 9-10; Bonnevie, Kristine, "Om racehygiene og om dr. Alfred Mjøens nye bok." In: *Tidens Tegn* (24. March 1915), pp. 6-9; Bonnevie, Kristine, "Dr. Mjøens racehygiene for siste gang." In: *Tidens Tegn* (24. April 1915), p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Turda, *Idea of National Superiority*, p. 15.

hereditary cultural aspects, like traditions or religions, in opposition to the hereditary traits of a race.<sup>119</sup>

Yet, Fischer did not keep this strict separation of race and population. As I have already mentioned in the introduction, it was not uncommon that both concepts were connected stronger, in particular in the interwar period when race and population became interchangeable terms for many eugenicists in the context of nation states and nationalism. In 1933, Fischer for example argued that a nation state needs a biological population policy based on hereditary selection.<sup>120</sup> Peter Weingart argues that the fusion of race and population as concepts in the interwar period was not necessarily based on the scientific research results of racial theorists but had also practical reasons. Racial biology became after the shock of the First World War in many ways, as here also demanded by Fischer, part of the state policy. A biologized population policy was popular to stop the perceived ongoing degeneration and keep up with other nations from a racial and biological, but also political and economic point of view.<sup>121</sup>

However, in the Nordic context, race and population was intertwined and frequently considered as the same in the interwar period. As Lene Koch argues in the Danish context, eugenics and racial hygiene as terms were connected closely with each other. Yet, racial hygiene was not so much connected to the biological race but rather to an understanding as population.<sup>122</sup> She continued that in this sense racial hygiene was an unfortunate term and population hygiene would have grasped more the core of the content.<sup>123</sup> This was, according to Koch, in particular related to the role of eugenics in the political context. She argues that eugenics was a biological utopia, which dreamed of a society free of any inferior individuals and mentally and physically disabled. Population hygiene on the other hand was a political and social project enacted in form of the Danish population policy since the 1930s to increase the population quality not only from a biological but also from a social point of view.<sup>124</sup>

In 1922, the Swedish racial biologist Herman Lundborg argued in the same way that racial theory became much more important and political after the First World War, because the disaster and destruction of the war had opened up the eyes of policy

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<sup>119</sup> Fischer, Eugen, *Rasse und Rassenentstehung beim Menschen*, Berlin 1927, pp. 11-12.

<sup>120</sup> Fischer, Eugen, *Der Völkische Staat. Biologisch gesehen*, Berlin 1933, p. 5-9.

<sup>121</sup> Weingart, "Eugenik – Eine angewandte Wissenschaft", p. 329.

<sup>122</sup> Koch, *Racehygiejne i Danmark*, p. 16.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

makers for the necessity of a racial biology based population policy for a nation state.<sup>125</sup> Racial biology and eugenics was important from a political point of view in Sweden, which did not differ from Denmark or the other Nordic countries.<sup>126</sup> Policy-making and racial science was closely intertwined in Sweden in the interwar period. Experts like the social democrat and race biologist Alfred Petré, eugenicist and physician Gunnar Dahlberg or physician Nils von Hofsten for example functioned as political advisers for the sterilization legislation in Sweden in 1934.<sup>127</sup> Medical experts and racial biologists contributed to the development of the population policy in Sweden in the 1930s. Their advice should help to end the economic depression of the 1930s, reform the national economy and develop a new vision of the society in the future.<sup>128</sup> Racial hygiene became in this way part of the policy-making not only in Sweden, but in all the Nordic countries. The focus was not anymore, as propagated in Germany, on the survival of the Nordic race, but the survival of the population, which stood synonymously for the race. Due to the engagement of racial biologists into the policy-making, also their racial terminology was included into the political discourse, which created the confusion of the conceptualization of race and population in the population policies in the interwar period in the Nordic countries.

The discussion about the understanding of race and population is strikingly summarised by Clare Hansen with the help of Foucault. Foucault argues that biological racism is the paradox of the biopolitical state, whose aim is to improve life by likewise having the power to kill. This new form of racism, which is defining for the modern state, divides people into species and subspecies. It is fundamentally not about the struggle for hegemony in a society but about the purification of the race to manifest the sovereign power. It allows the destruction of an external race which causes a threat to the own race. However, it also justifies the elimination of internal enemies, in form of abnormal and degenerated individuals, which threaten the race from within.<sup>129</sup>

The discussion of race within the eugenic community was frequently based on the elimination of the internal enemy, which threatened the success of a nation internally and its hegemony externally. In this study, the term race is widely understood

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<sup>125</sup> Lundborg, Herman, *Rasbiologi och rashygien. Nutida kultur- och rasfrågor i etisk belysning*, Stockholm 1922, p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> Broberg, Gunnar, Tydén, Mattias, *Oönskade i folkhemmet. Rashygien och sterilisering i Sverige*, Stockholm 2005, p. 10.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-55.

<sup>129</sup> Hansen, *Eugenics, Literature and Culture*, p. 4.

as synonymously with the term population. This is based on the above discussed more and more intertwining of both concepts in racial theory and racial biology in the early twentieth century and in particular the interwar period. Race became part of a nationalist argumentation and the race struggle was not only a struggle between human races but foremost a struggle between nations and their populations.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, (as I will show in-depth in chapter 2.2.) many eugenic feminists, internationally and Nordic, used the term race self-evidently as synonym for population. Despite the above problematization of the concept of race in research communities, in the everyday language a critical discussion took not necessarily place. Thus, the here discussed eugenic feminists were all highly educated and intellectual women. Their focus was not on the problematization of the concept of race but they often used race naturally (see for example the chapter about motherhood in this context) to bring forward their own agenda of female emancipation.

### 2.1.3. Eugenics, Modernism and Lifestyle Ideology

The uncertainty about the substance and effects of eugenics cannot only be found in retrospective research and the racial debates but also by the eugenicists and contemporary witnesses themselves. Discussions about eugenics around the First World War were marked by conflicting ideas and uncertainties. Neither the degenerative effects of individuals in society nor the prevention of these effects were certain or agreed on by experts. As shown by Marius Turda in his *Modernism and Eugenics*, there was not even consensus on the effects of the war itself on the societies. Some experts saw the Great War as a method of natural selection to obliterate the unfit. These experts considered war as a eugenic tool to achieve spiritual and physical renewal. It was the antidote to degeneration. The weak and unfit would not be able to survive the destruction of the war and only the fit and able-bodied would endure. This could be a chance to enhance the quality of the nation and wipe out the degenerated from society.<sup>131</sup>

Others considered war a disaster which wiped out the able-bodied. This would not help natural selection but would intervene negatively in natural processes. Only the strong and able-bodied were sent to die on the battlefield. The weak would stay at home, preserved their lives and could continue to spread their defective genetic material.

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<sup>130</sup> e.g., Turda, *The Idea of National Superiority*, p. 17.

<sup>131</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 43.

The critics of the war considered it a symbol of racial destruction, not an aid to natural selection.<sup>132</sup>

Turda's example shows the disunity of the perception of eugenics itself but also the uncertainty about societal developments in general after the Great War. A similar assessment is also provided by the discussion of modernity by historian Edward R. Dickinson. He argues that on the one hand the time after the First World War was characterized by a "Machbarkeitswahn" (a delusion that everything is possible).<sup>133</sup> Scientific, technical and medical inventions, tested in the war, created the feeling that every problem, social, physical or political, could be solved by scientific measures. The war seemed to have generated a superpower among the survived societies. Only the biologically, politically and culturally strongest nations or individuals could survive the disaster of the Great War. Surviving nations were now freed from degenerative artefacts and ready to be rebuilt. On the other hand, as Dickinson shows, the period after the First World War also created the feeling of constant crisis among the surviving societies. The nations were caught between the two extremes of the belief in progress and the fear of chaos and degeneration. The intertwining of science and policy-making played a decisive role in the biologization of the social which defined modernity and implemented eugenics as a central concept.<sup>134</sup>

Dickinson's and Turda's ideas are striking and sum up the confusions about the past, present and future in the interwar period. However, this confusion and sense of crisis might not immediately be related to eugenics, since in the first place eugenics was seen as scientific theory and in the second place as cultural phenomenon. Yet, the British political scientist Michael Freeden suggests that there was more to eugenics than being "a minor offshoot of turn-of-the-century socio-biological thought which never achieved ideological 'take-off' in terms of influence or circulation" but indeed showed overlapping with several other modern ideologies.<sup>135</sup> My aim here is to follow Freeden's example and also suggest an alternative approach to eugenics, different from previous research. I propose that eugenics was only in the first place a science used to restrict the reproduction

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<sup>132</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 49.

<sup>133</sup> Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism Democracy", p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>135</sup> Freeden, Michael, "Eugenics and Progressive Thought. A Study in Ideological Affinity." In: *The Historical Journal* 22/ 3 (1979), p. 645.

of defected or asocial individuals but then developed over time also into a lifestyle ideology.<sup>136</sup>

Christina Cogdell argues, in her discussion about the influence of eugenic ideology on architecture and design in 1930s America, that eugenics was a defining ideology and a central pillar of modernism. She continues that eugenic ideology can be found in many debates of the interwar period such as birth control, prohibition, anti-immigration, feminism, maternalism, the relation of the individual to the state, or nationalism.<sup>137</sup> According to Cogdell, eugenicists were obsessed with increasing efficiency and hygiene, not only in the context of the human body, but of the whole society. The aim was to achieve a civilized utopia.<sup>138</sup>

Normalization, as proposed by Cogdell, was a leading societal concept of the interwar period. The whole life of the individual should be streamlined, the natural should be commodified and the human transformed to a normalized person, serving the collective.<sup>139</sup> The normalization of the body by eugenic measures, for example medically and scientifically approved physical exercise, the control of reproduction or ideas about health advancing clothing, were only part of this new lifestyle ideology. It continued, for example, in housing design. A family home was to enable a clean, efficient and healthy life through the installation of new kitchens with running water and refrigerators, bathrooms and the separation of the living and sleeping area. New materials like plastic or metal were introduced to facilitate easier cleaning and maintain a hygienic environment.<sup>140</sup> Health care was no longer only considered to be treating sickness but preventing illness in the first place. Doctors became the experts to educate the housewife in a hygienic and eugenic lifestyle to prevent the spread of sickness in the family. New contraceptive methods were used to not only prevent reproduction but to regulate it by breaking the endless string of births which exhausted women, giving them time to rest, recover their bodies from pregnancy, and raise their children. Quantity was in various areas of life replaced with quality. Though eugenics was not exclusively responsible for these developments, eugenic ideas influenced the aim to improve the individual's life with the greater good of society in mind in other social and political movements. Additionally,

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<sup>136</sup> e.g. Berzano Luigi, Genova Carlo, *Lifestyles and Subcultures. History and a New Perspective*, London 2015.

<sup>137</sup> Cogdell, *Eugenic Design*, p. x.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>140</sup> e.g. Asplund, Gunnar, Gahn, Wolter, Markelison, Sven et.al. *Acceptera*, Arlöv 1980, p. 47ff; Hansen, *Eugenics, Literature and Culture*, p. 9.



eugenicists' study of degeneration provided supplementary information for medical experts and social reformists to find reasons for grievances in society.

It is certainly possible and legitimate to limit eugenics to a scientific phenomenon which aimed to control reproduction from a hereditary point of view. However, I find it much more interesting to broaden the perception of the concept and seek to detect where else one can find traces of eugenic ideology among social movements of the time – here in particular feminism – and the direct influence of eugenic ideology on everyday individual lives, for example in health care or educational material. Looking at the Lamarckist perspective on eugenics helps to legitimize this approach. In the early nineteenth century, the French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck argued that heredity was not only influenced by the genes but also by the environment, the individual is living in. The most prominent example was the long neck of a giraffe. The giraffe developed a long neck, because it had to stretch it to find food. This component was then inherited to the next generation, without a genetic foundation as such but became part of the gene pool.<sup>141</sup>

Neo-Lamarckism emerged as a reformed form of Lamarckism in the late nineteenth century among eugenicists again. As Peter Bowler suggests, Neo-Lamarckism was a highly flexible idea which could serve as foundation for various eugenic argumentations. The British philosopher and biologist Herbert Spencer argued that Lamarckism offered an understanding how individuals can adapt to social changes faster. However, he was convinced that the actual change must be left to nature and could not be influenced by human kind itself. The British novelist Samuel Butler on the other hand suggested that living things can indeed influence the shape of their own evolution.<sup>142</sup> Crucial for this study is not necessarily the idea how Lamarckism worked but rather the introduction of the influence of the environment on human genetics and the individuals' own influence on it. This relates to my argumentation in this study that eugenics was not only the science of heredity but by taken the social and cultural environment into account, eugenicists transformed eugenics into an all-embracing ideology, which could shape the individual's life but also the individual could actively shape his or her life with.

By calling eugenics a lifestyle ideology I argue that it was not only a biological theory of human improvement but also a cultural and social ideology, creating

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<sup>141</sup> e.g. Bowler, Peter J., *The Eclipse of Darwinism. Anti-Darwinian evolution theories in the decades around 1900*, Baltimore 1983, p. 58.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

identity by purifying the human body and the larger national community.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, following Marius Turda, I argue that eugenics was not only the scientific narration of the biological, social and cultural renewal but an expression of a programmatic modernism which sought to generate a higher form of civilization through rationalization, normalization and streamlining of nearly every aspect of human life.<sup>144</sup>

To sum up, my proposition is that eugenics was an ideology which affected numerous areas in the life of the modern human being. Eugenics was the theory of creating the perfect human being, not only through selective breeding but also through a clean environment. Eugenics must be put in the wider context of political developments on the national and international level, social movements and societal conflict to understand the far-reaching consequences of eugenic ideas for the development of Western welfare states until today.

## 2.2. Race and Eugenic Ideology in International First-Wave Feminism

Together with the socialist and the labour movement, feminism was one of the social developments that shaped modernity most. Feminism changed the social order and provided women with a place in the public sphere alongside men. Icelandic political scientist Auður Styrkársdóttir recognizes the first demands for women's rights in the individual battles of women in the early nineteenth century in several Western countries; for example, with the writings of British writer and women's activist Mary Wollstonecraft or in the fight for custody for her children after the British author Caroline Norton left her husband in 1836.<sup>145</sup>

The first British organization of women in the context of female empowerment was probably the *Langham Place Circle*, named after the meeting place of the group, organized in the 1850s by early feminists like Emily Faithfull and Helen Blackburn to improve women's rights in employment and education. Another early feminist was the Swedish author Fredrika Bremer (1801-1865), who was interested in women's rights, social equality and the working class. Yet, it would be wrong to talk about one feminist movement in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Feminist movements were shaped significantly by the national and political context, class, race, urban or rural

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<sup>143</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 1.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>145</sup> Styrkársdóttir, Auður, *From Feminism to Class Politics. The Rise and Decline of Women's Politics in Reykjavik, 1908-1922*, Umeå 1998, p. 13.

environment, education and much more. Working class feminists had very different agendas from bourgeois feminists and feminists in the United States differed from German, Swedish or Finnish feminists.

Eugenic feminism as an independent phenomenon describes the interest of first-wave feminists in eugenic ideas and the use of eugenic rhetoric in argumentation for the enhancement of women's rights in the early twentieth century. The term eugenic feminist was not a self-declaration but was introduced by Angelique Richardson in her book about eugenic feminism in Great Britain in 2003 and further developed by Mary Ziegler in 2008. Richardson argues that the maternal agenda of middle class feminists in the late nineteenth century in Great Britain, in the context of the fear of racial decline and imperial losses, resulted in the development of eugenic feminism.<sup>146</sup> Then Ziegler shows, in the context of US feminists and eugenics movements between the 1890s and 1930s, that feminists redefined eugenic ideas differently from other eugenicists and thus created a special form of eugenic feminism. Though eugenic feminists were not united as such, according to Ziegler, they had in common the idea that the decrease in racial quality could be prevented through greater political, social, sexual and economic equality between men and women.<sup>147</sup>

The peak of eugenic feminism was in the interwar period in the Western world. This was connected to the development of feminism. First-wave feminism appeared in a time frame of nearly 150 years and had several generations. The first generation, like the British Mary Wollstoncraft, raised first discussions about the role of women in modern societies. The second generation was primarily concerned with the struggle for suffrage. The third generation enjoyed this achievement and was more involved in political and social discourses.<sup>148</sup> The division was not clear-cut, and the overlapping of generations and individuals was self-evident. Eugenic feminism was not a closed, self-contained group of women. Like all feminists, these women combined their interest in eugenics with other political and social ideologies and eugenics was not their only interest. Furthermore, their perception of eugenics and use of its rhetoric was shaped by the own class and social status, by their education, civil status, profession and much more. Eugenic feminism was not a river flowing in one direction but rather a great lake,

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<sup>146</sup> Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 9; Ziegler, "Eugenic Feminism", p. 213ff.

<sup>147</sup> Ziegler, "Eugenic Feminism", p. 213.

<sup>148</sup> e.g. Styrkársdóttir, *From Feminism to Class Politics*.

in which various ideas and ideologies were collected and intertwined and were viewed from new perspectives through the lens of eugenics.

In this section, I bring together the ideas about eugenics as lifestyle ideology together with the feminist ideologies to show why they were so important in the development of eugenic feminism. I show that eugenic feminism, similarly to eugenics and feminism, was not a united movement but took various forms from the use of explicit eugenic rhetoric to enhance women's rights to more hidden use of eugenic ideology. I argue that several internationally known feminists, like the US-American birth control advocate Margaret Sanger, American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman, German feminist Helene Stöcker as well as Swedish writer Ellen Key, used eugenic ideologies to support their ideas about social reforms in the context of the women's movement. I do not claim that these women used exclusively eugenic ideas in their argumentation but that eugenics was one way for them to approach the social positioning of women within their societies. I demonstrate that eugenic feminism was not only a Nordic phenomenon but a Western one. However, the societal impact of eugenic feminists in comparison to the size of the Nordic countries was remarkable. In the following I give firstly a short overview of the role of international feminist organizations and then introduce international eugenic feminists to demonstrate the transnational importance of eugenic feminism in the early twentieth century. In the last part of the chapter I discuss the role of the concept of race in eugenic feminism.

### 2.2.1. International Feminist Organizations around 1900

During the mid-nineteenth century, the engagement of women in feminist ideas was often based on individuals or regional circles and on an intellectual level. The movement may be seen to have really taken off in the later part of the nineteenth century when more and larger women's organizations spread all over the Western world. Though of course the movements were shaped by their national contexts, similarities can be detected, and the movements benefited from intense interaction with each other. These movements shared the aim to increase the civil rights of women in their nations. The most prominent civil right sought was the right to vote. One of the first countries to grant women voting rights was New Zealand in 1893. The Nordic countries followed soon. Finland granted women the right to vote in 1906, and Norway in 1913. In Denmark women got voting rights in 1915 and in Iceland and Sweden in 1919 (legalised but used firstly in 1921). The Nordic countries thus gave impetus to a common international trend. Germany granted women

suffrage in 1918, the United States in 1919 (though single states enabled female voting earlier) or Great Britain in 1928.

However, women's suffrage was not the only aim of first-wave feminists and was even partly viewed critically by the women themselves. An anonymous article in the Finnish women's magazine *Naisten ääni* warned that women in Finland gained their voting rights very quickly and many might not understand yet how to use them.<sup>149</sup> The fear was that women would only follow male advice and fail to use their votes for their own purposes. The Finnish feminist and journalist Maikki Friberg argued in an article, also published in *Naisten ääni*, that gaining suffrage was only the first step in the liberation of women. This would provide women with the opportunity to gain equal rights in the fullest sense.<sup>150</sup> The aim to provide women with greater independence from their male relatives to determine their own destiny was the feminists' leading idea. Voting rights constituted only one part of this fight and were frequently seen rather as method of gaining more direct influence on the policy-making to enhance female liberation, than as liberation itself. Here the front was not united. Some women were not ready yet to use their voting rights positively. Women had to be educated by other women, to be able to understand their responsibilities.<sup>151</sup> Equality could not only be achieved by gaining voting rights but needed an extensive political education, as well as social, cultural and political engagement to define the woman's place in the society equal to the male. However, equal did not mean identical.<sup>152</sup> Early feminists were aware and supportive of the differences between the sexes as well as the differences between classes, and women were not considered as a homogenous group by them.<sup>153</sup>

Women organized themselves in various associations to support their feminist demands. The *National Women's Suffrage Association* was founded in the United States already in 1869. In 1904 the transnational *International Alliance of Women* was founded in Berlin, by Carrie Chapman Catt and other feminists, to support the fight for women's suffrage. Women were also organized together with men, for example in the Fabian society in Great Britain or in various labour movements, within which they frequently developed feminist strands. In Germany in 1894 the *Bund deutscher*

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<sup>149</sup> "Innokkaita Työntekijöitä." In: *Naisten ääni*, 1907.3, p. 33.

<sup>150</sup> Friberg, Maikki, "Naiset, äänioikeus ja puolueet." In: *Naisten ääni*, 1906.1, p. 3.

<sup>151</sup> "Innokkaita Työntekijöitä." In: *Naisten ääni*, 1907.3, p. 33ff.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> e.g. Key, Ellen, *Kvinnö-psykologi och kvinnlig logik*, Stockholm 1896, p. 6ff.

*Frauenvereine* [Federation of German Women's Clubs] was founded, which included up to 137 different women's organizations.

The Nordic countries, in comparison to their size and population, showed a great variety of different feminist organizations. In Denmark, for example, in 1871 *Dansk Kvindesamfundet* was founded. The national organization was not bound to any political party and fought for civil rights for women. In 1920, the organization had 8000 members.<sup>154</sup> A similar national women's organization can also be found in Norway, where in 1884 *Norsk kvinnesaksforening* was founded. The organization focused mainly on bourgeois women and their problems, like legal or employment rights.<sup>155</sup>

In Finland, *Suomen Naisyhdistys* [The Finnish Women's Association] was founded in 1884 mainly concerned with the struggle for suffrage. *Naisiasialiitto Unioni/Kvinnosaksförbundet Unionen*, established as a spin-off of *Suomen Naisyhdistys* in 1893, promoted equality and justice for Finnish women and aimed to encourage them to participate actively in society.<sup>156</sup> The already in the introduction introduced *Martha* organization (1899) was concerned with the matters of housewives. *Martha* offered practical household advice, for example cooking classes for housewives in Finland.<sup>157</sup> The women's organization of the Social Democratic Party *Työläisnaisliitto* [League of Labour Women, 1900] was directed towards working class women.<sup>158</sup>

Iceland had a strong, nationally and internationally active, feminism. The leader of the Icelandic movement was Bríet Bjarneheðinsdóttir (1856-1940), a journalist and publisher, who was a member of the city council of Reykjavik and published the journal *Kvennablaðið* [Women's Magazine]. In 1906, Bjarneheðinsdóttir spoke at the *International Woman Suffrage Alliance* in Copenhagen and gained international recognition.<sup>159</sup>

Sweden had a great amount of various feminist movements. Unorganized forms existed already in the 1860s and 1870s. A first organized association was the *Föreningen för gifta kvinnas eganrätt* (1873), led by the baroness Sophie Adlesperre.

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<sup>154</sup> Mannila-Haavio, Elina, "The Position of Women." In: Allardt, Erik, André, Nils, Friis, Erik J. (eds.), *Nordic Democracy. Ideas, Issues, and Institutions in Politics, Economy, Education, Social and Cultural Affairs of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden*, Copenhagen 1981, p. 562.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 564.

<sup>156</sup> Sulkunen, Irma, "Suffrage, Nation and Political Mobilisation – The Finnish Case in an International Context." In: Sulkunen, Irma, Nevala-Nurmi, Seija-Leena, Markkola, Pirjo, *Suffrage, Gender and Citizenship. International Perspectives on Parliamentary Reforms*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2009, p. 89.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>158</sup> Ollila, "Women's voluntary associations", p. 99- 100.

<sup>159</sup> Karlsson, Gunnar, *The History of Iceland*, London 2000, p. 277.

However, this organization was not concerned with the women's question as such but only with the married woman. The first organization, which directed its interest towards general women's questions was the *Fredrika-Bremer-förbundet*, founded in 1884. Its aim was to increase the women's emancipation morally, intellectually, socially and economically.<sup>160</sup> Another very active women's organization was the Swedish liberal women's union *Frisinnade Kvinnor*, founded in 1914, which showed a comparable great interest in eugenics. Members were prominent Swedish feminists like Elin Wägner, Ada Nilsson and Karin Hesselgren. The organizational programme of *Frisinnade Kvinnor* focused on the housing question, practical education of the young, care for the poor and children, as well as women's work in municipalities.<sup>161</sup>

These organizations were particularly responsible for introducing former private, female topics into policy-making. Ideas about social welfare for the poor, elderly and children or extending school education to the whole population were frequently introduced by feminist organizations. Many of the organizations had enacted their ideas philanthropically already for a long time but later became involved in political discussions to propose solutions for social problems and the introduction of social welfare on a national or municipal level. Fanny Hult, leader of *Martha* (1904-1924, *Finlands svenska Marthaförbund* 1925-1930) and editor of the organization's magazine *Husmodern* (1903-1922), argued that the aim of *Martha* was to instruct the housewife to provide a better home and better childcare, and to promote temperance and morality.<sup>162</sup>

The list of women's organizations founded at the turn of the century in the Nordic countries was nearly endless and the variety was great. Different classes, political orientations, religious views or social concerns formed their own organizations to bring forward their goals. Frequently the interests overlapped with other social movements of the time, for example the temperance movement or the labour movement. It would not be accurate to assume a unity of feminist movements at the turn of the century. The eugenic feminists I discuss were no exception. They represented only one part of the diversity of feminist thought during this period and cannot be considered representative of all women's activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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<sup>160</sup> Manns, Ulla, "Gender and Feminism in Sweden. The Fredrika Bremer Association." In: Paletschek, Sylvia, Pietrow-Ennker, Bianka, *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century. A European Perspective*, Stanford 2004, pp. 152-153.

<sup>161</sup> Nilsson, Ada, *Barrikaden valde oss. 25 år ur en kämpande förenings historia*, Stockholm 1940, pp. 38-39; Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, p. 165ff.

<sup>162</sup> Hult, Fanny, *Föreningen Martha*, Helsinki 1913, p. 4.

### 2.2.2. The Role of Individual Feminists

Though the analysis of women's organizations and whole movements is certainly interesting and fruitful, this study focuses rather on the ideas of individual feminists and emphasizes their achievements beyond organizations. I consider this more purposeful, because an organization always represents both a certain generalization of perceptions and a compromise. Furthermore, organizations were frequently led by an embracing ideology, for example temperance or socialism, which might not entirely correspond with the personal ideas of the individual members. Surely, most feminists were in one way or another associated with an organization. Nevertheless, by looking at them as individuals, the influence of their societal environment as well as a possible change in their views can be better made visible.

As already mentioned, eugenic feminists could broadly be located in the middle class. Eugenic feminists were particularly forthcoming in connecting women's rights with their role as mothers in the private and also the public sphere. The demand for women's rights were embedded in the idea of granting married women with children better civil rights, to increase their ability to be good mothers and raise the next generation of citizens.<sup>163</sup> This notion was class-orientated and mainly had the married middle class woman in mind, who was legally bound to her husband due to her status as an – in an economic sense – unproductive housewife.<sup>164</sup> Also, working class women's rights were a matter of concern. The prominent US-American birth control activist Margaret Sanger, who frequently used eugenic rhetoric, argued in her pamphlet *Family Limitation* (1917) that working class women should not have more than two children, because they would not be able to care for more. Furthermore, more children are often not wanted by working class women but the lack of care and hygiene in this class often did not prevent this, Sanger claims.<sup>165</sup> She ended with the idea that "women of intelligence who refuse to have children until they are ready for them, keep definite track of the date of their menstrual period."<sup>166</sup>

Sanger connected here the intelligence of a woman with the knowledge and understanding of her body. Due to the lack of safe contraception methods, she advised monitoring the menstrual cycle for fertile and infertile days, but also to ensure the health

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<sup>163</sup> e.g. Valverde, "'When the Mother of the Race'", p. 7; Repo, *Biopolitics*, p. 7-17/ p. 108-122.

<sup>164</sup> Repo, *Biopolitics*, p. 17.

<sup>165</sup> Sanger, Margaret, *Family Limitation*, Michigan 1917, p. 2.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



of the female body. A responsible or intelligent woman would know her body best, as Sanger argues. She controls it and has an advanced knowledge of what stage her body and mind has to be in to become a mother. Thus, being considered and planned mothers was a matter of intelligence and class. Not every woman, in particular a woman from the working class, was able to control her and her husband's sexuality and only have children when the social and economic circumstances were right. Here it must be pointed out that the perception of the lower classes differed in the United States, and also Great Britain, from the Nordic countries, as I demonstrate in chapter five. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, the working class was widely seen as the social and racial polluters.<sup>167</sup> I argue in the Nordic countries the lower classes were divided in the working class, which was not perceived as overall racially dangerous, and the under class, which was perceived as the clear cause for the decrease of the population quality due to their various genetic and social defects.

Yet, due to their participation in the labour market, the legal status of working class women was not entirely bound to their husbands and very different from that of the female middle class. Working class women were not necessarily freer, they were just differently dependent.<sup>168</sup> The role of eugenic feminism in the working class and other lower classes, and the definition of working class women through eugenic feminists will be discussed in chapter five. Here the focus shall be on the abstract and intellectual, maybe even utopic, perceptions of womanhood by international feminists.

The American feminist and writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) was born into a broken family – her father left her mother, herself and her older brother when she was a young child. Perkins Gilman was mainly brought up by her extended family, the Beechers, a family of intellectuals from New England, who provided her with some education and her first access to feminist ideas. In 1884, she married the artist Charles Walter Stetson and suffered from post-natal depression after the birth of her first child. The marriage was not happy, and she divorced in 1894. Perkins Gilman decided that her daughter should live with her former husband and his new wife, because she considered herself eugenically unfit to be a mother, due to her lifelong depression.<sup>169</sup> In

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<sup>167</sup> e.g. Cook, Hera, "Sexuality and Contraception in Modern England. Doing the History of Reproductive Sexuality." In: *Journal of Social History* 4 (2007), p. 917.

<sup>168</sup> e.g. Christensen, Rita, Jacobsen, Kirsten, Jensen, Inger Lise (et. al.), "Arbejderkvinder og uligeløn." In: Juhl, Lars (ed.), *Dansk arbejderklassens og arbejderbevægelsens. Historie. temanummer om forskning i dansk arbejderklassens og bevægelses historie*, Århus 1978 pp. 5-76.

<sup>169</sup> Ziegler, "Eugenic Feminism", p. 225.

1900 she married her cousin and remained happily married until his death in 1934. Perkins Gilman committed suicide in 1935 after being diagnosed with breast cancer three years earlier. Her most famous publication was the short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" which thematized the treatment of a mentally ill woman by her husband and doctors, with reference to her own experience of post-natal depression.<sup>170</sup>

Helene Stöcker (1869-1943) was among the first women in Germany to receive a doctorate. Born into a bourgeois, Protestant family, she became a Doctor of Philosophy in 1901. Her special interest was the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and Romanticism. The first German feminist movement from the late nineteenth century until the 1930s can, according to Sabine Hastedt, be divided into two groups. The first was working class women, who aimed for a general reorganization of society in the context of social revolution. The second was bourgeois feminists, who sought full emancipation within the existing economic and social system.<sup>171</sup> Stöcker was part of the radical-bourgeois wing. In 1909, she founded the *Bund für Mutterschutz* [Association for the Protection of Mothers], a forum in which she rather openly discussed sexuality and morality, and her pacifist ideas, which increased in particular shortly before the First World War. Motherhood and the social recognition of maternity was one of her leading topics. Although she lived for 25 years in a relationship with the lawyer Bruno Springer, she consciously decided against marriage and children.<sup>172</sup>

The Nordic countries might be seen as an especially notorious example of state intervention into private affairs. The benefits provided by Nordic welfare states from the 1930s onwards were widely accepted, together with a stronger intertwining of the private and the public sphere. It might not be by chance that Sweden, the role model for Nordic welfare, brought forth one of the leading but also most controversial feminists of this time, Ellen Key. It must be recognized as remarkable that a small country on the Northern periphery with a delay in industrial and social development, like Sweden in the mid-nineteenth century, produced such an internationally recognized and discussed feminist. Though Key was connected to other feminists on many issues, in particular her

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<sup>170</sup> Degler, Carl N., "Introduction to the Torchbook Edition." In: Perkins Gilman, Charlotte, *Women and Economics. A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Woman as a Factor in Social Evolution*, New York/ Boston 1898/1966, p. viii

<sup>171</sup> Hastedt, Sabine, "'Die große Bedeutung der Frau für die Menschheit liegt in der Mutterschaft.' Mutterrollen bei Helene Stöcker und Emmy Ball-Hennings." In: Guddat, Sarah, Hastedt, Sabine (eds.), *Geschlechterbilder im Wandel? Das Werk deutschsprachiger Schriftstellerinnen 1894-1945*, Frankfurt/Main 2011, p. 189.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 190ff.

emphasis of sexuality and the biological difference between man and woman set her apart and exposed her frequently to harsh criticism of other feminists.<sup>173</sup>

Though all three feminists lived and worked in Western societies, their national settings differed in some ways. All three had their most active periods at the turn of the century. At this point the United States, Perkins Gilman's home country, was marked by a rapid economic development and a strong growth of industry. This attracted in particular immigrants from the poorer parts of the Old World, Eastern and Southern Europe, to immigrate to America and seek work. The influx of cheap labour was received with great concern by many Americans, also Perkins Gilman, about the cultural, racial and social impacts of these immigrants, who were perceived as low quality. This concern peaked in the Johnson Act of 1924, which restricted immigration on racial grounds. The United States of Perkins Gilman must be understood as highly industrially developed but racially divided country through the history of Black Americans, slavery and the civil war.<sup>174</sup>

Sweden constituted the opposite of the United States. Around 1900 industrialization was still slow, and poverty was a common problem in Sweden. The country had a high level of emigration. Between 1850 and 1890 about 800,000 Swedes had immigrated to the United States.<sup>175</sup> The left-behind feared that the country would bleed dry and only the degenerated and not able-bodied would stay behind. In contrast to the United States the situation in Sweden was rather the fear of emigration of the able-bodied than immigration of the degenerated. Germany was positioned somewhere between these two extremes. By 1900 the country was extensively industrialized, however poverty was still great and many people also sought to emigrate. Furthermore, the political situation was tense. Germany participated actively in the First World War and the revolution and Weimar Republic afterwards brought neither economic nor political stability.<sup>176</sup>

Perkins Gilman, Stöcker and Key were significant, because their perception of the societal role of women was often controversial in the views of the leading feminist

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<sup>173</sup> Kinnunen, *Die Rezeption Ellen Keys*, p. 9.

<sup>174</sup> e.g. Stephenson, George M., *A History of American Immigration. 1820–1924*, New York 1964; Jacobson, Matthew Frye, *Whiteness of a Different Color. European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge 1999.

<sup>175</sup> Barton, Arnold H., *A Folk Divided. Homeland Swedes and Swedish Americans, 1840–1940*, Uppsala 1994, p. 37.

<sup>176</sup> e.g. Barton, *A Folk Divided*; Källemark, Ann-Sofie (ed.), *Utvandring. Den svenska emigrationen till Amerika i historiskt perspektiv*, Stockholm 1973; Broberg, "Scandinavia"; Kolb, Eberhard, *The Weimar Republic*, London 2005.

organizations in their countries, as show more in detail in the next section. Although their work predates the time scope of this thesis in some ways, they were indeed influential and inspirational for the feminists of the 1920s and 1930s. Ideas which were radical in the early period became self-evident later and allowed the feminists discussed here to implement their ideas on a practical level. All three, Perkins Gilman, Stöcker and Key, were intellectuals, writers and philosophers. They discussed feminist topics largely on an intellectual level with less direct impact on the actual life of the woman next door. However, their radical ideas served as intellectual foundation for the practical implementation of feminism through the second generation of first-wave feminists after the First World War. Without their demand for female education, many feminists of the second generation would not be able to become physicians and introduce women actively to birth control, health care and an understanding of the female body.<sup>177</sup>

### 2.2.3. The Concept of Race in Eugenic Feminism

Race was not only in the eugenic discourse but also in the eugenic feminist discussion a central concept. In the beginning of the twentieth century womanhood became vital in the discussion about evolution of the race.<sup>178</sup> The focus on population and the contribution of women to the development of the population by the eugenic feminists has contributed to this change. One of their main arguments for the enhancement of women's rights was that the political and societal limitation of women would contribute negatively to the race struggles of the age. Charlotte Perkins Gilman took a prominent position in the race and population discourse of eugenic feminism. In her book *Women and Eugenics* (1898) she criticized the economic dependence on the sexual partner, which can only be found among the human species.<sup>179</sup> She argued that:

For, in her [woman's] position of economic dependence in the sex-relation, sex-distinction is with her not only a means of attracting a mate, as with all creatures, but as means of getting her livelihood, as is the case with no other creature under heaven. Because of the economic dependence of the human female on her mate, she is modified to sex to an excessive degree. This excessive modification she transmits to her children; and so is steadily

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<sup>177</sup> e.g. Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, p. 101.

<sup>178</sup> Kline, Wendy, *Building a Better Race. Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2001, p. 8.

<sup>179</sup> Perkins Gilman, Charlotte, *Women and Economics. A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Woman as a Factor in Social Evolution*, New York/ Boston 1966, p. 5.

implanted in the human constitution the morbid tendency to excess in this relation.<sup>180</sup>

However, Perkins Gilman considered Social Darwinism as the way out of the dilemma. Social Darwinism served here as a justification for the socio-political emancipation of women. Perkins Gilman argued, according to Repo and as seen in the quotation above, that the economic and sexual dependency of women on the male species affects negatively the human and racial development. Female emancipation would have a positive contribution to the individual and racial level of humankind.<sup>181</sup>

In eugenic feminism, the concept of race was used to warn about the struggles Western societies currently experienced. This was connected to the overall concern about the decrease in the population quality and increase in the population quantity, at least among certain classes. The crisis of the population was not a specifically feminist topic but was widely seen as a social problem among Western nations in the early twentieth century.<sup>182</sup> However, eugenic feminists used this race struggle as argument for the enhancement of women's rights. They argued that women, eugenically favourable women, can only contribute to the struggle against the decay of the race when they receive equal civil rights. The demand for rights was not only related to suffrage but also to equal status in marriage, inheritance rights, and economic independence. The extension of civil rights for women would provide them with a better political and societal foundation to fulfil their national duty of being a mother and raising the next generation of citizens.<sup>183</sup>

Cecily Devereux shows that US feminists interested in eugenics divided womanhood mainly into two groups. There was, on the one hand, the mother of the race who contributed with her maternal and reproductive ability to society. On the other hand, there was the New Woman, who stood in opposition to racial motherhood, with her aim to overcome gender-based restrictions, demands for higher education or the combination of motherhood and work.<sup>184</sup> In the Nordic countries, eugenic feminists added a third

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<sup>180</sup> Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>181</sup> Repo, *Biopolitics of Gender*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>182</sup> e.g. Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 10ff.

<sup>183</sup> e.g. Repo, *Biopolitics*. 16ff.

<sup>184</sup> Devereux, *Growing a Race*, p. 22.

category, the under class woman who lacked the mental ability or supportive environment to use her reproductive function beneficially, as the next chapter shows.<sup>185</sup>

The mother of the race was a dutiful mother, not only in the upbringing of her children but also in considering when and how many children she should have. In this decision, she did not only consider herself, but also the societal impact of her procreation. She would ask herself, before conceiving, how many children could my husband's work feed? Do I have the mental and physical strength to give birth and raise a healthy child? Are there any reasons, for example genetic defects, in my family or my husband's family which would prevent me from having a healthy child? Motherhood became a patriotic and national cause, as Turda argues. The birth of a child should contribute to the strengthening of the nation. Thus, it was not a private matter anymore but a major concern of the state.<sup>186</sup>

The family and reproduction were central to the eugenic discourse overall. The fear of the decline in population quality was connected to concerns about the situation and the status of the family in society. The US-sociologist Patricia Hill Collins argues that eugenic thinking had a direct impact on US social policy in the interwar period to ensure the public health of the nation: official family planning advice followed eugenic ideas.<sup>187</sup> Women were central in the process of developing a new social policy focused on the family. Feminists, not only in the US but also in other Western countries, took part in transforming the role of the caring mother and wife in the private sphere to the mother of the nation or of the race.

To sum up, eugenic feminism was not a straightforward ideology or movement but once again shaped by various factors like the national setting, social standing, or profession of the feminists. Also, the perception of how a eugenic woman should be was diverse. However, they were united in the idea that motherhood was the defining characteristic of a woman. Motherhood provided women with a great responsibility, because their reproductive ability was decisive for the betterment of the race. Yet, motherhood was lifted to a higher level, from being a private to a public matter, even to be a national cause. Women contributed with their reproduction to the

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<sup>185</sup> e.g. Andreen-Svedberg, Andrea, *Preventivmedel. Bilaga X. Betänkande i sexualfrågan*, (SOU 1936:59), p. 323; Kjellberg, Gerda, Nilsson, Ada, "Dyrköpta själar." In: *Tidevarvet* 1926.29, p. 4.

<sup>186</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>187</sup> Hill Collins, Patricia, "It's all in the Family. Intersections of Gender, Race and Nation." In: *Hypatia* 13/3 (1998), p. 71.

strengthening of the nation.<sup>188</sup> Eugenic feminists argued in this context that women who were responsible mothers must be granted equal civil rights to men to be able to fulfil their role as mother of the race to their fullest.<sup>189</sup>

Still, eugenic feminists used this argumentation also to exclude other women from civil rights. Women were not a homogenous group. The ones being reckless with their reproductive ability were not seen as qualified for equal rights. Often eligibility as a eugenic mother was not granted to an individual but in the context of a group based on social categories, like class, education, age, sexuality or ability. Eugenic feminists used biological aspects to argue for women's rights which appeared to strengthen their case in science-based and expert-driven societies in the early twentieth century. This chapter was aimed as a brief introduction to eugenic feminism in the international context. However, in the next two chapters, I provide a more detailed discussion about the different types of women; *Modern and New Women*, *Eugenic Woman* and *Eugenically Excluded Woman*, as defined by eugenic feminists in the Nordic countries and their positioning in the struggle of the race, the population crisis and the nation.

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<sup>188</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 59.

<sup>189</sup> e.g. Klaus, Alisa, "Depopulation and Race Suicide. Maternalism and Pronatalist Ideologies in France and the United States." In: Koven, Seth, Michel, Sonya (eds.), *Mothers of the New World. Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare State*, London/New York 1993, pp. 188-212; Devereux, *Growing a Race*.

### 3. The Modern Woman, the New Woman and the Eugenic Woman

#### 3.1. Conceptualization of Modern and New Women

In 1922, Maja Björkman-Broberg, a member of the female workers organization in Sweden, proclaimed in the organization's magazine *Morgonbris* the emerging of the new independent woman of the twentieth century, the New Woman. She argued that the New Woman knew what she wanted in private, public and in the working life. She could have any occupation she wished, as lawyer, physician or politician. The overcoming of the old ideals and the development of a new confidence of women had made thousands of women being able to take care of themselves through the independent participation on the labour market, Björkman-Broberg claimed.<sup>190</sup> She stated that this was a European phenomenon. In the United States women were still willing to dedicate their lives to home and husband. However, the war in Europe forced women into industrial work and likewise into self-sufficiency, which they won't give up for a subordinated position. The New Woman looked for something else in a man than just an economic provider. He should be a companion, who stimulated her intellectually and cared for her with love. The woman itself became more important for herself and the caring for the man is less on her mind, Björkman-Broberg argued.<sup>191</sup>

In this chapter I discuss the development of the New Woman in the Nordic context: a woman situated in modernity, aware of its possibilities and limitations. The New Woman was not one type of woman but showed great differentiations due to class, age, civil status or location. I argue that the New Woman was primarily an urban woman, who was introduced to the Western, urban, modern living standards when she moved from the countryside to the city to seek employment. Or she was based in the urban middle class, educated and well-off, in the search for a professional career. Some variations of the New Woman were seen as eugenically favourable, others not, but all of them tried to adapt their lifestyle to the modern society.

The patriarchal role of women in Nordic societies was rooted in an agricultural patriarchal family structure. Their workplace was the domestic sphere. They cared for home and family and worked on the farm. Their societal and legal status was based on their civil status as married women. Unmarried women either stayed in the parental household or could seek domestic work in other households. Industrialization

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<sup>190</sup> Björkman-Broberg, Maja, "Åktenskapets revolution i det tjugone århundrat." In: *Morgonbris*, 1922.10, p. 2.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.



provided them with new possibilities for work in industries. Especially the textile and tobacco industries were dominated by female workers.<sup>192</sup>

However, as the Swedish historian Ronny Ambjörnsson describes, the institution of marriage was in crisis already in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1845 only one third of Swedish women in small towns were married and about one quarter in the Stockholm area.<sup>193</sup> In the 1870s, female labour was still concentrated mainly in the family household and agriculture. Only 5.5% of Swedish women worked in service and 1% in other occupations, for example the textile industry.<sup>194</sup> The introduction of new technology, like the post and telegraph service, created new employment possibilities for women. Around 1900, thirty per cent of women had employment outside the house and the majority of workers in the area of new technologies were women. Thus, still 45% of married women were not employed on the labour market in Sweden.<sup>195</sup> The situation in Sweden was widely similar to the other Nordic countries. Denmark and Sweden might be considered as slightly more advanced from an industrial point of view, but Norway and Finland did not lack far behind.

Tone Hellesund argues in this context that the unmarried woman became the new woman. She shows that from the mid-nineteenth century onwards unmarried women were increasingly considered as social problem in Norway. However, that was also true in most other Nordic and Western societies. Hellesund continues that especially unmarried middle class women became a problem, since they lacked of work opportunities and were condemned to an unoccupied life as guest of their families. According to Hellesund, the industrialization and urbanization created the problem and it was reinforced by the development of the nuclear family which was defined by the clear division of gender roles. The spinster, as Hellesund called her, did not desire to be in the private sphere of the bourgeois housewife and mother, because it was not her place to be. She pushed into the public sphere of the men and challenged in this way the masculine domain.<sup>196</sup>

The new woman was a woman who challenged the patriarchal gender order. This could be through her civil status, as shown by Ambjörnsson and Hellesund.

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<sup>192</sup> e.g. Markkola, "Women in Rural Society", p. 20ff.

<sup>193</sup> Ambjörnsson, Ronny, *Samhällsmodern. Ellen Keys kvinnouppfattning till och med 1896*, Gothenburg 1974, p. 5.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>196</sup> Hellesund, Tone, "Querring the Spinsters. Single Middle Class Women in Norway, 1880-1920." In: *Journal of Homosexuality*, 54/1-2 (2008), pp. 23-24.

However, there were also other possibilities for women to challenge the society and become the New Woman. As I show in the following, class was one social category which was leading in threatening patriarchy but also sexuality, disability or to a certain extent race were important categories in creating the phenomenon of the New Woman, who deconstructed masculinity and contributed to the rise of the female.<sup>197</sup>

The general perception is that Nordic societies look back on a long history of equal relations between men and women, and a strong integration of women into public life. Finnish historian Pirjo Markkola traces the role of the strong, modern woman in the Nordic countries back to its rural structures. She shows that in 1910 only ten per cent of Finnish women worked in industry but 75% worked mainly in agriculture. These numbers changed only very slowly, so that even in 1940, still sixty per cent of the female labour force worked in agriculture.<sup>198</sup> The majority of Finnish and also other Nordic women at the turn of the century and even in the interwar period did not live in the industrial or urban centres but in the rural parts of the countries. Though the Finnish *Employment Act* of 1922 and *Marriage Act* of 1929 enabled women to seek employment and achieve a certain independence from their husbands or families, the lives of most women were still dominated by rural, patriarchal structures rather than the ideals of modernity.<sup>199</sup> In Iceland in 1890, for instance, about 88% of the population lived in a rural setting. This decreased steadily but in 1923 still fifty per cent lived in the countryside.<sup>200</sup> However, marriage was not as common as in the other Nordic countries, since the poor relief system in Iceland prevented marriage of former paupers and cohabitation was a frequent form of family formation.<sup>201</sup> Yet, the capitals were growing centres of their countries; Copenhagen had a population of 500,000 inhabitants, Stockholm 400,000, Oslo 250,000, Helsinki 100,000 and Reykjavik 10,000 after the turn of the century.<sup>202</sup>

Marriage was a decisive status for women. Though unmarried women achieved more extensive legal rights earlier than in other countries and were able to participate in the labour market, marriage, leading to a role as housewife and mother, was

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<sup>197</sup> e.g. Witt-Bratström, Ebba, "Introduction. The New Woman Specter in Modernist Aesthetics." In: Witt-Bratström, Ebba (ed.), *The New Woman and the Aesthetic Opening. Unlocking Gender in the Twentieth-Century Texts*, Huddinge 2004, p. 6.

<sup>198</sup> Markkola, "Women in Rural Society", p. 18.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>200</sup> Karlsson, *History of Iceland*, p. 252.

<sup>201</sup> Eydal, Gudny Björk, *Family Policy in Iceland 1944- 1984*, Göteborg 2005, p. 51.

<sup>202</sup> Broberg, "Scandinavia", p. 3.

still promoted as the primary occupation for women.<sup>203</sup> However, during industrialization this perception and the position of women in the modern society were questioned. Was the current status of a married woman, who was legally bound to her husband, still suitable for modern society or did this need to be adjusted? This led to further questions: who would be a valuable woman in a capitalist, productive-orientated society and who would create a problem to this modernized social order?

Industrialization shaped the societal role of unmarried women in particular at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the Nordic countries. Women from the new working class and lower middle class were now able to seek work outside their parental homes and farms. New industries, such as textile and tobacco production, employed these women but paid low wages. Though unmarried women could seek employment now and develop a degree of economic independence, this did not mean that their wages were sufficient for a safe or comfortable economic status.<sup>204</sup> In her book *Kvinnohygien II*, Karolina Widerström discussed the trouble young Swedish women had finding sufficient employment and blamed their frequent fall into prostitution on low female wages.<sup>205</sup> Unmarried women were frequently employed in unskilled, low-wage work, like service or the textile industry. This work often did not provide them with a steady income and it was not uncommon that these young women, especially when they had illegitimate children, needed to raise extra funds, for example through prostitution. This problem was of great concern to many eugenic feminists, as I discuss in chapter 5.

### 3.1.1. The New Woman as Eugenic Problem

I suggest that the New Woman stood in some ways in opposition to the here a little bit later discussed modern, eugenic woman, who sought independence within patriarchal structures. Both types of women must certainly be considered constructs and idealizations of the types. They were constructed not only by the political and economic discourse but in particular by the feminist debate on the need to redefine the female role in modernized societies. The eugenic-interested parts of the feminist movements used these idealized types of women to enhance the woman's place in the modern society. The eugenic woman

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<sup>203</sup> e.g. Eskelin, Karolina, *Personlig hälsövård med särskild hänsyn till bostad*, Helsinki 1925, p. 86; Dederding, Dida, *Sundhedslære for unge kvinder*, Copenhagen 1941, p. 7; Mohr, Tove, *Katti Anker Møller. En banbryter*, Oslo 1968, p. 59; Boalt, Carin, "Familjeekonomi." In: Myrdal, Alva, Wigforss, Eva, Höjer, Signe (eds.), *Kvinnan, familjen och samhället*, Stockholm 1938, p. 168.

<sup>204</sup> e.g. Ambjörnsson, *Samhällsmodern*, p. 7ff.

<sup>205</sup> Widerström, Karolina, *Kvinnohygien II. Om den veneriska sjukdomarna och deras bekämpande*, Stockholm 1905, p. 27.

constituted the ideal woman, who, with her reproductive function, contributed to the modern society in a natural, feminine way. The New Woman on the other hand could constitute an antithesis, focused on her own interest, denying her natural responsibility and seeking her own pleasure.

It is necessary now to define the New Woman to be able to set her in opposition to the eugenic woman, discussed in a later chapter. The conceptualization of the New Woman described not only one type of woman but demonstrated a wide range of characteristics women in modern societies could have. The New Woman was in fact not one woman, or one type of woman, but rather characterized through a vast number of primarily social characteristics which worked against her perceived natural role as mother.

In her discussion of eugenic feminism and the New Woman in Great Britain, Angelique Richardson argues that eugenic feminists, like the writer Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), described the New Woman as being concerned about poverty, sickness and health, national efficiency, labour capacity and the changing role of woman.<sup>206</sup> Richardson continues that the Irish writer and feminist Sarah Grand (1854- 1943) showed herself troubled with the New Woman. Though, she supported the ideas Schreiner had developed about a modern and socially-conscious woman, she worried that the New Woman had lost her femininity and female charm. Grand demanded that women should get rid of their Victorian silliness and hysteria but keep their female manner and seek self-improvement within marriage.<sup>207</sup> Looking at the discussion of the New Woman by English-speaking, feminist writers, it demonstrates the fluidity of the concept of the New Woman. Despite feminists like Schreiner, showed a positive attitude towards a modernized lifestyle of women participating in the public life. Others, like Grand, also worried that modernity and a modern lifestyle would decrease the femininity of women. Women should be modern, but feminine and embrace their femininity in a modern way. The New Woman did not find satisfaction in previous female roles but sought to adapt her female role to modern ways of life. This could be done in several ways, eugenically beneficial or not, as I will show.

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<sup>206</sup> Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 4.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Yvonne Hirdman describes the concept of the New Woman as a woman whose body had been disconnected from motherhood.<sup>208</sup> This could take place in many ways. The highest type of New Woman was the emancipated woman, who took her liberation by drinking, smoking, dancing, driving and riding a horse like a man. The lowest type was the loose woman who threatened the married woman with her shameful body, seduction and illegitimate children, for example the prostitute.<sup>209</sup> However, all the different types of New Woman were united in their exploitation of the sexual aspects of their bodies and not the motherly ones. The sexual attributes of the New Woman were the source of her power and threatened the married woman in her traditional environment, bound to the home. The eugenic woman, who usually appeared as a married woman, stood against the New Woman by defining herself as guard against the latter's recklessness and promiscuity.<sup>210</sup> Motherhood, and in particular the concept of social motherhood, that is, bearing the children of the whole nation, was the antithesis of the selfish, unfeminine New Woman.

Contemporaries also defined these types of women as New Woman and problematized their societal misbehaviour. Ellen Key argued that the New Woman "[...] wants to live by herself, with herself, for herself, which peaks when she starts to consider the man only as a method to have children!"<sup>211</sup> In 1905, Karolina Widerström defined three types of New Woman in her discussion about prostitution. The first type was the abnormal woman. Her abnormality was shown by being sexually degenerated, criminal and abusing substances.<sup>212</sup> This degeneration was based on heredity and there was not much society could do about these women other than to reduce their visibility in society. The second type was the mindless and lazy woman.<sup>213</sup> This type of New Woman was often portrayed as young girl, moved from a rural to an urban setting, frequently employed in service. This woman was dazzled by the possibilities and persuasions of the city and attracted by the perceived luxurious lifestyle which led her to immoral behaviour, like dancing, drinking and sex. She was often searching for a social position beyond her

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<sup>208</sup> Hirdman Yvonne, "When Anaïs Nin met Alva Myrdal, or Modernism and Woman Power." In: Sogner, Sølvi, Hagemann, Gro (eds.), *Women's Politics and Women in Politics. In Honour of Ida Blom*, Oslo/Bergen 2000, p. 152.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>211</sup> "[...] vilja att lefva genom sig själf, med sig själf, för sig själf när sin spets när hon nu börjat betrakta mannen endast som – medel för barnet!" Key, Ellen, *Lifslinjer I*, Stockholm 1903, p. 153.

<sup>212</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, p. 27.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

status and disregarded suitable men for marriage in the hunt for something better.<sup>214</sup> The third type of New Woman, who endangered the nation from the point of view of eugenics, was the abandoned and hard-working woman. She did not become a eugenic polluter by choice but was forced into this position by economic and social circumstances. She might have been abandoned by her husband or become the family bread-winner for other reasons. This woman was a victim of her environment. Her status as eugenic polluter could be prevented by a better social and economic protection of women in society.<sup>215</sup>

The two types of New Woman most threatening to the eugenic status of a society must be considered the abnormal one and the lazy, mindless one, because they endangered the female liberation achieved by feminists beforehand. In 1907, the Danish writer Thit Jensen warned about the abuse of the new female rights and freedom by some women. She noted that female liberation was not limitless and must be countered with respect and modesty. Freedom does not mean misuse of rights but use with seriousness, Jensen demanded in her article in the Danish women's magazine *Kvinden og Samfundet*.<sup>216</sup> The first two types of Widerström's New Woman misused the female liberation. In this way, they uprooted the aim of female liberation and rights from their originals, altruistic purpose of saving the nation and used it for their selfish aims and pleasures, which would harm the nation from a eugenic point of view.

In Finland for example, the status of women and the idea of what constituted a good woman were still primarily based on their rural background, according to Anneli Anttonen. Maternalism played a decisive role in the societal perception of Finnish women.<sup>217</sup> The stereotype of the Finnish woman was the strong country woman who worked side by side with men.<sup>218</sup> Anttonen argues that in the nineteenth century the societal status of Finnish women was rather defined by work in their rural community than motherhood. The rurally organized society perceived women not foremost as mothers but as members of the agricultural household, in which motherhood was only one of a woman's tasks. Anttonen continues that the twentieth century showed a transformation of the female role. Though the majority of Finns still lived in rural communities, the new national consciousness led to a reformation of the civil status of the

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<sup>214</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, p. 31.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>216</sup> Jensen, Thit, "Misforstaaet Frisind." In: *Kvinden og Samfundet*, 1907.17, pp. 135-137.

<sup>217</sup> Anttonen, Anneli, "The Female Working Citizen. Social Rights, Work and Motherhood in Finland." In: *Kvinder, køn og forskning* 10/2 (2001), p. 34.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

Finnish people. The new democratic order with general suffrage reshaped the role of men and women and the demand for active citizens increased. Thus, the role of citizens remained gendered. Men became active citizens in the public sphere, women became mother citizens. The active role of women in the civil society was based on their role as moral agents and their activity in social and health organizations.<sup>219</sup>

The transformation of Finnish women from rural women into the mother citizens was certainly not exemplary for all Nordic women, especially since Finland kept its rural structures longest of all the Nordic countries and became an independent nation only in 1917 after longstanding foreign domination. The majority of Nordic women were neither urbanized nor modern, and the modernization of the role of women in Nordic societies was of great interest in society and especially to Nordic feminists. Nordic women did not only enter the public sphere during industrialization, like in most Western countries, but also reached decisive positions in political, economic and social decision-making earlier than elsewhere in the Western world. Women were not only visible but they were also active in previously male-exclusive spheres, especially in workplaces outside the home but also in political decision-making or educational institutions, which divided them from their sisters elsewhere.<sup>220</sup> Still, the number of influential women was low, despite their higher visibility. I will now show how this modernization of women was partly considered a eugenic threat to the overall modernization and development of society, and how feminists played a role in the creation of the myth of the modern, New Woman as eugenic threat, starting with the family.

### 3.1.2. The Family as Heart of the Nation

The family, the smallest community of society, was considered the heart of the nation by many modern contemporaries across political and social spheres. Eugenic feminists understood the family to be an important part of society.<sup>221</sup> In 1938, the Swedish social reformer and feminist, Alva Myrdal argued that not only in agricultural but also in industrial society, the family constitutes the most important social setting.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Anttonen, "The Female Working Citizen", p. 37.

<sup>220</sup> Mannila-Haavio, "The Position of Women", p. 555; Anttonen, Anneli, "Universalism and Social Policy. A Nordic-Feminist Revaluation." In: NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research 10/2 (2002), p. 73; Julkonen, Raija, "Women in the Welfare State." In: Manninen, Merja, Setälä, Päivi (eds.), *The Lady with the Bow. The Story of Finnish Women*, Helsinki 1990, p. 142.

<sup>221</sup> Dederding, *Sundhedslære*, p. 56.

<sup>222</sup> Myrdal, Alva, "Swedish Women in Industry and Home." In: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 5 (1938), p. 217.

Nevertheless, the idea of the family was different in the modern society. The agricultural family was patriarchal and extended, including several generations and usually a large number of children. The modern, industrialized family was a small, nuclear family consisting of father, mother and two to three children. The agricultural family took over the role of employer and carer for its members. However, as Myrdal explained, during industrialization this role was taken over by the community:

An extensive system of medical care, sickness insurance, old age pensions, and institutional care for the physically and mentally handicapped and the invalids, has liberated the family household from a heavy burden of work but has of course also diminished the family's 'importance', if the latter is regarded from the angle of expediency.<sup>223</sup>

Social modernization had a strong impact on the family and its responsibilities. In the new, smaller families, women did not have the same workplace and structures of dependency. Before industrialization, the family, and with that often the women of a family, had been responsible for the care of the sick, the children and the elderly. When these tasks began to be taken over by the state, the family as carer for the individual lost its importance, as Myrdal described in the quote above. Since women often took over the care work in the family, they were frequently harder affected by the social changes which transmitted responsibilities from the family to the state.<sup>224</sup> Tasks which were done by women in agricultural families, like food preparation, making clothing, or extensive care work, were now partly be taken over by industry or eased through new technological inventions. The smaller families and the invention of modern household products after the First World War, like the electricity, refrigerator or washing machines, minimized the demands on the housewife<sup>225</sup>. It was possible, and often even necessary, especially for working class women, to seek employment outside the house.<sup>226</sup>

As a result marriage was not the only option for women anymore to become independent from their families. In the eyes of young women, the benefits of being a dependent wife and housewife seemed low in comparison to the advantages of an economically and socially independent woman. The traditional family in a modern setting as heart of the nation seemed to be threatened by the New Woman.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Myrdal, "Swedish Women in Industry and Home", pp. 218-219.

<sup>224</sup> e.g. Hallsten, Ilmi, *Die Stellung der Frau in Finnland*, Helsinki 1928, p. 10-11.

<sup>225</sup> e.g. Asplund, Gahn, Markelison, *Acceptera*, p. 47ff.

<sup>226</sup> e.g. Hallsten, *Stellung der Frau*, pp. 8-11.

<sup>227</sup> e.g. Cogdell, *Eugenic Design*, p. 41ff.



Besides social modernization, the rise of the modern New Woman as national threat was also stimulated by industrialization and economic development. The Swedish feminist Ellen Key argued in 1909 that women's traditional work gives them a much higher cultural and emotional status than men, but industrial work robs them of their superordinate abilities.<sup>228</sup> Key considered the problems forced on women by industrialization to be class-related. She warned that the economic need of the lower classes, fewer marriage possibilities, and the decreased demands of housework, all forced women out of their natural environment, the home, into industrial work. This had consequences not only for the women themselves but for the whole family. The home missed the warm and unifying force of the housewife, which drove the children out on the street and the husband to drink away his salary.<sup>229</sup>

Key defined the woman here through her role as mother, wife and housewife as the centre of the family. If the woman, by choice or by force, did not take up her natural role as carer of the family, not only the family but the nation was at stake. The loss of the mother and housewife as creator of a home for husband and children would have serious consequences for society. Key gave women the responsibility of providing their husbands with a comfortable and warm home, so that they would not give in into their inferior habits of a dissolute lifestyle of drinking and not working.

Furthermore, not only the present but also the future lay in the woman's hands. When the woman did not fulfil her maternal duties, the upbringing of the next generation citizen was neglected. Key put it solely in the hands of the mother to raise her children to the next responsible citizens and keep them away from the harm and danger of the streets. She believed that the cultural and emotional superiority of the woman provides her by nature with this role.<sup>230</sup> Consequently, when the woman as mother was overtaken by the modern New Woman, not only her own future, but also the future of her husband and children and of her entire family as the core of the nation, was at stake. In this way, the downfall of the role of mother in industrialized society led to the downfall of the whole nation. Thus, Key laid the future of the nation in the hands of the woman as mother. In contrast, the modern New Woman, without interest in her natural and national duties, endangered the success of the nation.

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<sup>228</sup> Key, Ellen, *Die Frauenbewegung*, Frankfurt/ Main 1909, p. 12; Styrbárdóttir, *From Feminism to Class Politics*, p. 41.

<sup>229</sup> Key, *Frauenbewegung*, p. 38.

<sup>230</sup> Key, *Kvinno-psykologi*, pp. 8-12; Key, *Frauenbewegung*, p. 33.

### 3.1.3. The New Woman – A National Threat without Choice

As seen by Key, the modern New Woman took her role not only by choice but frequently through external, societal force, also enacted by the eugenic parts of the feminist movement.<sup>231</sup> Though other eugenic feminists, like Karolina Widerström, also argued that some women neglected their natural duties due to selfishness, laziness and the wish for a more luxurious life, they were united in the idea that industrialization put a particular strain on women's lives and created a force which would destroy the societal order from its core, the family.<sup>232</sup> This argument was not only related to gender but also to class. The neglect of the mother's role through selfishness was attributed to middle and upper class women, who had a choice not to become mothers due to a greater access to contraception and also due to better living conditions, which did not necessarily require them to get married or have children.<sup>233</sup> The desire for a more luxurious life was attributed in particular to working class girls, who lacked social security due to their low paid work in labour or service. In the eyes of some feminists, these women sought other ways of making money, such as prostitution, in order to climb the social ladder.<sup>234</sup>

The New Woman and her perceived rejection or neglect of her natural duties caused a dilemma for the eugenic feminist movement. As Helga Maria Hernes describes, as result of industrialization and capitalization the modern welfare state transformed reproduction from a mostly private matter to also an increasingly political concern.<sup>235</sup> Hernes argues that the traditional female reproductive role was professionalized and politicized. Had the woman previously been dependent on the man, she was now dependent on the state.<sup>236</sup> Hernes claims further that through this transformation women were mainly seen as mother citizens. Men were defined through their labour as citizen workers but the female role was not defined through their activity on the labour market but through their passive, nature-given role as reproducers. Hernes argues that this role of women as mothers was protected and supported by the paternalistic welfare state.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Key, *Frauenbewegung*, p. 10.

<sup>232</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, pp. 27-30.

<sup>233</sup> Jacobsen, Jo, *Fosterfordrivelsesparagraffen § 241. Tvangsfødsel eller forebyggelse*, Copenhagen 1930, p. 7.

<sup>234</sup> e.g. Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, p. 27ff; Aas Ingeborg, "Alkohol og hjemmet." In: Aas, Ingeborg, Holdhus, A., Høye, Bjarne (eds.), *Lærebok i alkoholspørsmålet*, Oslo 1935, pp. 57–62; Lionæs, Aase, Skaug, Arne, *Dør vi ut? Befolkningsspørsmålet og Arbeiderbevegelsen*, Oslo 1936, p. 1ff; Jacobsen, Jo, *Seksualreform. En social fremstilling af populær seksualoplysning*, Copenhagen 1932, p. 137ff.

<sup>235</sup> Hernes, *Welfare State and Woman Power*, p. 54.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

This conclusion of a gendered citizenship as end result must be certainly considered correct. However, I think, it is important to take a step back and consider who put forward the definition of women as mother citizen during the time of the development of the welfare state. The role of women as recipients and men as participants in the welfare state was not, or at least not merely, forced on women through external pressures of the patriarchal structures but indeed supported by the argumentation and demands of the eugenic feminists to look at the societal position of women foremost through their reproductive role, and not their productive role in society. Strengthening the importance of the reproductive female role for the nation was part of the modernization of the female, societal role by eugenic feminists. I argue that the mother citizen, as proposed by Hernes, correlated with the eugenic mother or the mother of the race. In other words, the eugenic mother citizen gained her civil rights through her reproductive function, contributing to the national success just as the man did through his productive function. I suggest that the eugenic ideology of selective breeding supported this gendered notion of citizenship by emphasizing the importance of reproduction, in particular the female role in it, for the well-being of a nation in modernity. The system of gendered citizenship in Nordic welfare state, as described by Hernes, can to some extent find its origins in the widespread eugenic thinking of the interwar period in particular.

Yet again, class was a key factor here; the maternal argumentation and emphasis on traditional, but modernized family, was put forward in particular by eugenic feminists based in the middle class. The New Woman, worldly and independent in various ways, constituted a threat through the unproductive, dependent status of the middle class woman in society. The role of working class women was not only defined through their reproductive function but mostly through their labour market participation.<sup>238</sup> The societal role of rural women was demarcated through their plan in the agricultural production process as well as the traditional, patriarchal family.<sup>239</sup> However, what was the role of modern, middle class women in society? They were neither productive on the labour market nor as such productive in the family, since, as the Finnish feminist Ilmi Hallsten warned, women were robbed of their occupation. She noticed that:

More and more women were forced to look for work outside the house –the new era made this necessary. Now the women's movement was responsible for the task of solving problems and alleviating misery, which can be seen

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<sup>238</sup> e.g. Christensen, Jacobsen, Jensen (et.al.), "Arbejderkvinder", p. 26ff.

<sup>239</sup> e.g. Markkola, "Women in Rural Society", pp. 17-20.

as consequences of the difficulties in home and life brought about by the changes in the national economic situation.<sup>240</sup>

Hallsten claimed that economic development, which means for her in particular the industrialization, created a new misery among women. Hallsten further hinted that society or the state showed no interest in providing space in the public sphere for women. Male-led societies were not interested in the situation of women. Women themselves had to fight for their rights and resolve their misery created by the patriarchal national economy.<sup>241</sup> This is an argument which we have heard frequently before, and it dominated the discourse. Women were presented as victims of industrialization and capitalism.<sup>242</sup>

As I have shown, eugenic feminists believed that working class women were the greatest victims. While middle class women could choose to deny motherhood and go to work but working class women were forced into the double role of mothers and workers.<sup>243</sup> From a eugenic feminist point of view, this was most concerning: working class women were highly reproductive but the breeding outcome was seen as low, due to severe living conditions. They sought to counter this by demanding civil rights based on maternity and state protective measures, like health care or maternity leave. For the middle class, these measures were not seen to be as important as strengthening the role of women within marriage to make motherhood and marriage more appealing than the independence of the labour market. In contrast, the under class was seen as not worth strengthening at all, as I show a little bit later.

#### 3.1.4. The Eugenic Argument against the New Woman

Jemima Repo argues in her discussion of gender in biopolitics that maternal feminists used the eugenic argument to bring forward political rights and socio-economic independence for women.<sup>244</sup> Nonetheless, this argument cannot be made for all women but only for those who were seen as unproductive in the economic sense but were so far excluded from many rights since they were not participating on the labour market. I argue

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<sup>240</sup> "In immer größerem Umfang wurden die Frauen gezwungen sich außer Haus Arbeit und Verdienst zu suchen, - das war eine durch die neue Zeit bedingte Notwendigkeit. Nun lag die Aufgabe, Probleme zu lösen, Übelstände zu lindern vor der Frauenbewegung, die man also teilweise als Folgeerscheinung jener Schwierigkeiten ansehen kann, die durch die veränderten nationalökonomischen Verhältnisse sich auf häuslichem Gebiet und im Lebenslauf angehäuft hatten." Hallsten, *Stellung der Frau*, p. 11.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., p. 11 ff/ 32.

<sup>242</sup> Styrkársdóttir, *From Feminism to Class Politics*, p. 40ff.

<sup>243</sup> Christensen, Jacobsen, Jensen (et.al.), "Arbejderkvinder", p. 26.

<sup>244</sup> Repo, *Biopolitics of Gender*, p. 18.

that eugenic feminists claimed the reproductive function of women as productive in an economic sense, to provide the unproductive women of their class with a better place in the modern society. They must naturally have perceived the New Woman as a threat. The New Woman established her own independent place in society through her productivity and not through her reproduction. In the eyes of eugenic feminists, she thus denied her natural duty of motherhood and sought independence through the male category of production and not the female societal role of reproduction.<sup>245</sup> She modernized herself and sought her place in modernity actively by being part of the production process.

Why was the New Woman, who already adapted to the new societal situation, perceived as eugenic threat and thus a threat to the well-being and forthcoming of the nation? Like Hallsten and Key before, in the 1930s Alva Myrdal saw still the heart of the problem in the shift of the site of production from the home to industry, and from the family to the individual. She considered this as a problem for women, whose societal position and workplace were historically connected to the family. Marriage and the connected task of housewifery and motherhood, previously the main life and work task for women, were not life-shaping as such anymore.<sup>246</sup> Myrdal countered that the family still fulfilled various important functions in society. It protected, educated, recreated and created an economic, biological, sexual and personal space.<sup>247</sup>

The eugenic feminists supported the idea that the family must continue to constitute the smallest community of the nation. The role of the woman in this construct was complex, in particular in the development of the welfare state. Sociologists Barbara Hobson and Marika Lindholm claim that women were objects not subjects in welfare policy-making. They continue that women must be seen as weak actors with no fixed power resources. Hobson and Lindholm argue that in early twentieth-century Sweden, motherhood was the first experience which unified women beyond class boundaries and led to the first influence on policy-making through the foundation of women's organizations in the 1930s.<sup>248</sup> Motherhood was indeed a decisive identity marker for women in the development of their political consciousness, but class divisions remained real. I argue that the boundaries of class, as well of other social categories like race, civil

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<sup>245</sup> e.g. Key, *Frauenbewegung*, p. 36.

<sup>246</sup> Myrdal, Alva, "Den nyare tidens revolution i kvinnans ställning." In: Myrdal, Alva, Wigforss, Eva, Höjer, Signe (eds.), *Kvinnan, familjen och samhället*, Stockholm 1938, pp. 16–17.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>248</sup> Hobson, Barbara, Lindholm, Marika, "Collective Identities, Women's Power Resources and the Making of Welfare States." In: *Theory and Society* 26/ 1997, pp. 478–483.

status, age, location, sexuality or disability, were crucial for eugenic feminists as they sought to raise the status of motherhood in the making of the welfare state. They systematically applied bourgeois, feminist ideals to all women, as a measure of their worthiness in society.

The New Woman, by denying her role as mother of the race, constituted a eugenic problem. As Raija Julkonen argues, the role of women in the welfare state was unclear and contradictory.<sup>249</sup> Though the patriarchal capitalist structures of the welfare state provided them with new liberties and increased their societal recognition, it also placed them under new restrictions by focusing on their maternal functions as their main contribution to society and rejecting other female, societal roles. Eugenic feminists only rejected patriarchal capitalist structures when they saw these as hindering the perceived natural female function of motherhood, but not in other cases, for example to defend women who preferred labour market participation over motherhood.

Thus, eugenic feminists were indeed in favour of the patriarchal social structures, at least in the period before the First World War. They used it together with a eugenic argumentation to transform the traditional female role as mother of the family into a traditional-modern female role as mother of the race, which helped to resolve the dilemma of the unproductivity of the middle class woman in capitalist society. Her task, according to eugenic feminists, was to become equal but not identical to the man. She should establish her own maternal role within the patriarchal society as an equal partner beside the man, conscious about her natural femininity and womanhood as guardian not of the capitalist productive process, like the man, but the more superior productive process of the nation.<sup>250</sup> The New Woman's rejection of this notion demonstrated her racial inferiority. Though she was not excluded from reproduction, she and her offspring endangered the racial purity of the nation through misunderstanding the role of women in the modern society and misuse of the nature-given female ability to be the mother of the race. She was thus perceived as a danger to the nation.<sup>251</sup>

However, this eugenic feminist perspective shifted in the interwar period in the context of economic crisis. It became obvious that equal rights in marriage were not enough, even for middle class women. Then, the demand to open the labour market up to

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<sup>249</sup> Julkonen, "Women in the Welfare State", p. 143.

<sup>250</sup> e.g. Key, *Frauenbewegung*, p. 33ff.

<sup>251</sup> e.g. Key, *Lifslinjer*, p. 46ff/ p. 147ff; Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II* p. 39-40; Hirdman, "When Anaïs Nin met Alva Myrdal", p. 152ff.

married women and to provide extensive state support for mothers and families to make motherhood compatible with work also began to be considered eugenically beneficial for the national well-being. The focus shifted from the responsibility of women to be alone responsible for the national well-being from a maternal perspective to the duty of the state to create the right circumstances for women to be able to be both eugenically good mothers and members of the workforce.<sup>252</sup>

### 3.2. Suffrage and Legal Rights – Independence for the New Women?

Women's suffrage and the demand of greater or equal legal rights were one of the main claims of the first wave of feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Great Britain had one of the most prominent and violent suffragist movements, led by the feminist and political activist Emeline Pankhurst, who was also member of the left-leaning Independent Labour Party. However, Nordic women did not lag behind in the demand for voting rights, property rights or equal rights within marriage. The Nordic countries are often considered role models in creating equality.<sup>253</sup> This argument is usually based on the fact that women gained suffrage comparably early, as I have shown earlier.

The suffrage movement was rooted in the change of the female position in society in the context of industrialization and the capitalist redefinition of society. Icelandic researcher Auður Styrkársdóttir argues that industrialization destroyed the gender division of labour and the economic independence women enjoyed through their position in the family was taken away through the reorganization of the family structures. Women became the cheap labour force in the patriarchal capitalist society.<sup>254</sup> This applied predominantly to the women in the new urban working class.

In this section, I discuss how the demand for and granting of suffrage in the Nordic countries shaped the role of women in society. I show that the suffragists had a problematic perception of non-suffragist women, lacking trust in the political and intellectual ability of other women to use their voting rights. Furthermore, I consider whether suffrage meant independence for women, or rather a different form of restriction, dictated this time by other women, rather than men. Finally, I discuss how far this was

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<sup>252</sup> e.g. Lionæs, Skaug, *Dør vi ut?*

<sup>253</sup> e.g. Borchorst, Siim, "Woman-Friendly Policies and State Feminism"; Melby, Kari, Ravn, Anna-Birte, Carlsson Wetterberg, Christina, *Gender Equality and Welfare Politics in Scandinavia. The Limits of Political Ambition?* Bristol 2008.

<sup>254</sup> Styrkársdóttir, *From Feminism to Class Politics*, p. 40.

relevant to eugenic feminism and its maternalist argumentation of women as mothers of the race.

### 3.2.1. The Ambivalent Relationship of Suffragists to their own Gender

The topic of female economic and legal liberation from male relatives, such as husbands, fathers or brothers, was a dominant debate in female organizations prior to the First World War and as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>255</sup> The recognition of their own limitations and the desire for liberation were very often the starting point for women to organize themselves. Elisabeth Lønna argues in her discussion of the Norwegian women's movements that women looked to organization to stop their own marginalization and to generate a better society. From early on, leading feminists like Fredrikke Marie Qvam asserted that the right to vote meant the duty to vote.<sup>256</sup>

In Finland, the debate regarding women's suffrage was especially intense, since women gained suffrage already in 1906 as the first of the Nordic countries. The ambivalent relationship of middle class-based suffragists towards their own gender can be detected in an article by a prominent Finnish feminist, Maikki Friberg (1861-1927). Friberg was a journalist and intellectual who received a doctoral degree from the University of Bern after studying sociology and philosophy in Berlin. She was the chair of *Naisasialiitto Unioni* from 1920 until 1927 and the editor of *Naisten ääni* from 1905 until 1927, which was ran by *Suomalainen Naisliitto* since 1906 and where Friberg took a leading role until the 1920s. In an article published in 1906 in the magazine, the year Finnish women gained universal suffrage, Friberg took a critical stand against the female ability to vote. On the one hand, Friberg welcomed the new opportunities and perspectives women's voting rights would bring to Finnish policy making. On the other hand, Friberg warned that women also have to learn how to use their voting rights in a profitable way.<sup>257</sup>

Friberg was not alone with her concerns. Another anonymous article, published one year later in the same magazine, warned that Finnish women gained their voting rights very fast, maybe even too fast, but many of them would not understand the deeper meaning of suffrage yet.<sup>258</sup> The concern of some Finnish political women's activists was great that Finnish women would use their suffrage not to bring forward the

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<sup>255</sup> Styrkårsdóttir, *From Feminism to Class Politics*, p. 55.

<sup>256</sup> Lønna, Elisabeth, *Stolthet og kvinnekamp. Norsk kvinnesaksforenings historie fra 1913*, Oslo 1996, pp. 50–51.

<sup>257</sup> Friberg, Maikki, "Naiset, äänioikeus ja puolueet." In: *Naisten ääni* 1906.1. pp. 1-3.

<sup>258</sup> "Innokkaita Työntekijöitä." In: *Naisten ääni*, 1907.3, p. 33.



woman question in Finnish politics but rather get influenced by their male environment, their fathers or husbands, in their choice to vote. Finnish feminists suffered from a disbelief in their own gender's ability to understand political processes. The author argued

That is why we needed to go through a lot of educational work to spread information about the new rights of women and the obligations they owe to it. This was what needed enthusiastic, enlightened, sophisticated women, those who, as they themselves were aware of this great change in the position of women, were also able to speak to their sisters and to react to their hearts.<sup>259</sup>

Seemingly some women, like Friberg or the anonymous author above, already had reached this level of political education. Women like her now had to educate other women to reach the same political, intellectual level.

Also, in the magazine of the Finnish *Martha* organization, *Husmodern*, this discussion was taken up. In 1906, the leader of the organization Fanny Hult stated that it was important for women to decide actively about home, country and the other significant questions. However, she continued, women must be educated and introduced into political life to make the right decisions. Way too often class relations would make them blind to the right political choice, Hult argued. Most women would not have extensive knowledge about their rights, but it would be their duty to familiarize themselves with these to fulfil their civil duties.<sup>260</sup>

Women's suffrage should support the political agenda of women from the feminist point of view. It should bring forward female topics, which had been excluded from politics due to a lack of interest and recognition of relevance in the perception of male politicians.<sup>261</sup> In particular family, social and health politics, as well as education, was on the agenda of the new female politicians and they sought support from their female voters. This idea was closely related to eugenic feminist notions and many of the eugenic feminists, for example Karolina Widerström, Ada Nilsson or Thit Jensen, were also active in the suffrage movement and in politics on the municipal or national level. They used suffrage as eugenic argument for female empowerment from a eugenic point of view

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<sup>259</sup> "Siksi oli ryhdyttävä ahkeraan sivistystyöhön ja levitettävä tietoa naisten uusista oikeuksista ja niistä johtuvista velvollisuuksista joka sopukkaan. Tähän tarvittiin innokkaita, valistuneita, hienotuntoisia naisia, sellaisia, jotka, samassa kuin itse olivat selvillä tästä suuresta muutoksesta naisten asemassa, siitä myöskin kykenivät siskoilleen puhumaan ja heidän sydämissään vastakaikua herättämään." "Innokkaita Työntekijöitä." In: *Naisten ääni*, 1907.3, p. 33.

<sup>260</sup> Hult, Fanny, "Kvinnorna och rösträtten." In: *Husmodern*, 1906.10, pp. 146–147.

<sup>261</sup> e.g. Nilsson, Ada, *Glimtar ur mitt liv som läkare*, Stockholm 1963, p. 114.

emphasising the importance of civil rights for women in fulfilling their natural and national duty of motherhood.<sup>262</sup>

### 3.2.2. Eugenic-Feminist Arguments on Citizenship and Legal Rights

Female participation was traditionally high in Nordic politics, according to Jaana Kuusipalo. She states that in the context of Finland the agrarian social structure made female work participation always relevant and thus the introduction of women into political engagement more likely.<sup>263</sup> By building the first women's organizations in the 1880s and 1890s, women became a stronger political interest group. However, the early women's rights movements were class-orientated. Kuusipalo shows how their goal was suffrage for upper class women, who were strongly defined through their marital status.<sup>264</sup> However, the *Työlaisnaisliitto*, which was part of the Finnish Social Democratic Party, was defined by female left-wing MPs, who discussed working class issues, such as equal pay in the public sector, maternity insurance, the demand for day care and more rights for married women, which succeeded in the reformation of the marriage legislation in 1930 in Finland.<sup>265</sup>

Göran Therborn argues that the Nordic gender model had no feminist foundation. Feminism had, according to Therborn, a certain value at the turn of the century but Sweden and the other Nordic countries remained patriarchal societies. The women's reforms were only a result of industrialization, the importance of female work and economic capital.<sup>266</sup> I demonstrate in the following that Therborn is not as wrong as often assumed. The women of the women's organizations, middle class as well as working class, were very well aware of the change in their role brought about by industrialization and were highly critical of how they were utilized, in their perception, by the capitalist system. In particular, middle class feminists interested in eugenics rather sought to modernize the patriarchal system and extend the female private sphere to the public, than a complete resolution of all gender roles. The aim was to strengthen the rights of the

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<sup>262</sup> e.g. Key, *Kvinno-psykologi*, p. 8; Widerström, Karolina, *Kvinnohygien I. De kvinnliga underlivsorganen, ders förrättningar och vård*, Stockholm 1899, p. 3.

<sup>263</sup> Kuusipalo, Jaana, "Finnish Women in Politics." In: *Women in Finland*, Keuruu 1999, pp. 56-57.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>266</sup> e.g. Therborn, Göran, *European Modernity and Beyond. The Trajectory of European Societies, 1945-2000*, London 1995; Bergman, Helena, "En feministisk konspiration. Kvinnors politiska aktivism för barnavårdsmaninstitutionens införande i 1910-talets Sverige." In: Florin, Christina, Kvarnström, Lars (eds.), *Kvinnor på gränsen till medborgskap. Genus, politik och offentlighet 1850-1950*, Stockholm 2001, p. 175.

mother, because motherhood was the highest product a woman could give to society, and not to release women from all their natural roles and transform them into men.<sup>267</sup> The restoration of the natural role of women as mother was important to fight the usage of the female body by the capitalist society and bring it back to its natural environment of home and motherhood. This was not only based on the patriarchal societal structure, but also on the ideas proclaimed by female eugenicists in the feminist movements.

As early as the late 1880s, the Danish magazine *Hvad vi vil* took a principal role in advocating female liberation. An article about the social position of women, published in 1888 in *Hvad vi vil*, denied that female oppression was a universal, historical fact. The author argued that recent research demonstrated that in ancient times women were not oppressed but indeed able to gain power within the established family structures.<sup>268</sup> The article continued:

Modernity brought a change of [economic] ownership, which took place in disfavour of women and resulted in their oppression. [...] The reason for the women's social inferior position is based on their economic dependency.<sup>269</sup>

If women were able to participate in the production process like men, the structure of ownership would change and increase the female societal position. Women had not always been oppressed but the foundation for oppression was in the modern system. If women would become equal as workers to men, also with equal salaries, they would also become equal as citizens, the article stated.<sup>270</sup> The author showed here that the male understanding of civil rights was based on property rights. Participation in the labour market and productivity made it possible to own property and gain civil rights. However, since middle class women were widely excluded from this form of production, the system of ownership did not work in their favour. One option would have been to situate women in the production process in the same way as men. But a mother was not able to participate in the production process like men and raise her children sufficiently. Therefore, the eugenic feminists tried to raise the status of female reproduction and motherhood to equal that of male productivity in order to generate equal rights.

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<sup>267</sup> e.g. Key, *Frauenbewegung*, p. 36; Jensen, Thit, *Frivilligt moderskab*, Copenhagen 1925, p. 11.

<sup>268</sup> Nielsen, F.G., "Kvindens sociale Stilling," In: *Hvad vi vil* 1888.10, p. 74

<sup>269</sup> "At dette [modernity] bragte en Omvæltning i den Ejendomsforholdene, i Disfavør af Kvinderne, er jo givet, og samtidig indraadte ogsaa hendes Undertrykkelse. (...) Delen anerkendes, at Grunden til Kvindens hele sociale Misstilling maa søges i hendes økonomiske Afhængighed." Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

Not only the early Danish women's movements had linked voting and legal rights to citizenship at this time. Also, in Sweden the *Fredrika-Bremer-Förbundet*, the general women's rights organization, connected the woman question to the issue of general suffrage. In an anonymous article in their mouthpiece *Dagny* in 1899, the author demanded that women's suffrage was important regarding the question of citizen rights and citizen duties, which defined the place of women in Swedish political representation. According to the article, women's voting rights were the most important aspect of solving the woman question. Although, the same argumentation was found contemporaneously in their neighbouring country Denmark, this author took it further and demanded that the Swedish women's movement fight with the same energy as in the United States or Great Britain.<sup>271</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century the possibility of female labour market participation was a strong point on the agenda of many women's organizations. A distinction between different kinds of women, especially married or unmarried, was not recognized yet in the general tangle of ideas, as it can be observed in the interwar period. Instead, they were united in the criticism against the current regime of capitalism and a romanticizing of the past. The embedding of the Danish *Kvindelig Fremskridtsforening* in socialist ideas contributed to the general critique of most women's movements of the current societal and legal system, which included middle class and working class women. The industrialization and introduction of a capitalist economic system after the Enlightenment brought people from lower classes, the new working class, into citizenship and citizen rights for the first time. By participating in the labour market and producing goods for exchange, the male worker could gain civil rights. Productivity and efficiency became the buzzwords.<sup>272</sup>

As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues the politics of equal rights are politics in the category of capital. The more productive and efficient the worker was, the more legal rights he could gain.<sup>273</sup> In the beginning, the women's movements tried to ground their demand for equal civil rights in the equal labour market participation of men and women. This seemed to be the way to achieve liberation and citizenship. Male legal dependency was solved by the abolishment of feudalism and the creation of capitalism, but female

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<sup>271</sup> "Den svenska kvinnan och den politiska rösträtten." In: *Dagny*, 1899.16, pp. 335-339.

<sup>272</sup> e.g. Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Habitations of Modernity. Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*, Delhi 2002, p. 33ff.

<sup>273</sup> Chakrabarty, Dipesh, "Marx after Marxism. Subaltern Histories and the Question of Difference." In: *Polygraph* 6 (1993), p. 13.

dependency was bound to the current system of capitalism and – as recognized by many feminists – the marriage system, which chained the wife legally to her husband.

Nevertheless, although labour market participation remained a dominant topic for women's organizations, perspectives began to differ, after the gaining of suffrage in the early twentieth century. The eugenic feminists argued that due to the biological predisposition of men and women their societal positioning, though equal, could not be identical. They demanded female liberation not from a social but from a biological point of view, by arguing that the natural ability to procreate set women at least on equal terms to men, or maybe even higher, in their contribution to the societal well-being. Eugenic feminists introduced a biological understanding of feminism and sought female empowerment through grounding their argumentation in biological facts.<sup>274</sup>

The bourgeois-liberal Finnish teacher and regular contributor to *Husmodern*, Alli Nissinen (1866-1926), argued in an article in 1907, one year after Finnish women gained suffrage, married women must gain full political rights as well as full personal rights:

The right to self-determination is necessary for a woman, because her position as mother and educator demands independence and a strong sense of responsibility.<sup>275</sup>

Nissinen stated that it was also unnatural that unmarried women have more rights than married women.<sup>276</sup> Like the Swedish or Danish feminists, Nissinen ascribed a higher social status to married women and married mothers than to unmarried women. She used here the maternal argumentation for the enhancement of female civil rights. It was not uncommon that unmarried women had more legal rights than married women. Sweden and Norway for instance allowed unmarried women to engage in trade and craft professions already in the 1840s, and Denmark granted legal majority to unmarried women in 1857.<sup>277</sup> However, in all Nordic countries, it was still disputed in the 1920s and 1930s whether married women should work at all. Unmarried women could gain certain,

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<sup>274</sup> e.g. Valverde, "When the Mother of the Race", p. 4; Repo, *Biopolitics*, p. 7/ 16-17; Deutscher, Penelope, "Reproductive Politics, Biopolitics and Auto-immunity. From Foucault to Esposito." In: *Bioethical Inquiry* 7 (2010), p. 221.

<sup>275</sup> "Att självbestämningssätt är nödvändig för en kvinna, hvars ställning som moder och uppfostrarinna framför allt fodrar självständighet och en stark ansvarskänsla." Nissinen, Alli, "Kvinnornas önskningsmål." In: *Husmodern* 1907.2, p. 18.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>277</sup> e.g. Österberg, Carin, Lewenhaupt, Inga, Wahlberg, Anna-Greta, *Svenska kvinnor. Föregångare nyskapare*, Signum 1990.

though not equal, legal and civil rights through their civil status. Yet, married women were bound to home and husband.

The feminist debate about civil and voting rights was a divided one. I suggest that the division was by class as well as civil status. Most of the bourgeois feminist organizations claimed to work beyond party structures but often had loose relations to the liberal parties of their countries. This influenced their notions of suffrage and in particular the discussion of greater rights for married women. The working class feminist organizations often had much closer relations to political parties and were often a direct sub-organization of the Social Democratic Party, as I have shown with the example of the Finnish *Työlaisnaisliitto* at the beginning of this chapter. Their discussion of suffrage and civil rights was more closely connected to their class status in the context of labour market participation, for example equal pay. The eugenic feminists were situated among the bourgeois feminist movements and introduced a new biological perspective to the discussion of women's rights, which particularly favoured married mothers, as I discuss next.

### 3.2.3. The Married Woman vs. the Unmarried Woman

The political theorist Carole Pateman argues that although women started to form their status as citizens after the Enlightenment, they were still bound to their families.<sup>278</sup> According to Pateman, a central category of citizenship was independence, which was a male attribute. Yet, the welfare structure created female dependence on the state. Women relied heavily on state-supported welfare measures. Their previous dependency on the male family members was now transformed to the dependency on the patriarchal state.<sup>279</sup> On the one hand, it was formally possible for them to find work but on the other hand, the actual opportunities were often small especially for middle class women. Consequently, they had two choices: either they could bind themselves through marriage to a man, which guaranteed neither economic security nor economic independence, or they were unemployed without social rights and had to rely on poor relief, the state and patriarchal market relations, as Pateman concludes.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Pateman, Carole, "Den patriarkalske velferdsstaten." In: Nagel, Anne-Hilde (ed.), *Kjønn og velferdsstat*, Bergen 1998, p. 54.

<sup>279</sup> e.g. Hernes, *Welfare State and Woman Power*, p. 54.

<sup>280</sup> Pateman, "Den patriarkalske velferdsstaten", p. 57ff.

The concept of maternal citizenship, which was introduced by many eugenic feminists internationally, seemed to provide a solution to this dilemma. Women's reproduction was to be recognized as work for society, because they gave their body to produce the next generation of workers. Their productivity was marked through their reproductive function. Nevertheless, this did not bring any liberation to women but rather moved their dependence from the husband to state and society.<sup>281</sup> A further problem was that not all mothers were married and not all married women were mothers. The argumentation for a maternal citizenship presumed a heteronormative and patriarchal, though modernized, family structure in which the mother and wife functioned as housewife to her nuclear family and the husband worked outside the home.<sup>282</sup> This was very much a bourgeois idea and disregarded the working class reality.

In this context, I argue, the first subdivision of the general category woman took place. The married woman was distinguished from the unmarried woman and the status of the former became more and more important in the debates about legal rights. At the same time, a certain animosity towards emancipation in general can be observed.<sup>283</sup> In 1893, an author with the initials J. M. discussed a book of Austrian publicist and feminist Adele Crepaz in *Hvad vi vil*, to argue that female emancipation might lead to celibacy. Women no longer had any desire for marriage, since they had found their joy and freedom in life. They did not need the boundaries of marriage anymore.<sup>284</sup> Ellen Key had similar concerns at the turn of the century.<sup>285</sup>

The previous discussion of the New Woman showed that unmarried, middle class women were often considered to have liberated themselves by denying their natural duty to motherhood. From a eugenic feminist point of view, by not getting married and having children, their liberation was achieved at the cost of the whole society. In the eyes of the eugenic feminists, the societal order showed a fundamental misconception of the female role in modern society by neglecting the biological perspective. It was incumbent upon the feminists now to resolve this destructive misconception and create a form of

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<sup>281</sup> Lake, "A Revolution in the Family", p. 387; Devereux, *Growing a Race*, p. 21.

<sup>282</sup> Hill Collins, "It's all in the Family", p. 62.

<sup>283</sup> e.g. Ambjörnsson, *Samhällsmodern*, p. 19/ 62.

<sup>284</sup> J.M., "Farene ved Kvindens Emancipation." In: *Hvad vi vil*, 1893.16, p. 63.

<sup>285</sup> e.g. Key, *Frauenbewegung*, p. 27; Key, Ellen, "Missbrukad kvinnokraft" och "Naturenliga arbetsområden för kvinnan". *Tvenne föredrag*, Stockholm 1896, p. 13ff.

citizenship, equal to the male, which was based on the feminine nature of reproduction and not the male nature of production.<sup>286</sup>

In the two decades preceding the First World War the married woman and her social position became more and more central in the eugenic feminist debate. As I showed, the unmarried woman was already economically independent through her labour market participation, which was partly considered problematic, as we have seen. The married middle class woman was caught somewhere in between liberation and restriction and hence attracted the special attention of the female activists. They focused on demanding new marriage legislation in the Nordic countries, since, in their view, marriage was important for the survival of society but the situation of women in marriage should change fundamentally.

However, also in the interwar period, especially during the economic depression in the 1920s, the question of the right of married women to work was strongly debated in Sweden but took a shift. Sweden followed here widely Nordic and Western trends. Despite the number of married, working women were low, only about ten per cent had employed, critiques argued that married, working women would demoralize the home, take away work from men, and since they accepted lower wages would become an unfair competition to male workers.<sup>287</sup> Yet, as historian Barbara Hobson argues, the Swedish women's organization were in particular in the 1930s widely united in their demands for greater working possibilities for women, despite not agreeing on many other topics. They were even supported by the trade unions, which were aware that women did not constitute a competition to men on the labour market but formed due to the gendered labour market structures an own group.<sup>288</sup>

The Swedish magazine *Hertha* published frequently on the situation of women in marriage. The writers argued that in the "new marriage" the man did not "take" a woman, but that marriage was a mutual agreement and that marriage should not be based on economic considerations, but love.<sup>289</sup> The security for abused women must be

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<sup>286</sup> Kinberg, Julia, *Sexuell etik*, Stockholm 1931, p. 100; Lionæs, Skaug, *Dør vi ut?* p. 14; Jensen, *Frivilligt moderskab*, p. 13ff.

<sup>287</sup> Hobson, Barbara, "Feminist Strategies and Gender Discourses in Welfare States. Married Women's Rights to Work in the United States and Sweden." In: Koven, Seth, Michel, Sonya (eds.), *Mothers of a New World. Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare State*, New York 1993, p. 398.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 402-404.

<sup>289</sup> Stjernstedt, Georg, "Självständigare ställning åt den gifta kvinnan, Utkast till en reform av lagstiftningen om makars egendmsföhältnanden." In: *Hertha*, 1915.8, p. 155; "Svenska kvinnoföreningar uttala sig i äktenskapslagstiftningsfrågan." In: *Hertha*, 1916.8, pp. 163-164; Staël von Holsten, Mathilda, "Önskemål i äktenskapslagstiftningen." In: *Hertha* 1917.2, pp. 23-27.



increased, one article demanded, and divorce must be made easier with fewer disadvantages for women. Furthermore, people who were mentally ill or infected with venereal diseases should not be allowed to marry. The implementation of new marriage legislation should be coordinated with the other Nordic countries, Denmark and Norway, since in this context cross-national marriages were common and favourable.<sup>290</sup>

The dominant attitude towards marriage in the women's organizations was positive. It was considered one of the pillars upholding society and the foundation of the family. The place of women was within marriage and a sufficient number of children belonged to a marriage. Eugenic feminists positively recognized the middle class woman's work as a housewife and mother, while working women from the middle class were viewed with a certain suspicion.<sup>291</sup> However, the middle class wife, housewife and mother should not be socially, politically or economically dependent on her husband but her work as mother and provider of the home should receive positive recognition in society. The private work space of the housewife was politicized, as it was to be on the one hand appreciated but on the other hand also regulated by society.

### 3.2.4. Biopolitics and Eugenics in the Suffrage Debate

The maternal-based argumentation for female civil and legal rights was not an invention of the Nordic countries but rather intersected in particular with the eugenic arguments in most modernized, Western countries. Human reproduction and thus sexuality, in particular female sexuality, became of central concern to society. According to Jemima Repo, in the modern discourse about citizenship this focus was mainly based on a perception of sexuality as method to ensure the reproduction of the population as labour force. Sexuality was now concerned with reproduction for production. Biopower was regulated to the reproduction of labour power.<sup>292</sup>

However, as Repo shows, first-wave feminists used racial, eugenicist and pro-natalist arguments to gain social and political ground and put women and their sexuality at the heart of the struggle of the nations.<sup>293</sup> The demand for female suffrage and legal rights was widely directed towards married women and married mothers, because they were the least liberated women yet. At the same time, they were the most

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<sup>290</sup> Montelius, Agda, "Kvinnan och äktenskapet." In: *Hertha*, 1914.1, pp. 5-8.

<sup>291</sup> Caspersen, Hanne, *Moderskabspolitik i Danmark i 30'erne. Det modsætningsfyldte moderskab*, Copenhagen 1985, p. 40.

<sup>292</sup> Repo, *Biopolitics of Gender*, p. 77.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

important women in the nation, because they produced the next generation of the race. The feminists revealed this paradox and made it a public topic of discourse. Furthermore, the feminists used, as Cecily Devereux calls it, a politics of maternal feminism.<sup>294</sup> Devereux shows how the argumentation of the Canadian feminist and author Nellie McClung for women's suffrage was based on the idea of a female moral superiority. Thus, McClung positioned women as the guardians of the race.<sup>295</sup>

Guardianship of the population was also one of the main argument put forward in the Nordic countries by eugenic feminists to enhance the legal rights of married mothers. The argumentation followed the idea that only a legally independent woman could live her maternal opportunities to the fullest. Only an independent woman understood what it took to be a good mother. However, when legally dependent on her husband, she had to rely on advice from a person who did not have the same natural instincts as she did.<sup>296</sup> As Penelope Deutscher argues, the first-wave feminists saw motherhood as the unique female ability which was of benefit to society overall. Women held the future of the people in their hands.<sup>297</sup> The suffrage and legal rights movements argued that to fulfil this duty, women must have equal rights to men to elude male guardianship. Ultimately, however, I argue that women's suffrage or the extension of legal rights did not herald an escape from male oppression of the woman's body or sexuality but rather a transformation of this oppression from the individual man, the husband or the father, to the state. As Deutscher shows, since individual reproductive autonomy was considered a risk, biopolitical methods were introduced to restrict and control female reproduction. If female reproduction took place outside the heteronormative boundaries of the nuclear family, state intervention was demanded.<sup>298</sup>

However, eugenic feminists recognized women as equal but still bound to their natural determination of home and motherhood. As Hirdman has argued, the women's question was a strategy to reform the capitalist society. The gender system was restored with the segregation of the sexes and a patriarchal hierarchy. The new order was a compromise between women and society. It gave the female place at home a new structure and made by the politicization of the private sphere the woman public.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Devereux, *Growing a Race*, p. 21.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>296</sup> Holst, E., "Agteskabet. Til fru Katti Anker Møller." In: *Nylænde* 01.04.1902, p. 99; Staël von Holsten, Mathilda, "Önskemål i äktenskapslagstiftningen." In: *Hertha* 1917.2, p. 24.

<sup>297</sup> Deutscher, "Reproductive Politics", pp. 219/229.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>299</sup> Hirdman, Yvonne, *Att lägga livet till rätta. Studier i svensk folkhemspolitik*, Stockholm 1990. p. 97.

The eugenic feminists thus connected legal rights and suffrage to the eugenic-biological ability of reproduction, which their foremost category to define the female societal position. This heteronormative approach thus meant restrictions on all women living outside these norms. Women who did not conform to middle class social structures became victims of normative, for example eugenic, measures, to be normalized.<sup>300</sup> The extension of legal rights and suffrage to married middle class women was not a liberation for all women but rather a transformation of their dependency from a private to a political one. Not only was the individual male now their judge but additionally the patriarchal, public system as a whole.

### 3.3. Women in Working Life – Women becoming Public

Although women are often considered as passive recipients of the state.<sup>301</sup> They were indeed visible in public life. This can especially be seen within the introduction of basic and higher education for women and their appearance on the labour market. Both were leading topics in the discussions of eugenic feminists about the public role of women in the eugenic context but also important for the overall feminist movement.<sup>302</sup> However, the debate was an ambivalent one: education was viewed more positively than participation in the workforce. Most feminists were in favour of providing women with basic and higher education. However, as the Swedish physician Karolina Widerström cautioned in 1921,

Girls' school education is much younger than boys'. It has failed to develop its own way yet and is more or less a copy of boys' education.<sup>303</sup>

Widerström disapproved of the lack of individualization concerning gender in Swedish education. Girls needed a different education from boys, because life set different demands for them and school should prepare girls and boys for life. Thus, eugenicist feminists argued that girls' education aimed to raise a mother citizen, to enhance female attributes to become a mother of the nation, and not a productive worker.

The discourse about women on the labour market was again, similarly to the debate about legal rights in the previous chapter, based on the division between

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<sup>300</sup> Kjellberg, Gerda, Nilsson, Ada, "Dyrköpta själar." In: Tidevarvet, 1926.29, p. 1/4.

<sup>301</sup> Hernes, *Welfare State and Women Power*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>302</sup> e.g. Ambjörnsson, *Samhällsmodern*, p. 60.

<sup>303</sup> "Flickornas skolundervisning är av betydligt yngre datum än gossarnas. Den har dels följt sina egna utvecklingslinjer, dels blivit mer eller mindre en kopia av gossarnas." Widerström, Karolina, *Hygieniska önskemål beträffande flickornas högre skolutbildning, föredrag*, Stockholm 1921, p. 151.

married and unmarried women.<sup>304</sup> Even though the labour market participation of unmarried women was not problematic as such, working married women constituted a great topic of debate. The eugenic feminists showed a great diversity of views about married women on the labour market as well as concern for its effect on the family and the nation.

The debate also changed over time. In the earlier period around the turn of the century, female work was rather debated in the context of the severe circumstances of industrial work and restrictions to women's work.<sup>305</sup> Later, in the interwar period the discussion shifted more to married women's ability to work and the compatibility of female household duties and work outside the house, for example by the Swedish social reformer Alva Myrdal.<sup>306</sup> Sweden, which was most industrially developed Nordic country, dominated the debate. However, also Finland had especially strong advocates for female education, such as the pedagogue and feminist Lucina Hagman (1853-1946). Though it would be too far-fetched to consider Lucina Hagman as eugenicist as such. She was one of the feminists, who included eugenic notions as part of the general debate in her discussions, as I will show. However, the debate about female education had set the foundation for the double role of women as homemakers and workers, while also recognizing women as welfare recipients in the welfare state.

### 3.3.1. Basic and Higher Education

Higher education concerned a very small minority of women during this period and it was for sure not the method to bring dependent, unmarried women into the labour force. These women were more likely to enter industrial or office work than higher education institutions. Nevertheless, the idea of women losing their femininity by working in jobs requiring higher education, or even more in industrial work, was debated intensely, also by eugenic feminists.<sup>307</sup> The issue of motherhood and work, entering the public sphere and gaining economic independence, created a special conflict, which influenced the social order, the social recognition of women and the organization of the private and public sphere.

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<sup>304</sup> e.g. Ambjörnsson, *Samhällsmodern*, p. 87.

<sup>305</sup> "Kvindens økonomiske afhængighed af manden." In: *Nylænde* 01.10.1902, p. 291; M.A., "Vore unge kvinder". Et svar." In: *Nylænde* 01.04.1907, p. 106; Hjelt, Vera, "Naisten yöttyö." In: *Naisten ääni* 1906.1, p. 9ff.

<sup>306</sup> e.g. Myrdal, Alva, "Den svenska kvinnan i industri och hem." In: Myrdal, Alva, Wigforss, Eva, Höjer, Signe (eds.), *Kvinnan, familjen och samhället*, Stockholm 1938, pp. 183-215; Myrdal, "Den nyare tidens"

<sup>307</sup> e.g. Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 163ff; Key, *Frauenbewegung*, p. 30ff.

The debate was divided into two parts, the general school education of girls and higher university education for women. Centralized state-led school education for girls developed in the mid-nineteenth century in the Nordic countries. Previously upper class girls, and also many boys, were taught at home by freelance tutors or governesses. Denmark was the forerunner here by starting to include girls in school education as early as 1800. Sweden had only five upper girls' schools in the 1840s, but the number grew fast until the 1870s. This development was similar to the other Nordic countries, for example also Finland started a school reform in the 1840s to include girls in education. Universities were widely open to women in the Nordic countries from the 1870s onwards, first for female medical students and later on also in all other subjects. Iceland was somehow a latecomer by starting female university education only in the early twentieth century, which can be related to the overall slower development of the country towards modernity. In this, the Nordic countries broadly followed international trends. The University of London opened up to women in 1878 and female university education in Germany started in the 1890s.<sup>308</sup>

Eugenic feminists were active in the Nordic countries, as in the overall international context, in paving the way for female education. Finland had a great advocate for female education in Lucina Hagman. Her work was not only recognized in Finland but also in other Nordic countries.<sup>309</sup> At the first sight Hagman might not be understood as other eugenic feminists. She did not use eugenic rhetoric as directly as for example Eskelin, Kinberg or Widerström. However, her engagement for female education can be considered in the eugenic zeitgeist and showed similar arguments for the improvement of the female role in the society through education and the aim of female education, like other feminists interested in eugenics.

At the turn of the century, Hagman argued that the question of how to educate women was one of the great questions of the age. She continued that women have to educate themselves. In her view, the goal of female education was liberation from the spouse and a new self-determination of women. Women had to learn to say what they wanted and what they did not want. This was, according to Hagman, not a question of blood or higher status but necessary for all women regardless of their societal standing.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> e.g. Ahonen, Sirkka, Rantala, Jukka (eds.), *Nordic Lights. Education for Nation and Civic Society in the Nordic Countries, 1850- 2000*, Helsinki 2001.

<sup>309</sup> Hagen, Ellen, "Lucina Hagman 75 år." In: *Tidevarvet*, 1928.23, p. 3.

<sup>310</sup> Hagman, Lucina, "Hvortil skola kvinnorna utbildas." In: *Referat fra Nordisk kvindesagsmøde. afholdt i, Kristiania 1903*, pp. 84-85.

However, female education should not be unfeminine, but educate girls as mothers and wives. The new mother was free and independent, because her family home was not a solitary place anymore but was connected to the nation and the population, the world and whole humanity, Hagman stated.<sup>311</sup> Hagman's ideal of female education correlated with the idea of women and their legal position in society. I argue that a certain form of liberation of women was accepted and education was seen as a sufficient method for it but the aim of the education was not supposed to be that women could enter the labour market and disregard marriage as the main life goal. The purpose was rather to make them a more comprehensive manager of home, family and finally society and a more independent companion to their husband.<sup>312</sup> Hagman therefore qualified her support for female education with the premise that it educated women into their natural environment, which was the home and the family. In this she followed the argumentation of the Swedish feminist Sophie Adlersparre, who demanded already in the nineteenth century that female education lead to motherhood, not only for the sake of the family and the individual but for the sake of society and the nation.<sup>313</sup>

The debate about female education in and beyond the Nordic countries during the period of female liberation was not marked by a resolution of the female, private and public, male sphere but extent the female, private role also to the public. As described by Carole Pateman, capitalism transformed the domestic, private life, which was considered woman's place, since it became relevant to social and political theory.<sup>314</sup> The private sphere defined by the women's nature of childbearing was considered inferior to the cultivated, public sphere of men, Pateman argues.<sup>315</sup> Although Pateman demands that the distinction of private and public had changed from premodern to capitalist times, she refers merely to the turn of the eighteenth century and the very early female liberation around the British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>316</sup> It might be useful to discuss whether childbearing lost its inferior position, as Pateman describes it, or perhaps even becoming superior to the cultivated sphere with the increasing importance of population questions and eugenic research in the late nineteenth and especially early twentieth century. Despite this, Pateman's notion of female citizenship must certainly be considered fruitful. She

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<sup>311</sup> Hagman, "Hvortil skola kvinnorna utbildas", pp. 86-88.

<sup>312</sup> Hagman, Lucina, "Om mödrar till mödrarna." In: *Husmodern* 1903.01, p. 8.

<sup>313</sup> Ambjörnsson, *Samhällsmodern*, p. 63.

<sup>314</sup> Pateman, Carole, *The Disorder of Women. Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, Cambridge 1989, p. 123.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

argues that the first suffragists did not want women to enter the public, male sphere but instead strengthen their role in the private and domestic, female sphere, through voting rights and female education should protect and strengthen the female sphere. It should be it equal but not identical to the male sphere.<sup>317</sup>

The female education advocated by feminists was one example of this protection of the female sphere. The orientation towards female needs and the distinction from male education demonstrated the desire to preserve the traditional, social order in a modernized form by the eugenic feminists rather than a resolution. The academic education of women must be seen as a separate case but even here, the concentration on feminine areas, for example gynaecology or paediatrics in medical education, suggests the wish for preservation rather than revolution.

Additionally, Ellen Key advocated for both the reform of school education for children from all classes and the connection between physical and mental activity in education in 1896. Key stressed the need for equal education for boys and girls up to the highest levels and more female teachers. She argued that mothers, female teachers and women's rights activists had to work together to fulfil this goal.<sup>318</sup> Education should encourage individual strengths:

It would be cruel to some young girls to take them away from their studies for a few years; to others to force them to be trained at all in household chores.<sup>319</sup>

Marriage was just one option.<sup>320</sup> In this, Key went a step further than Widerström in the beginning of this chapter. Although both recognized the necessity for female education, Widerström still saw the main goal of girls' education to prepare girls for marriage and motherhood. This necessitated, for example, strengthening girls' bodies through physical activity, to prepare the female body for the strain of pregnancy and motherhood.<sup>321</sup> Female sexuality was a focal point of education. Key demanded higher education for every girl that wished it. Widerström, however, was not generally in favour of academic

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<sup>317</sup> Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, p. 125.

<sup>318</sup> Key, *Kvinno-psykologi*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>319</sup> "Mot somliga unga flickor skulle det vara grymhet att alls taga dem från studierna under några år; mot andra att tvinga dem att alls utbildas i husliga sysslor." Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., pp. 121-133.

<sup>321</sup> e.g. Widerström, *Hygieniska önskemål*, p. 376; Widerström, Karolina, *Uppfostran och sexuell hygien. Föredrag hållet vid sommarkurserna i Stockholm 1907 samt (i något ändrad form) vid antialkoholkongressen s. å., Uppsala 1907*, p. 3.

education for girls. In her view, their destiny was motherhood and marriage, not independence through education and labour market participation.<sup>322</sup>

Education for women was a matter of controversy in the Nordic countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The general idea that girls needed at least basic education was not highly contested, since a primary school system was established in all Nordic countries in the mid-nineteenth century. However, eugenic feminists raised the question of whether girls' education should be different from that of boys. Here the demand was not that girls and boys should be educated separately, rather the opposite, but the fact that the education material for boys was also used for girls was criticized. For eugenic feminists, in education as with legal rights, the aim for from the eugenically point of view girls should be motherhood and marriage and not entering the workforce.<sup>323</sup>

However, the housewife and mother was also supposed to be symbolized by the characteristics of modernity. Through her educational background, she should be able to organize her home and family efficiently in terms of time, work and economics. The man, by his labour market participation, represented the public part of the national economy and the woman, by her household work and care for the population stock, the private national economy. The importance of the housewife and the household for the national economy is stressed by several eugenic feminists. Education for girls, promoted by men and women, should finally make them more skilful housewives and mothers, to assist and support state and society from the private sphere, rather than competing with men in the public sphere, on the labour market. The biological difference between men and women was constantly stressed in the eugenic feminist debate about education.<sup>324</sup>

### 3.3.2. Women on the Labour Market

Female participation in the labour market was from a class perspective a diverse discussed topic. Working class women had to work out of economic necessity, and eugenic feminists acknowledged this, seeking an improvement in their living conditions. The work of unmarried middle class women was widely accepted and also appreciated. Most

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<sup>322</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, p. 3.

<sup>323</sup> e.g. Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*; Key, *Frauenbewegung*, p. 118; Eskelin, Karolina, "Om Kvinnohygien och Kvinnosjukdom." In: Eskelin, Karolin, Tillgren, Josua (eds.), *Hälsa och sjukdom. Den moderna läkarboken. Hur man håller sig frisk och hur man behandlar sjukdomar*, Helsinki 1930, p. 426; Lionæs, Skaug, *Dør vi ut?* p. 13; Hult, Fanny, "Upplysning åt alla." In: *Husmodern* 1905.02, p. 17.

<sup>324</sup> *Husmodern* was here an excellent example for this discourse, since every issue included extensive educational advice around the house, family and motherhood for women.



feminists considered it a woman's right, if she was unmarried, to be able to take care of herself. In these cases, issues such as equal pay were important for the feminist movements.<sup>325</sup>

The controversy arose in the context of the right for work for married women was in particular strong in the interwar period. More women wished to enter the working force and the economic crisis of the 1920s made two breadwinners often an economic necessity. The family was considered, in particular by eugenic feminists, to be the core of the nation and society in need of special protection. If the mother and housewife worked outside the house, care of the family was most certainly neglected. The double burden of women as worker outside and inside the house and family was a great concern of many feminists. This was foremost a question of class and even middle class feminists recognized that the economic circumstances of some working class women did not leave them with another option.<sup>326</sup>

The arguments for and against female work outside the house were complex and exacerbated by the economic and societal change which occurred with industrialization. The discussion, on whether a woman should or should not work outside the house was based on various social categories, such as civil status, class, location, and age. The uncertainty about the female status on the labour market can be seen in an article in the Swedish magazine *Morgonbris* which, maybe surprisingly, took a critical position towards women's work outside the home. It argued that modern wage work had not increased the female societal position but was merely a matter of economic need. The role of the household had declined strongly, according to the article. Even bourgeois women were expected to be educated and work outside the home. On the one hand, the article attributed this to the fact that women who did not own property found a new working area in industry, but on the other hand, women also showed an increased desire for a luxurious life, which could no longer be satisfied through just one income.<sup>327</sup> The second part of the article, published in the next issue of *Morgonbris*, continued the discussion of the economic need of female work, since the male income alone was not enough anymore to provide for a family.<sup>328</sup> The magazine focused especially on the

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<sup>325</sup> "Siitä me naiset pidämme kiini." In: *Naisten ääni*, 1908.21, p. 293.

<sup>326</sup> e.g. Myrdal, "Den nyare tidens", p. 28; Bangs, Dagny, "Fabriktilsynsloven. Særlove for kvinder." In: *Nylænde* 15.03.1909, p. 81-83; Friberg, Maikki, "Naiset, äänioikeus ja puolueet." In: *Naisten ääni* 1906.01, p. 1; Ambjörnsson, *Samhällsmodern*, p. 4.

<sup>327</sup> Zetkin, Clara, "Arbeterskorna och nutidens kvinnofråga I. Förändringarne i kvinnans ekonomiska ställning." In: *Morgonbris*, 1905.2, p. 2

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

double burden of women through work outside the home and continuous care for the family inside it.<sup>329</sup>

As an organ of the social democratic women's movement in Sweden, *Morgonbris* provided a different viewpoint concerning women on the labour market to the bourgeois one. Still, overlaps with the ideas of middle class eugenic feminists can be detected. The double burden was a theme running through most feminist movements over most of the time span of this study but intensified in the interwar period, when more married women entered the labour market. The eugenic feminists considered the double burden of domestic and industrial labour as dangerous for the population from a biological point of view and feared a further degeneration through the weakening of the female body. The social democratic feminists were concerned from a social point of view and criticised the lack of social inclusion of women through the labour market participation as well as the lack of support from the state to release working women, in particular from the working class, from the double burden.

In the early years of the eugenic feminist movement, until the mid-1920s, the debate concentrated mainly on women with family, who had or wanted to enter the labour market. Single women were either neglected in the discussion or presented as too selfish to enter marriage, and as competition to male workers. However, in the majority of publications women were classified as victims who were forced to leave their natural environment of home and care work to enter the cruelty of industrial work, which worked against femininity.<sup>330</sup> A study by Rita Christensen and other Danish researchers shows why female labour market participation was often not considered a liberation but a limitation by many feminists, including eugenic feminists. They argue that though women had also started to work outside the house like men, they were not released from duties at home. Production and reproduction became their task. This was in particular a problem for women in the working class.<sup>331</sup>

The study paints a drastic picture of the life of Danish working class women around 1900 as defined by pregnancy, birth and nursing. They claim that women went through up to 20-30 pregnancies in their lifetime, but the majority resulted in miscarriages due to hard labour or bad nutrition. If the child was born alive, the chance of survival was

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<sup>329</sup> Migray, Josef, "Kvinnofrågan och socialismen." In: *Morgonbris*, 1923.11, p. 4.

<sup>330</sup> e.g. Key, "Missbrukad Kvinnokraft", p. 22ff; Lionæs, Skaug, *Dør vi ut?* p. 13; Mohr, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 80.

<sup>331</sup> Christensen, Jacobsen, Jensen (et.al.), "Arbejderkvinder og uligeløn", p. 26.

low. Furthermore, the study argues that work outside the house and likewise the strain on their bodies was not a choice but an economic necessity. Also, the women of the Danish working class defined themselves primarily through their families and not through their labour market participation.<sup>332</sup>

Based on this Danish case, it seems that self-perceptions of working class and middle class women were not so different. Women of the working class also saw their primary aim in raising their children and incorporating them into society. For them too, motherhood was the self-evident goal in a woman's life. They aimed to contribute to the success of the nation with their reproduction, not through their labour. However, the middle class members of the women's movements seemed to recognize their reproductive abilities less than their productivity.

Middle class women on the other hand had easier access to contraception and were able to regulate their reproduction more than working class women though also not in any way completely.<sup>333</sup> Married middle class women were widely excluded from the labour market, as this was not an economic necessity for them, at least before the First World War. If they did wish to work outside the home, this was frequently associated with the desire of more independence from their husband, to whom they were closely legally and economically bound.

Nevertheless, the perception of the working class woman's body was important in the context of the female labour market participation. From a eugenic feminist point of view, the body of a working class woman was torn between reproductive and productive work. Working class women were thus probably the greatest losers of the industrialization, because they were the first to suffer from the double role as mothers and workers.<sup>334</sup> This followed only later for middle class women, as we will see in a moment. From a eugenic point of view, the physical effects of the double burden, such as miscarriage, child and infant mortality, were highly problematic. In the long run this would have an effect on the population and the future of its productive citizens.

The debate about the prohibition of night work for women, leading to the decision of the International Labour Organization in 1919 to prohibit female night work,

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<sup>332</sup> Christensen, Jacobsen, Jensen (et.al.), "Arbejderkvinder og uligeløn", p. 35.

<sup>333</sup> e.g. Mohr, Tove, "Mødrehygienekontorene i Norge." In: *Samtiden*, Oslo 1934, p. 239; Lennerhed, Lena, *Sex i Folkhemmet. RFSU:s tidiga Historia*, Uppsala 2002, p. 23.

<sup>334</sup> e.g. Andreen-Svedberg, Andrea, "Mödrahjäl." In: Myrdal, Alva, Wigforss, Eva, Höjer, Signe (eds.), *Kvinnan, familjen och samhället*, Stockholm 1938, pp. 13-16; Key, *Frauenbewegung*, p. 12; Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, p. 27; Lionæs, Skaug, *Dør vi ut?* p. 13; Anker Möller, Katti, *Katti Anker Möller. En kvinnes sociale arbejde gennem 30 år*, Oslo 1928, p. 78/ 97ff.

was one example for the conflicted situation of work class women in the Nordic countries.<sup>335</sup> An article by the Finnish feminist, factory inspector and MP Vera Hjelt in *Naisten ääni* demonstrated the importance but also the dangers of night work. Hjelt argued that night work was most certainly unhealthy for women, but it was also unhealthy for men. Yet, night work was often better paid, and the additional income was necessary for the survival of many working class families.<sup>336</sup>

The night work prohibition was an especially sensitive topic from a eugenic point of view. It was obvious that the nightshift put a strain on the female body and it was common that working class women fulfilled their household duties during the day and their labour duties during the night. Female-dominated workplaces, like laundry services or food industries, worked at night. Also, the pay was usually higher at night.<sup>337</sup> The prohibition of night work for women would have particular economic effects on working class families and would straiten their circumstances further. It was questionable whether that would have a positive effect on the physical status of working class women from a eugenic point of view, since the work was not a voluntary act but an economic necessity. Therefore, it was sensible for the feminists to argue, also from a eugenic point of view, for a discussion about working conditions and the mother role in the working class.

One strong opponent of female work outside the home was Ellen Key. In several of her works, she claimed that female work outside the home and especially in industry was against the nature of women. In her discussion of the international women's movements, she blamed the movements themselves for the situation of working women. She argued that the traditional division of work provided women with a much higher cultural and emotional status than men. Women were, according to Key, not subordinated at all in the preindustrial period. However, industrial work, she claimed, robbed women their natural abilities.<sup>338</sup>

Finnish feminist Ilmi Hallsten made similar claims in her study about women in Finland. She claimed that the industrialization had a greater impact on women, since industry took on tasks women traditionally did at home, for example food preparation or clothes making. Home employment became redundant and out-of-work

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<sup>335</sup> e.g. Karlsson, Lynn, "Inledningen till en 'maskulin renässans'. Debatten kring 1909 års förbund mot nattarbete för kvinnor." In: Wikander, Ulla, Manns, Ulla (eds.), *Det evigt kvinnliga. En historia om förändring*, Lund 2001, p. 161-193.

<sup>336</sup> Hjelt, Vera, "Naisten yötyö." In: *Naisten ääni*, 1906.1, p. 9.

<sup>337</sup> e.g. Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Key, *Frauenbewegung*, pp. 12-13.

women were forced out of the house into industrial work.<sup>339</sup> This was not a specific Swedish, Finnish or even Nordic problem, but the rapid and late transformation from rural to industrial states might have been experienced more intensely in the Nordic countries, especially Finland, which was particularly rural and agricultural.

At this point the criticism of feminists interested in eugenics started. Key argued that especially middle class women are not always able to marry, and therefore they were increasingly forced to become economically independent.<sup>340</sup> For Key, this was the foundation of the goal-orientated women's movement, in both the middle and working classes.<sup>341</sup> Key's perception of female labour market participation was not always consistent.<sup>342</sup> In her book *Die Frauenbewegung* she argued that the goal of the women's movement was to situate women in male work, which had the effect that women had to do thankless work. Yet, Key claimed also that female labour market participation opened up new possibilities for women, especially for women from the upper classes who had no purpose until then and, on entering the labour force, became happy and independent.<sup>343</sup>

Women's organizations, here especially the Swedish *Fredrika-Bremer-Förbundet*, stood mostly in opposition to Key. In an article published in 1896 in *Dagny*, the reform pedagogue Anna Sandström was highly critical of Key's book *Missbrukad Kvinnokraft* [Women's Abused Power], in which argued that the greatest mistake of female emancipation was the demand for work.<sup>344</sup> Sandström summarized Key's message in a sarcastic tone:

Dear women! If you stay at home, believe me, in this way you will become the happiest, and you are good enough – to speak frankly – just not for anything else. You have been weighted and found too light.<sup>345</sup>

Sandström showed herself very surprised that Key argued in her book that emancipation did not mean the resolution from dependency to man but personal development led by the, what Key claimed, natural determination of love and motherhood.<sup>346</sup> Sandström

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<sup>339</sup> Hallstein, *Stellung der Frau*, pp. 10-11; *Hertha* 1915.4, pp. 67-68.

<sup>340</sup> Ambjörnsson, *Samhällsmodern*, p. 19.

<sup>341</sup> Key, *Frauenbewegung*, pp. 27.

<sup>342</sup> Ambjörnsson, *Samhällsmodern*, p. 134ff.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>344</sup> Key, "*Missbrukad Kvinnokraft*", p. 25.

<sup>345</sup> "Kära kvinnor! stanna ni hemma, tro mig, på sil sätt bli ni lyckligast, och ni duga - uppriktigt sagd - just inte till någonting annat. Ni äro vägda och befunna för lätta." Sandström, Anna, "Kvinnoarbete och kvinnolycka. Med anledning av 'Missbrukad kvinnokraft' af Ellen Key." In: *Dagny* 1896.2, p. 33.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

criticised Key's claim that the female preposition was motherhood and this was the equivalent to male productivity. She did not agree with Key that work necessarily meant that women lose their physical and mental femininity, and that a healthy emancipation was not tantamount with equality between men and women.<sup>347</sup>

Key had an ambivalent relationship with other Swedish feminists and criticized in particular the conservative and bourgeois feminist organizations, like the *Fredrika-Bremer-Förbundet*. The quote above shows that the dislike was mutual. As Tiina Kinnunen demonstrates, Key was dissatisfied that the Swedish bourgeois feminist movements did not emphasize enough the difference between the sexes and the value of motherhood in their programmes.<sup>348</sup> Key supported the idea, which connected her with eugenic ideas of other feminists, that it was the natural role of women to take care of the private and public home.<sup>349</sup> The idea of maternity as natural and leading aim of female lives was not a universal one in Nordic feminists movements but very much restricted to eugenic feminists. Other feminists, like for example here Sandström, indeed demanded equal rights for men and women including the possibility for every woman to arrange their lives as they wished too.<sup>350</sup>

Key's notion of the woman being the carer of the private and public sphere connected well with eugenic feminist ideas of a woman being not only the mother of her own children but the mother of the race. Biologizing the social aspects of motherhood to position women as equal to men in society without disregarding the natural order and making men and women partners, not competitors, was the form of emancipation propagated by eugenic feminists, which separated them from the other bourgeois feminists.

The problem of the dual role of women as mothers and workers became more relevant in the interwar period. Before the Great War the labour market participation of married women was still debated even within the feminist movements, as seen by Key. However, after gaining voting rights most women sought not only civil but also economic independence. Furthermore, the consequences of the war and the global economic crisis in the 1920s made female work outside the house an economic necessity beyond the working class. Finnish historian Marita Pohls shows, in her study of women's work in

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<sup>347</sup> Sandström, Anna, "Kvinnoarbete och kvinnolycka. Med anledning av 'Missbrukad kvinnokraft' af Ellen Key." In: *Dagny* 1896.2, p. 36.

<sup>348</sup> Kinnunen, *Die Rezeption Ellen Keys*, p. 10.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>350</sup> e.g. Ollila, "Women's Voluntary Associations", p. 105ff; Ambjörnsson, *Samhällsmodern*, p. 97.

Finland, that in the 1930s about 26% of the female middle class was employed and 43% of married women continued working after their wedding.<sup>351</sup>

The double role of women as workers and caregivers was a widely discussed topic in the interwar period in all the Nordic countries. The Norwegian labour politician and member of parliament Aase Lionæs, in her pamphlet *Dør vi ut? Befolkingsspørsmålet og Arbeiderbewegelsen* [Do we die out? The Population Question and the Worker's Movement, 1936], argued that married women need both the right to work and the right to have care for their children. Lionæs was concerned that the prospect not being able to continue their working life would prevent many women from getting married and having children.<sup>352</sup>

She stated that:

No independent women will do society the service of bearing children, when society thanks her for it by driving her out of her workplace and putting her into economic dependency.<sup>353</sup>

The discussion changed in the interwar period from the idea that female work outside the house was a horrible consequence of industrialization which caused serious eugenic damage, to the understanding that female labour market participation might indeed be beneficial for the development of women but the necessary conditions, for example childcare, must be created for it. Then women would happily procreate to work against the population crisis.<sup>354</sup> The eugenic feminist debate changed here significantly and transformed women from being passive victims of modernity into active citizens, who could gain their civil rights through reproduction and production, though the former was still the main task.

The feminist pioneer of the population question in Sweden, Alva Myrdal, shared Lionæs' and Key's concern. Myrdal argued that family and marriage no longer had the economic and biological function which they used to. Women now had to fulfil the double role of family and work. Myrdal continued that this often created a personal conflict for women, because they could fulfil neither role as they wished to. While

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<sup>351</sup> Pohls, Maritta, "Women's Work in Finland 1870-1940." In: Manninen, Merja, Setälä, Päivi (eds.), *The Lady with the Bow. The Story of Finnish Women*, Helsinki 1990, pp. 61/ 67.

<sup>352</sup> Lionæs, Skaug, *Dør vi ut?* p. 13.

<sup>353</sup> "Ingen frihetssel ksende kvinne vil gjøre samfundet den tjeneste och føde barn, hvis samfundets takk driver henne ut fra arbeidsplassene og over i økonomisk utfrihet." Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>354</sup> Myrdal, Alva, Myrdal, Gunnar, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, Stockholm 1934, p. 205.

Myrdal, like Lionæs, demanded a harmonization between motherhood and the labour market, she saw this task as incumbent upon the women themselves and stated that they could not expect any help from the outside.<sup>355</sup>

Myrdal argued in another article that the infiltration of women into the labour market was unstoppable. However, men and women were not on the same level there. Women always kept their special attachment to the family and were still wives and daughters. For women on the labour market, marriage was always the option for the future, Myrdal reasoned. Since women never demanded full access to the labour market and their main field of occupation remained the home, their chances on the labour market remained slim and their wages stayed low.<sup>356</sup>

I started this section by showing how women were mainly perceived as mother citizens and men as worker citizens. Furthermore, the state took over the role to protect and support this gendered division of citizenship.<sup>357</sup> I have now demonstrated that eugenic feminists in the Nordic countries based their views on both education and labour market participation on the assumption that the female role in society was foremost that of a mother, and the role of worker was secondary to this in the pre-war period. But then in the interwar period considered the integration of married women and mothers into the labour market as partly favourable, when the children were cared for. Maternal citizenship was invented in a period of population crisis and the rise of the population question. The question which needed to be answered was how women, and also men, should function in a modern society to ensure economic, social and cultural success. The eugenic argument was highly relevant here. On the one hand, there was the concern that middle class women would refuse marriage due to their high level of education and the independence they could gain on the labour market. Why should they enter the dependency of a marriage, when they could be liberated? Eugenicists were concerned that this could increase the imbalance between the quality and quantity of the population. On the other hand, the situation of women who were forced to work was severe, as we have seen. Labour market participation put a great strain on the working class woman's body and her ability to bear healthy children.

From a eugenic point of view this was most concerning. Through education and labour market participation on male terms, women would lose their ability to

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<sup>355</sup> Myrdal, "Den nyare tidens", pp. 39-41.

<sup>356</sup> Myrdal, "Swedish Women in Industry and Home", pp. 221-223.

<sup>357</sup> Hernes, *Welfare State and Women*, p. 140.



reproduce in a healthy way and the state of the nation would be put in danger. The integration of women into the labour market, from the point of view of feminists interested in eugenics, had to be done with special consideration for the most important attribute of a woman, her ability to reproduce.<sup>358</sup> This function should not be hindered by work. Women's new appearances in the public sphere through education and labour did not liberate them as such, but rather contributed to a shift of dependency from the private in the form of the family, to the public, represented by the state.<sup>359</sup> Here I showed how the eugenic feminists promoted this shift of dependency, for example through their demands for a different type of education of girls, or the argument that women's reproductive function was the main basis for their recognition as citizens. Thus, eugenic feminists supported the patriarchal view of family and a woman's place in the Nordic welfare state.

### 3.4. Making the Home of the Nation – The Eugenic Woman

The notion that femininity was based on the domestic role of women was a re-emerging phenomenon, of which several historical examples can be found. In the mid-nineteenth century in the United States an organization called *True Womanhood* attributed four main characteristics to a true woman; piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.<sup>360</sup> By combining all four attributes and sacrificing herself completely to home, husband and family, she constituted a pillar of the nation and the civilization.<sup>361</sup> It was the task of a true woman to provide her husband with a comfortable and cheerful home.<sup>362</sup>

A similar notion of womanhood emerged also in Europe and the Nordic countries in the early twentieth century; the cult of domesticity, as historian Karen Lützen calls it. Middle class women cultivated the idea that feminine values of the home and female morality constituted a certain superiority to their male counterparts.<sup>363</sup> The cult of domesticity included not only the emphasis on the female role as carer for home and family but also an extension of the domestic sphere to the public sphere. The home was defined as the heart of society, according to Lützen, and society was considered a metaphor of the home. The women, supporting the cult of domesticity, demanded an

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<sup>358</sup> e.g. Ambjörnsson, *Samhällsmodern*, p. 87.

<sup>359</sup> e.g. Borchorst, Siim, "Woman-Friendly Policies", pp. 207-224.

<sup>360</sup> Welter, Barbara, "The Cult of Womanhood: 1820-1860." In: *American Quarterly* 18/2 (1966), p. 152.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163

<sup>363</sup> Lützen, Karin, "The Cult of Domesticity in Danish Women's Philanthropy, 1870-1920." In: Markkola, Pirjo (ed.), *Gender and Vocation. Women, Religion and Social Change in the Nordic Countries, 1830-1940*, Helsinki 2000, p. 152.

expansion of the values of a bourgeois home to the public sphere to generate as much peace and morality in the public as in the private middle class home, provided by the bourgeois housewife.<sup>364</sup>

The idea of defining woman through her domestic role as equal citizen was also embraced by the eugenic feminists at the turn of the century. The domestic woman became not only the mother and wife of her home but of the entire society. The idea that the main task of women as mothers and homemakers could be extended to that of carer of the whole society can also be found in the conceptualization of a eugenic, modern woman. Eugenic feminists thought that women should contribute through their feminine values as homemaker not only to the eugenic well-being of their own nuclear family but also to the eugenic progress of the whole nation.

The aim of this section is to show the antithesis to the previously discussed New Woman; the eugenic woman. The eugenic woman enhanced the quality of the population through her eugenically beneficial behaviour. As I show here, this was mainly linked firstly to her role as housewife and the extension of this role into the public sphere, which contributed to the eugenic well-being of the nation. I demonstrate that the eugenic, modern woman was not born this way but had to be educated by the newest scientific methods and ideas to be an efficient housewife. Furthermore, this section continues the discussion of the legal position of women with the focus on marriage and how the early twentieth century context hindered the contribution to society of married women from a eugenic point of view. Finally, I discuss how the housewife was situated in the debate about productivity and citizenship, and to what extent she constituted her own category in this discourse.

#### 3.4.1. Education of the Housewife

Finnish doctor Karolina Eskelin emphasized, in the introduction of her 1914 book about care of the home and infants, that practical education was of great importance and especially the instruction of housewives in basic hygiene must be very much encouraged.<sup>365</sup> Eskelin saw a specific need for this in Finnish society. She argued that many Finnish housewives lacked basic knowledge about modern household skills and hygiene. Eskelin attributed this mainly to the underdeveloped status of the Finnish

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<sup>364</sup> Lützen, "The Cult of Domesticity", p. 158.

<sup>365</sup> Eskelin, Karolina, *Om hygien i allmogehemmen och späda barns vård*, Helsinki 1914, p. 3.

population and its traditional alignment, which made the implementation of new ideas slow and difficult.<sup>366</sup>

An organization which was particularly active in the education of the housewife in Finland, as demanded by Eskelin, was the *Martha* organization. As Finnish historian Anne Ollila describes, the main activity of the *Marthas* was economic domestic counselling, which was perceived positively in particular in rural Finland. However, over time their programme evolved to provide popular education for the Finnish population beyond household skills and home economics.<sup>367</sup> The aim of the so-called housewife organization was not only to improve the general knowledge of the housewife herself and the care of the nuclear family, but the organization's leaders were also concerned with the wider effects of their work on the whole society, the people, and the nation.<sup>368</sup>

Educational advice for housewives can be found in women's magazines as well as in books published by feminists. *Husmodern* was one of the leading magazines in Finland to provide written support and advice for Swedish-speaking housewives. However, the *Martha* organization also provided practical guidance through local clubs. Outside Finland, the magazine *Hertha*, published by the Swedish women's organization *Fredrika-Bremer-Förbundet*, demanded education for the Swedish housewife.<sup>369</sup> The Norwegian housewife organization was founded in the early twentieth century.<sup>370</sup> The practical guidance of the housewife was very much based on eugenic ideals of hygiene and cleanliness. By providing educational advice in this spirit, the housewife organizations contributed to the development of eugenics as lifestyle ideology spreading in all parts of the people's lives and defining the ideals of their daily lives. Eugenics became in this way an important ideology in aspects of housewifery.

Every edition of *Husmodern* included articles about the practical advice for the home and the family. The articles were general but also on specific topics like how to air the house adequately, how to provide health care to sick family members or how to cook delicious and healthy meals on a small budget.<sup>371</sup> An overlapping theme of the article was cleanliness and hygiene. The *Martha* leader Fanny Hult advised in an article

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<sup>366</sup> Eskelin, *Om hygien i allmogehemmen*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>367</sup> Ollila, "Women's Voluntary Associations", pp. 98-99.

<sup>368</sup> Hult, *Förbundet Martha*, p. 3

<sup>369</sup> Hesselgren, Kerstin, "Husmodersutbildning I." In: *Hertha* 1916.8, pp. 155-159; Hesselgren, Kerstin, "Husmodersutbildning II." In: *Hertha* 1916.10, pp. 199-202.

<sup>370</sup> Kelber, Mim, *Women and Government. New Ways to Political Power*, Santa Barbara 1994, p. 63.

<sup>371</sup> e.g. "Små hälsoråd." In: *Husmodern* 1905.03, pp. 42-43; Wilksman, Edith, "Luftens betydelse för vår hälsa." In: *Husmodern* 1906.02, pp. 29-32; Hagman, Lucina, "Uppfostra edra söner till renhet." In: *Husmodern* 1910.12, pp. 178-179; E. "Några enkla ord i hälsovård." In: *Husmodern* 1911, pp. 136-138.

in 1903 that a home needs constant work and attention to be tidy and in order, in particular an urban home.<sup>372</sup> She provided her reader with detailed instruction; the house needs a deep cleaning at least three to four times a year. After the preparation of a meal all dishes must be cleaned. Meals should be prepared and eaten regularly to a fixed time. In a proper home, according to Hult, everything has its fixed places and should be returned to the place after its use to avoid waste of time. Hult argued that it was the task of the housewife to not only do these works but also to provide instructions to the children to educate them to the same lifestyle and encourage them to help in the household. The husband's help was not mentioned.<sup>373</sup>

The educational advice provided by *Husmodern* to Finnish housewives was an example of the development of eugenic ideology from science into everyday life and forming a lifestyle. Notions of clean and pure genes were transmitted into idea that a eugenic life was not only constituted by heritage but also by life choices. Not only should the future body be pure but also the contemporary one. A clean and healthy lifestyle was the foundation for that. It was upon expert women, like the contributors to *Husmodern*, to educate firstly the ordinary housewife in this new, modern and eugenic lifestyle, who then would transmit her knowledge to her children. *Husmodern* obeyed it on the housewife to clean and purify the smallest community of the nation as foundation for the later overall cleaning of the whole society. Eugenic ideas about purification and cleanliness left in this way the scientific fields and were introduced into the common life, via scientific methods of education, to contribute to a development of eugenics as lifestyle ideology through eugenic feminists.

The care of the home became, similarly to reproduction, not a private but a public matter. While the Finnish magazine *Husmodern* focused mainly on giving actual, practical advice about cleaning, cooking and caring, the Swedish feminist Kerstin Hesselgren argued in *Hertha* that the education of the Swedish housewives was also of special national economic interest.<sup>374</sup> In the second part of the article, Hesselgren elaborated on this. She argued that women have a double position in society:

The woman's double position as independent citizen and prospective housewife is also important for a national economic point of view, so that the state prepares her possibilities and her interest when she was educated

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<sup>372</sup> Hult, Fanny, "Några ord om hemmets vård." In: *Husmodern* 1903.01, pp. 11–12.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>374</sup> Hesselgren, Kerstin, "Husmodersutbildning I." In: *Hertha* 1916.8, p. 155.

to receive gainful employment, which she can also use to be a housewife and mother.<sup>375</sup>

Hesselgren demanded state-supervised education of girls in housewife matters. She declared that schools should train girls from 16 years onwards in professional housekeeping. Practical skills, like cooking, baking, cleaning, clothes making or childcare, should be on the syllabus in the same way as theoretical matters, like nutrition, economic housekeeping or health care. Hesselgren concluded that although housework was a feminine task by nature, professionalization must be increased and improved. Education was not only important in general but also for the housewife herself.<sup>376</sup>

Hesselgren was a founding member of the *Fredrika-Bremer-förbundet*, which as I have already shown was generally more critically towards a eugenic approach. However, she was also chair of *Frisinnade Kvinnor* since 1923, which was much more open to eugenic feminist ideas. Yet, also the *Fredrika-Bremer-förbundet* advocated for the obligatory education of the housewife for all women, married and unmarried, and of all classes.<sup>377</sup> Though the organization was also interested in the societal aspects of housewifery and motherhood and argued for a modernization of the housewifery, similar to eugenic feminists. It contradicted the idea of a renaissance of the housewife as the main life perspective of women but instead advocated continuously for the free choice of women.<sup>378</sup>

The professionalization of the work of the housewife functioned as part of the general demand for the women's liberation by eugenic feminists like Hesselgren and Eskelin. As Norwegian historian Kari Melby argues in the context of the Norwegian feminist Fredrikke Marie Qvarm, the aim of many first-wave feminists in the Nordic countries to make women equal to men within the gender segregation.<sup>379</sup> Women and men needed to have an equal status in society but their societal role should be defined thorough their biological difference to complement each other rather than compete with or replace one another. The feminine attributes determined their societal place as carer

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<sup>375</sup> "Kvinnans dubbelställning av självförsörjande medborgare och blivande husmor gör det också till en nationalekonomiskt viktig sak, att staten bereder henne möjligheter att därest hennes intresse och anlag ligga däråt - kunna utbilda sig till ett Förvärvsarbete, som hon kan utnyttja även som husmor och mor." Hesselgren, Kerstin, "Husmodersutbildning II." In: *Hertha* 1916.10, p. 201.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>377</sup> Manns, *Den sanna frigörelsen*, pp. 194-195.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>379</sup> Melby, Kari, "Fredrikke Qvam. A Woman's Practice of Democracy before Suffrage." In: Sogner, Sølvi, Hagemann, Gro (eds.), *Women's Politics and Women in Politics. In Honour of Ida Blom*, Oslo/ Bergen 2001, p. 100.

and housewife in the same way as the male attributes determined their place as provider. Yvonne Hirdman argues that the housewife contract was a substantial part of the Nordic welfare state from the 1930s until the mid-1960s. In her view, this proved the lack of feminist input into the political decision-making and the patriarchal foundation of Nordic societies.<sup>380</sup>

I would argue that the reality was more complicated. Prominent feminists in several Nordic countries, like Hesselgren, Qvarn or Eskelin, argued that, after gaining suffrage in the early twentieth century, women could only achieve complete liberation and equal societal positioning when they received an equal status in society: but this status was not the same as men's. The feminine attributes of caring and nurturing were reaffirmed to generate an equal, but not identical, standing to men. The eugenic feminists, not the established patriarchy, decided on the professionalization of the housewife as method for the enhancement of the female societal position and created housewifery as the main female task in the Nordic welfare state for several decades. This showed the great influence feminists had on societal formation and political decision-making in the Nordic countries.

#### 3.4.2. New Marriage Legislations

Professionalization of the work of the housewife was only one aspect of establishing that women's social status was equal but not identical to that of men. Another approach was to enhance the legal rights of married women. From a eugenic point of view, the recognition of the importance of female reproduction as not only a private but also a public, even state, matter was crucial to work against the perceived ongoing degeneration and prevent the downfall of the civilization. Eugenic feminists used this fear skilfully for their own purposes, both to introduce female matters in the public discourse and to establish the woman as an equal but not identical partner of the man in building society. This argumentation was not without risk, as we will see later.

The life of an unmarried woman was clearly described in the Danish women's magazine *Hvad vi vil*. The article, published in 1892, long before the discussion about the marriage reform took place, argued that it is not a disaster if a woman does not get married. There are other ways an unmarried woman can live her life. The article suggested that unmarried women could play the piano or sew or be in any other way a

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<sup>380</sup> Hirdman, "Kvinnor – från möjlighet till problem?", pp. 116-149.

good person.<sup>381</sup> The unmarried bourgeois woman was condemned here to an unproductive and dependent life at home. This notion was very bourgeois and probably largely disconnected from the reality of the majority of Danish women at the turn of the century. The situation of workingclass women was largely irrelevant for these middle class women, which does not mean that similar discussion did not take place in the working class-based feminist movements. However, it demonstrated the change in ideas about marriage, the married and unmarried woman. Unmarried women, at least from the middle class, did not seem to be socially dangerous in any way before 1900. At least in this article "[...] one can be also a diligent person when one is not a housewife or a mother."<sup>382</sup> Nevertheless, this was a private life without appearance in the public sphere.

Only twenty years later this notion had changed. Unmarried middle class women were in the public eye now, since they were not bound to the family anymore but were able to participate in the labour market. This change affected the role of marriage in the middle class woman's life and the composition of society. The solution appeared to be a reformation of the marriage legislation to make marriage more appealing again to women, to place their reproduction under the control of the state.

The enhancement of the legal position of the married woman was in many ways equally important to the education of the housewife, but rather from a political than from a national economic point of view. Still, both were crucial for the development of society from a eugenic perspective. Between 1909 and 1929, all Nordic countries revised their marriage and divorce legislation to create greater equality between husband and wife. This took place in close Nordic cooperation. Especially in the early years, there was even the idea of a Nordic marriage and divorce legislation. Norway was the first Nordic country in 1909 which enacted a liberal divorce legislation, which allowed divorce by mutual consent.<sup>383</sup> It expanded this law with *the Law on Formation and Dissolution of Marriage* (1918) and the law on the *Property Relations of Spouses* (1927). Sweden created a marriage and divorce reform in 1915 and a new *Marriage Code* in 1920. Denmark started its reform process a little bit later and enacted the *Law on Formation and Dissolution of Marriage* in 1922 and the *Law on Legal Effects of Marriage* in 1925.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Fru Rosalie, "Som man gifter sig." In: *Hvad vi vil*, 1892.1, p. 2.

<sup>382</sup> "[...] at de kan blive dygtige Mennesker, ogsaa om de ikke bliver Hustruer og Mødre." Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>383</sup> Rosenbeck, Bente, "Modernisation of Marriage in Scandinavia." In: Sogner, Sølvi, Hagemann, Gro (eds.), *Women's Politics and Women in Politics. In Honour of Ida Blom*, Oslo/ Bergen 2001, p. 71.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

Finland revised its *Marriage Law* in 1929, including the regulations for divorce.<sup>385</sup> The legislations stated that spouses within marriage were equal. The initiatives for the new legislations was not by the policy makers but by women's organizations and lawyers.<sup>386</sup>

Nordic cooperation was great by the legislation reforms. In 1909 a Nordic committee for family law centred the women's question in the middle of the reforms of marriage laws. The commission argued that married women needed to gain more rights, especially in context of property, to increase the appeal of marriage for young women. The goal of the committee was to provide women as individuals with the same rights as men.<sup>387</sup>

The argumentation of the Nordic committee overlapped with the demands of several eugenic feminists who argued that married women's rights had to be increased to make marriage more appealing to young women. An article, published in 1903, in the Swedish bourgeois women's magazine *Dagny* raised the question why a young woman would want to get married, if she gained full rights at the age of 21.<sup>388</sup> If women have to give up their full independence when entering marriage, this is to their great disadvantage, the article argued.<sup>389</sup> The successor magazine of *Dagny*, *Hertha*, was concerned in a similar way more than ten years later in 1914 at the dawn of the First World War. Though the article by the Swedish feminist and philanthropist Agda Montelius was published more than ten years later, apparently not much had changed. Montelius also demanded that a new marriage act make men and women equal in marriage. She argued that women must be able to be independent in marriage.

If the now revised part of the marriage code before Parliament is essentially accepted, it will without doubt be a big step: a time for the improvement of the Swedish women's status within marriage, which under current conditions is extremely concerning at times. A happy development of family relations for the whole community will also undoubtedly thus be achieved.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Savolainen, Matti, "Finland. The New Marriage Act enters into Force." In: *Journal of Family Law* 27 (1988-1989), p. 127.

<sup>386</sup> Rosenbeck, "Modernisation of Marriage", p. 69.

<sup>387</sup> e.g. *ibid.*, p. 71; Melby, Kari, Pykkänen, Anu, Rosenbeck, Bente, Carlsson Wetterberg, Christina (eds.), *The Nordic Model of Marriage and the Welfare State*, Copenhagen 2000; Melby, Kari, Pykkänen, Rosenbeck, Bente, Carlsson, Wetterberg, *Inte ett ord om kärlek. Äktenskap och politik i Norden ca 1850-1930*, Riga 2006.

<sup>388</sup> Cederschiöld, Maria, "Den svenska gifta kvinnans rättsliga ställning i familjen och samhället." In: *Dagny*, 1903.03, p. 62.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>390</sup> "Blir den nu reviderade delen av giftermålsbalken av riksdagen i huvudsak antagen, så är utan allt tvivel ett stort steg: taget till förbättrande av den svenska kvinnans ställning inom äktenskapet, som under



For Montelius the extension of married women's rights was not only a private or individual question, but also of societal importance. The current legal situation of married women was considered disadvantageous, not only from the female but also the societal, and finally a eugenic point of view. If fewer women entered marriage and created a traditional family, this would create more cohabitation outside the control of the state and society. Clearly, women and men would not disregard their sexuality when deciding against marriage. Illegitimate children and an uncontrolled cohabitation would be the consequence. But also, on the other hand, when healthy and strong women would stay single and live in celibacy to be able to work and be independent, this would have had a negative effect on the qualitative outcome of the race. This would be, from a social as well as a eugenic point of view, a catastrophe. The extension of married women's rights was consequently not only to the advantage of the individual woman, but of national interest from a eugenic feminist perspective. Keeping sexuality and reproduction in the state-regulated form of marriage, I argue, would mean greater control over the people's procreation and guarantee more control over the quality and quantity of the population.

The different marriage laws acted also as a control system, I suggest. The eugenic marriage laws, which were implemented in the Nordic countries in the 1910s and 1920s, regulated marriage between individuals with hereditary diseases, epilepsy, mental illness or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) to prevent the spread of these conditions to the next generation. In Finland for example, the *Marriage Act* of 1929 demanded the permission of the president to marry for people with STIs, epilepsy, deafness or muteness.<sup>391</sup> These laws were based on the bourgeois notion that sexuality should only be expressed within the framework of marriage. This notion had to be soon revised by the law-makers, since the marriage laws did not seem to have an effect on the population quality and demands for the next step, the introduction of sterilization of defective individuals, followed soon, not only in Finland but also in the other Nordic countries.<sup>392</sup>

This notion is also particularly reflected in the fact that Montelius in her article not only demanded greater married women's rights but in the same article also the

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nuvarande förhållanden stundom är ytterst sorglig. En för hela samhället lycklig utveckling av familjerättsliga förhållanden skall ock otvivelaktigt därmed åstadkommas." Montelius, Agda, "Kvinnan och äktenskapet." In: *Hertha*, 1914.1, p. 9.

<sup>391</sup> Hietala, "From Race Hygiene to Sterilization", p. 231.

<sup>392</sup> e.g. Hietala, "From Race Hygiene to Sterilization", p. 231; Hansen, Bent Sigurd, "Something Rotten in the State of Denmark." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Roll-Hansen, Nils (eds.), *Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland*, East Lansing 2005, p. 26; Broberg, Tydén, "Eugenics in Sweden", p. 100; Gjaever, Øyvind, "Marriage and Madness. Expert Advice and the Eugenic Issue in Twentieth-Century Norwegian Marriage Legislation." In: *Science Studies* 16 (2003), pp. 3-21.

restriction of marriage for people with hereditary illnesses, mental illnesses or sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>393</sup> The aim was stronger regulation of individual sexuality, in particular the female one, through the institution of marriage. Further, it was an attempt to prevent sexuality being expressed in areas where the state could not act as control organ, but the results of these sexual acts might have harmful effects on the future of the nation, through for example physically or mentally disabled or feeble-minded offspring whose births could have been prevented through the regulation of marriage.

#### 3.4.3. Productivity and Citizenship of the Housewife

By focussing on women's domestic role, eugenic feminists sought both to demonstrate the moral superiority of women as carers and to address the issue of women who were seen as unproductive from a capitalist point of view, like housewives and married women, to raise their status as valuable members of society. Several feminist publications raised the issue of the lack of recognition of social productivity. An article in the Norwegian women's magazine *Nylænde* argued that economic independence can only be achieved for people in paid work. Since women were not paid for their household work and motherhood, it was not possible for them to be independent.<sup>394</sup> The article argued further that the work of the housewife and mother is not only restricted to her own children but is frequently spread over the entire family, even the extended family. Though, she works for many people, her work has no influence on her economic position.<sup>395</sup>

A similar criticism can be found in the writings of the Norwegian physician and daughter of Katti Anker Møller, Tove Mohr. Mohr wrote that married women are at a disadvantage compared to unmarried women.

The sum of money that the unmarried woman is able to apply to her personal consumption from her salary now would rather break a family father's budget, if his wife had similar demands. The amount the married woman can spare for herself out of the total family budget cannot be compared with what the unmarried woman can sacrifice for her own person. The married woman must decrease her claims to the lowest minimum, so that family life is supported and it does not suffer too much loss.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Montelius, Agda, "Kvinnan och äktenskapet." In: *Hertha*, 1914.1, p. 6.

<sup>394</sup> "Kvindens økonomiske afhængighed af manden." In: *Nylænde*, 01.10.1902, p. 293.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>396</sup> "Den pengesum som den ugifte kvinde nu ut av sin løn frit kan anvende til sit personlige forbrug, vilde ganske sprænge en familiefars budget om hans kone hade de tilsvarende fordringer. Det beløb som den gifte kvinde av familiens samlede budget kan avse til sig selv, kan ikke sammenlignes med hvad den ugifte kvinde kan ofre på sin egen person. Den gifte kvinde må skruer sine fordringer ned til det laveste minimum

Mohr continued that reproduction was the most important mission for society and should be more greatly appreciated, because housework is not valued or paid with an independent salary, which shows that the socially important work of housewifery and motherhood was still overshadowed by patriarchal behaviour.<sup>397</sup>

The fact that two Norwegian feminists argued forcefully for the higher social valuation of the housewife and mother might not be coincidental. Norway during the years of economic challenge at the turn of the century saw the housewife become an object of ideology and the Norwegian Housewife organization supported specifically the interests of the housewife. An education to a hygienic and clean lifestyle were introduced into the school syllabus, as was called for in Sweden and supported by the work of the *Martha* organization in Finland.<sup>398</sup> The focus on the enhancement of married women's rights and the recognition of their housework as productive appears to be a logical strategy to prevent these women from suffering from the effects of a growing understanding of civil rights based on productivity and increase the introduction of a eugenic lifestyle into the population through the channel of the housewife.

The discourse about the greater recognition of housewives and their work in society, with the demand for their equal rights, was based on the argument that the housewife and mother reproduced and raised the next generation of workers. Julia O'Connor argues that the concept of the citizen in the welfare state can be understood as a labour resource. Citizenship was, according to O'Connor, built on the status of the citizen as worker. This did not correspond with the diverse experience of women in the welfare state, foremost as needs-bearing clients and rights-bearing consumers of welfare services, O'Connor concludes.<sup>399</sup> The position of women mainly as clients of the welfare state rather than active citizens might be considered particularly topical after the Second World War, when the welfare state in the Nordic countries reached its peak.<sup>400</sup> However, the notion of the welfare state citizen as worker was shaped earlier in the twentieth century, not only with the rise of social democracy in the 1920s, but with the introduction of universal suffrage in the decades before. Civil rights were issued to productive

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skalfamilielivet holdes oppe og de forskjellige medlemmer ikke lide for store savn." Mohr, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 151.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-155.

<sup>398</sup> e.g. Hagman, Lucina, "Uppfostra edra söner till renhet." In: *Husmodern* 1910.12, pp. 178-179; Andreen-Svedberg, Andrea, *Vissa problem vid sexualundervisningen i skola., Bilaga XVI, betänkande i sexualfrågan*, (SOU 1936:59), p. 424.

<sup>399</sup> O'Connor Julia, "Understanding Women in Welfare States." In: *Current Sociology* 44/1 (1996), p. 3.

<sup>400</sup> e.g. Hernes, *Welfare State and Woman Power*; Hirdman, "Kvinnor – från Möjlighet till Problem?"

members of society and for example middle class women or receivers of poor relief were disadvantaged due to their unproductive status.<sup>401</sup>

The eugenic feminists sought to counter this by emphasizing the role of the housewife in society and the new cult of domesticity, arguing against the double burden by stating that reproduction was a form of production. Barbara Hobson and Marika Lindholm, in their study of female labour resources in the welfare state, seek to reveal the agency of women in the construction of citizenship.<sup>402</sup> They argue that motherhood was seen by Swedish feminists as a service and social function, comprising the female contribution to the welfare state. According to Hobson and Lindholm, Swedish feminists articulated multiple identities for women in the 1930s; as mothers, citizens and workers.<sup>403</sup> The eugenic feminists' emphasis on the importance of the housewife and her contribution to the society tried to resolve this issue by proclaiming the role as housewife, and mother as I show in the next chapter, as active civil role equal to the worker.

In this section I contested the idea that all women strived for labour market participation and rejected their traditional role. The eugenic feminists did not seek to bring the woman back into the home but rather to position her as an active citizen, through her reproduction, as a public member of society. The eugenic feminist aim was to give female work in the home the same value as male productive work outside the house and thus create equality between men and women. Being equal did not mean being identical. The eugenic notion that biology defined everyone's place in society was expanded by eugenic feminists to include the role of biological sex. Every person contributed to society in their own way. This was not valued as such, at least not in the case of eugenically healthy individuals, and so the recognition of housework as equal to male labour was a step to create equality between men and women through the acceptance of their biological difference, which would finally lead to a higher civilization in the eugenic sense.

### 3.5 The Mother of the Race – Eugenic Reproduction and Productivity

The domestic role was not only limited to that of the housewife but especially included the role as mother. I have discussed already on several places in this study the importance of motherhood for eugenic feminists, but I do it here now in depth. Several of the

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<sup>401</sup> e.g. Satka, Mirja, *Making Social Citizenship. Conceptual Practices from the Finnish Poor Law to Professional Social Work*, Jyväskylä 1995, p. 63.

<sup>402</sup> Hobson, Lindholm, "Collective Identities", p. 476.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., p. 483.

feminists discussed here were united in the idea that motherhood was the main task in a woman's life. In 1930, Karolina Eskelin claimed in her article "Om kvinnohygien och kvinnosjukdom" [About Female Hygiene and Female Sickness] that marriage and motherhood are the main tasks in a woman's life. She argued that the best age for a woman to get married would be between 21 to 22 years old.<sup>404</sup>

Also, her Swedish colleague Karolina Widerström saw more than thirty years earlier it as "[...] woman's duty to consciously do everything for the child she is carrying, so that it is born healthy."<sup>405</sup> Though Widerström was not claiming, in opposition to Eskelin, that women should be mothers, she argued that a woman carrying a child should do her best to have a healthy child. However, she continued, it is also "her duty not to forget her own sake and the maintenance of her own body and all its organs."<sup>406</sup> Widerström considered it a duty for women, who were bound to be mothers, to do their best for the child and themselves, to be capable of being a good mother and to give the child the best the possible start into life.

While Widerström spoke of the duty of women to be good mothers, which appeared to be something a woman could influence and decide about herself, Ellen Key argued, in the same year as Widerström in 1896, that motherhood (and maternal health) is the highest source of meaning for women, and also their natural destiny.<sup>407</sup> When Widerström demanded a conscious decision for motherhood, Key argued that it was inevitable for women to be mothers. Though Key's argumentation was not consistent, and she was open to other life choices.<sup>408</sup> Widerström's conscious argumentation for motherhood left room for the possibility for women who were not mothers to be women too. In contrast, Key's and Eskelin's argument that motherhood was natural for women implied that women who were not mothers worked against their own nature and nature's gift to them. This section considers how far the perception of the woman's nature-given duty of motherhood influenced her value as an individual and her position in society. Furthermore, it addresses the questions of what actually makes a dutiful mother and what happened to women who did not fulfil these values from a eugenic point of view.

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<sup>404</sup> Eskelin, "Om kvinnohygien", p. 452.

<sup>405</sup> "[...] kvinnans plikt nämligen att medvetet göra allt hvad hon kan för att det barn hon bär och föder skall bli friskt." Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, p. 3.

<sup>406</sup> "Hennes plikt ej heller att förgäta att för sin egen och sin verksamhets skull väl vårda hela sin kropp med alla dess organ." Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>407</sup> Key, *Kvinno-psykologi*, p. 8.

<sup>408</sup> e.g. Key, *Lifslinjer*.

The three Nordic eugenic feminists quoted above were not an exception in their maternal argumentation but found themselves in the great company of other international feminists. One of the strongest proponents of maternal feminism in Canada was probably the feminist, politician and author Nellie McClung (1873-1951). McClung was not only a suffragist and a member of the *Alberta Legislative Assembly* but also a strong advocate of eugenics and the sterilization of so-called simple-minded individuals.<sup>409</sup> McClung, Devereux argues, set her demand for women's rights in the context of motherhood: women must be granted voting rights, because of their moral superiority which was based on their ability to reproduce.<sup>410</sup> It was the woman's destiny to save, care for and help not only her own children but the children of the world. McClung not only used similar argumentation on the naturalness of motherhood for women to Eskelin or Key, but also set motherhood within the bigger picture of the nation. Women's ability to mother was not limited to the home and the private sphere but was particularly important for the success of a nation. McClung extended the role of the mother from the being the mother of her own biological children, to be also the mother of the whole nation, or the race.

Similar aspirations can also be found among feminists in the United States, France and Germany. Historian Alisa Klaus demonstrates the betterment of the race and making motherhood scientific were some of the ideas about female moral reform movement in the United States.<sup>411</sup> Women activists, according to Klaus, campaigned for the improvement of maternal and infant care, especially around the First World War, not only to improve individual health but also that of the whole nation.<sup>412</sup> However, Klaus points out that the idea of race betterment referred rather to the whole population in the United States and not necessarily to concepts of selective breeding to eliminate racial groups.<sup>413</sup>

Klaus continues in her discussion that also French women showed a great interest in maternalism in the context of the idea of the depopulation of France in the early twentieth century. However due to the relatively low numbers of professional women,

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<sup>409</sup> Canada had a strong eugenic feminist movement and McClung found herself in the company of several other feminists, like Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney and Irene Parlby (known as the Famous Five). For more about eugenic feminism in Canada, see Moss, Stam, "From Suffrage to Sterilization".

<sup>410</sup> Devereux, *Growing a Race*, p. 21.

<sup>411</sup> Klaus, "Depopulation and Race Suicide", p. 190.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

such as doctors, the typical scenario was that French bourgeois women worked as philanthropists, for example by visiting and educating French working class women about health and infant care.<sup>414</sup> The maternalism in the United States and Canada was often supported by the government, since many activists were either politicians or in other professional positions. In contrast, French maternalism appeared to take place on a private, bourgeois level, limited by the restrictions on the professionalization of women.<sup>415</sup>

Germany probably showed the closest connections to the situation in the Nordic countries. As in the Nordic welfare state, German women can be considered the main recipients and also contributors to the development of the welfare state as such.<sup>416</sup> German historian Christoph Sachße argues that members of the German bourgeois women's movement around 1900 created the idea of a social motherhood through their establishment of social work as female profession.<sup>417</sup> Sachße shows that the strong engagement of middle class women in social work to improve the situation of the German working class resulted on the one hand in their imposing bourgeois norms about maternalism, health and hygiene on the working class. On the other hand, it also fuelled the societal discourse about the place of motherhood in society. As Sachße suggests, women's emancipation became a cultural mission to transform the morality of society by enlarging the idea of motherhood, similarly to McClung's argumentation in Canada, from being a private to a public matter.<sup>418</sup> Mothers were not only responsible for their own offspring but also became mothers of the whole society and to all neglected individuals in need of motherly support.

To return to eugenic maternalism in the Nordic countries, I now look at how the ideal mother was defined by Nordic eugenic feminists, and why a troubled mother constituted a threat. Furthermore, I analyse the support systems for mothers demanded by feminists in the form of maternity insurance and allowances. Finally, I explore the notion of race and population in eugenic maternalism.

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<sup>414</sup> Klaus, "Depopulation and Race Suicide", pp. 188/ 193.

<sup>415</sup> e.g. Klaus, "Depopulation and Race Suicide"; Devereux, *Growing a Race*.

<sup>416</sup> Sachße, "Social Mothers", p. 136.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., pp. 137/ 141.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

### 3.5.1. The Idealization of Motherhood

The female ability to bear children often provided women with a special place in the social order. Women of reproductive age were the subjects of more rules and rights than any other member of society.<sup>419</sup> In modern Nordic societies in the early twentieth century, motherhood was central to transforming women's rights and an important matter for the state. The protection of mothers and their children, as well as their regulation, became an integral part of the population question in the Nordic countries in this period to ensure the quality as well as the quantity of the perceived shrinking population.<sup>420</sup>

Motherhood became vital to creating the new national identity of the younger Nordic nations, like Finland, Norway and Iceland. I suggest that a woman was not only a mother for her own children anymore but functioned also as mother of the whole nation to guarantee its unity and success with her reproductive function.

Iceland, as one of the youngest and not even yet independent countries in the early twentieth century, used maternalism to define the female role in the emerging Icelandic national discourse, as Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir discusses.<sup>421</sup> Björnsdóttir argues that one main topic in the Icelandic national question was the emphasis on the maternal body and mind as a precondition for successful manhood. The health and strength of the mother was important to ensure Icelandic manhood, national self-identity and the political independence, as Björnsdóttir shows. The maternal picture was not only a symbolic one but, in her view, also resulted in the notion that only mothers could be fully legitimate Icelandic women.<sup>422</sup>

Björnsdóttir demonstrates here a phenomenon which is not only found in Iceland but became prominent also in the other Nordic countries. The female national identity was centred on the female reproductive function. Only women who were able and willing to bear the next generation of citizens received full national recognition. The male national identity and civil rights were connected to his present actions, labour or

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<sup>419</sup> e.g. Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*; Broberg, Roll-Hansen, *Eugenics and the Welfare State*; Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*; Koch, *Tvangsterilisation i Danmark*; Giæver, Øyvind, "Eugenisk indikasjon for abort – en historisk oversikt." In: *Tidsskrift for den norske legeforening* 24 (2005), pp. 3472-3476.

<sup>420</sup> e.g. Myrdal, Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, p. 205ff; Haavet, Inger Elisabeth, "Milk, Mothers and Marriage. Family Policy Formation in Norway and its Neighbouring Countries in the Twentieth Century." In: Christiansen, Niels Finn, Petersen, Klaus, Edling, Nils, Haave, Per (eds.), *The Nordic Model of Welfare. A Historical Reappraisal*, Copenhagen 2006, pp. 189-214.

<sup>421</sup> Björnsdóttir, Inga Dóra, "They had a Different Mother. The Central Configuration of Icelandic Nationalist Discourse." In: von der Fehr, Drude, Jónasdóttir, Anna G., Rosenbeck, Bente, *Is there a Nordic Feminism? Nordic Feminist Thought on Culture and Society*, London and New York 1998, p. 90.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90–93.



military service.<sup>423</sup> He was an active member of society. In contrast, a woman's rights and identity was bound to her reproduction of the future citizen. Only through the objectification of her body as the passive breeding place of the male sperm, and his offspring, was a woman able to receive full rights and identity in a modern Nordic society.<sup>424</sup> Her route to citizenship was perceived passive, depended on the man and her ability to reproduce the normative offspring required by a modern society, while the eugenic feminist discourse emphasised the active societal impact of motherhood.

Still, this was not imposed on women by the patriarchal society alone but strongly supported by, if not even based in, the maternal-focused, eugenic feminist discourse of the early twentieth century. Eugenic feminists acted in patriarchal terms. The Norwegian feminist Kati Anker Møller argued in an article in the women's magazine *Nylænde* that the Norwegian population policy claimed a "renaissance of motherhood".<sup>425</sup> The question which must be raised now is: what could a "renaissance of motherhood" mean? How could motherhood go out of fashion and what made it come into fashion again? A hint at the answer to the last part of the question can be found in the previous discussion of the rise of maternal identity in the Icelandic national discourse. In some Nordic nations, like Norway, Iceland and Finland, the maternal discourse was closely connected to the awakening or realization of a nation. Nonetheless, not every Nordic nation was in the process of establishing national independence, but the maternal question seemed strong everywhere. In the other Nordic countries, Sweden and Denmark, eugenic feminists connected their maternal discussion to the population question.

Nevertheless, the revitalization of motherhood included a critical discussion of the status of women and their reproductive rights in modern societies. The recognition of motherhood in society and the definition what makes a good mother were not only debated in the interwar period but were already discussed around the turn of the century. Already in 1900, Ellen Key took in her book *Barnets århundrade* a critical stand against the general idea that motherhood was natural for all women, in opposition to the doctors Karolina Widerström and Karolina Eskelin discussed above.<sup>426</sup> Yet their views were not as different as one might expect. Key argued that the conception of motherhood must be reconsidered, because many women refuse to follow their nature by bearing children and

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<sup>423</sup> e.g. Key, Ellen, *Barnets århundrade*, Stockholm 1900, p. 86.

<sup>424</sup> Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 88.

<sup>425</sup> Isaachsen, Hanna, "Kvindernes Fødselspolitik. Av Kati Anker Møller." In: *Nylænde*, 1919, p. 142.

<sup>426</sup> Key, *Barnets århundrade*, p. 117.

make their own life plans against their nature.<sup>427</sup> In the end, like Widerström and Eskelin, Key claimed that it is the woman's nature to reproduce and be a mother but modern women refuse to follow the plan nature designed for their lives and prefer to live according to their own ideas.<sup>428</sup> The difference lies in the fact that Key did not criticize this self-determination as such. She ended by stating that it means true freedom if women can follow their nature, of becoming mothers, if they wish to.<sup>429</sup>

The notion of voluntary motherhood was not only central for Key but can be found in the image of the ideal mother among Nordic eugenic feminists.<sup>430</sup> The ideal mother was a voluntary mother, who made a conscious decision for a child and otherwise regulated her reproduction. A troubled mother was often perceived as a woman who lost control over her reproduction and produced too many or defective offspring in an economically and socially unstable environment.<sup>431</sup> In the eyes of Ellen Key and other eugenic feminists, it was the duty of society to create the suitable environment for women to be able to make their natural contribution to societal well-being. From the eugenic feminist point of view, modern society lacked the necessary support for women, in particular for women from the working class, to become eugenically beneficial mothers. Way too often the focus, according to eugenic feminists, was on the quantity, not on the quality of the population. Women, which mainly meant middle class women, had to be willing to be less selfish and make the sacrifices women have to make to fulfil their natural duty as mothers of the race. However, in Key's argumentation, motherhood could never be a sacrifice as such for women, since if they denied motherhood, they ignored their biological destiny.<sup>432</sup> It was more the duty of the state and society to make it easier for women to follow their biological vocation than for women to aspire motherhood in eugenically unbeneficial social environments.

The Norwegian birth control activist and feminist Katti Anker Møller showed a diverse perception of the role of women as mothers. In an article titled "Moderskapets frigjørelse" [Liberation of Maternity], published in 1914 in the Norwegian conservative daily newspaper *Morgenbladet*, she argued that marriage and motherhood are widely considered the most natural female desire in society.<sup>433</sup> Møller contradicted

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<sup>427</sup> Key, *Barnets århundrade*, p. 117.

<sup>428</sup> Key, *Lifslinjer*, p. 181.

<sup>429</sup> Key, *Barnets århundrade*, p. 118.

<sup>430</sup> e.g. Jensen, *Frivilligt moderskab*.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>432</sup> Key, *Lifslinjer*, p. 181.

<sup>433</sup> Møller, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 54.

this argument and stated instead that the decision of a woman for marriage and motherhood must be voluntary and uninfluenced. According to Møller, a woman is not less clean or pure if she does not become a mother.<sup>434</sup> Though many feminists interested in eugenics argued that motherhood was the highest aim and the woman's national duty to preserve the race, the conscious planning of the reproduction was as important as the reproduction itself.<sup>435</sup> The devotion to motherhood became a patriotic cause to contribute to the strengthening of the nation. In this view, eugenics was not only selective breeding, but also the emancipation of women and the implementation of a new sexual morality to lead selective breeding to success.<sup>436</sup> The eugenic focus on motherhood was not a return to old values but the demand for a modernized maternity fitted into the eugenic agenda to save the population. The entire process of conceiving and raising a child was to be based on rational planning supported by expert scientific and political advice. In relation to the population question, the quality was more important than the quantity.

The Danish feminist and writer Thit Jensen, who dedicated an entire book to the question of voluntary motherhood, took up the question of quantity and quality in reproduction, similarly to Møller. Jensen argued that the restriction on procreation in some European countries, like the Netherlands and France, can be considered a success. In countries which emphasized quantity over quality, like Germany, the result was hunger, immorality and revolution, according to Jensen.<sup>437</sup> Her motto was "I would say, we need: Fewer sick men, fewer fallen women, and fewer, but better children."<sup>438</sup> The discussion about the "renaissance of motherhood" focused not on the idea that every woman had to be a mother but that the highest-qualified women, mentally and physically, should become mothers to secure the progress of the population. Motherhood as such became a profession of national importance, which justified the interference of experts and policy-makers. Møller argued in this context that most women had a reckless character and were in need of help by institutions to care and raise their children to become beneficial citizens in the future.<sup>439</sup> It was the occupation of the man to ensure the economic progress of society through his labour and the profession of the qualified woman to support society by producing the future workers.

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<sup>434</sup> Møller, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 55.

<sup>435</sup> Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, p. 100.

<sup>436</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, pp. 58–59.

<sup>437</sup> Jensen, *Frivilligt moderskab*, p. 8.

<sup>438</sup> "Da faar vi, som jeg fæg sagde: Færre syge Mænd, færre faldne Kvinder og færre, men bedre Børn." *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>439</sup> Møller, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 33.

As Penelope Deutscher argues, the preoccupation of eugenic-inspired feminists with the importance of reproduction for women might be seen as anti-feminist today.<sup>440</sup> Though Møller, for example, argued that women should decide for or against children freely, she also made clear that sexuality belongs in marriage to keep it "clean and honest". She suggested penalties for reckless behaviour of both sexes.<sup>441</sup> It might be considered anti-feminist that these feminists still situated female reproduction in the traditional, even patriarchal boundaries of marriage and gave the (male-dominated) state the possibility to interfere with the most personal decision of reproduction. However, the progressiveness of this thinking was to situate motherhood in the societal and political discourse and thus make it a public topic. Furthermore, the demand for regulation of reproduction for the health of both the individual woman and the health of the nation (discussed more in detail in a later section) and the organized support for mothers (considered next), were important in the liberation of the maternal body. The idealization of motherhood was in the end the transformation of motherhood from a personal to a public good, with all its liberations and restrictions.

### 3.5.2. Allowances for Mothers

Situating the importance of reproduction in the public discourse must be considered a feminist success. Motherhood became a profession itself and a woman had to be trained for this profession. The training was particularly important from a eugenic point of view. The active application of economic, educational or social support in the upbringing of the children was of national importance. On the one hand, it created a control system which ensured that the state could exercise immediate action if a child was in danger of developing in an unbeneficial way. This would result, at least in theory, in the prevention of unworthy and asocial individuals, which lived at the cost of society. On the other hand, it supported the families with financial, medical and educational help, which greatly improved individual living conditions in the 1920s and 1930s in the Nordic countries.

In the following, based on eugenic feminist-led demands for mother allowances, I discuss how motherhood became a trained profession, similar to housewifery. The support was provided by women for other women and centred women in the discussion about the reproduction of the race. There was less discussion about health care or other support for men or fathers. The mother was defined as the person

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<sup>440</sup> Deutscher, "Reproductive Politics", p. 218.

<sup>441</sup> Mohr, *Katti Anker Møller*, pp. 41-42.

responsible for the upbringing and the survival of the child. The entire success or failure of this undertaking was in her hands. The eugenic feminists did not do much to change this. This created gender hierarchies.<sup>442</sup>

Maternity insurance was a system proposed by several Nordic feminists and consisted of a mixture of health insurance and maternity care. It was mainly aimed at women from the working class, since it should ensure that women could stay at home after the births of a child and still get paid. The Finnish women's magazine *Naisten ääni* proposed, for example, that a state-financed maternity insurance should provide paid maternity leave for new mothers (the duration was not stated), the possibility to pay a midwife for the delivery and the care after birth, as well as further medical care for mother and child.<sup>443</sup> The article emphasized the importance of mother staying with their children during the first year of their life, because "we simply insist on our demands that every child needs to get appropriate care and education."<sup>444</sup> It stated that one in ten children in Finland is left on its own before its first birthday, because the mother is forced to work outside the home.<sup>445</sup>

The focus here was not only on the mother but first of all on the survival of the child. Swedish physician and sex educator Andrea Andreen-Svedberg, argued in 1938 that support for mothers was crucial at this time when reproduction was of social importance. She showed that the death rate of children in poor families was four times higher than in wealthy families and that the death rate of mothers in bigger cities with a better public health system was fifty per cent lower than in rural communities.<sup>446</sup> Andreen-Svedberg demanded a system similar to that proposed thirty years earlier in *Naisten ääni*. Mothers should get financial and instructional support.<sup>447</sup> Although *Naisten ääni* and Andreen-Svedberg had similar demands, her argument showed the progress made in the last three decades, at least in Sweden. From 1900, new mothers were prohibited from doing industrial work until six weeks after giving birth and from 1912, Sweden paid a small amount of financial support up to 14 days after a woman gave birth.<sup>448</sup> Norway started making a similar two-week payment to new mothers in 1913.<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Borchorst, Siim, "Woman-Friendly Policies and State Feminism", p. 135.

<sup>443</sup> Gebhard, Hedvig, "Äitiysvakuutus." In: *Naisten ääni*, 1908.18, p. 249.

<sup>444</sup> "Ja ihan jo vaatimalla vaaditaan, että jokaisen lapsen pitää saada tarkoituksenmukaista hoitoa ja kasvatusta." *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>446</sup> Andreen-Svedberg, "Mödrahjälp", pp. 135-136.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>449</sup> e.g. Haavet, "Milk, Mothers and Marriage", pp. 189-214.

This was also suggested by the Norwegian women's organization, but the organization's mouthpiece *Nylænde* did not consider this measure sufficient. An article by Katti Anker Møller argued that this compensation was too small: all-embracing health insurance was needed, as well as maternity care. Møller argued that birth and pregnancy was not a private matter but significant for the whole society. She continued that society should recognize pregnancy and motherhood as productive work and consequently support new mothers.<sup>450</sup>

Møller and Andreen-Svedberg mainly focused their demands on working class mothers, since they suffered the most from the lack of health and maternity care. Middle class women did not participate on the labour market as much and their access to health care was better. Maternity leave should particularly protect women who worked in industry from working shortly before giving birth or returning immediately afterwards. This had two aims. On the one hand, the health of the mother should be protected. Childbirth was still a dangerous act. On the other hand, the survival chances of children with a strong and healthy mother were much greater, than if the mother who was weak and sick, or even died in childbirth and left not only an infant behind but also older children as well. From the eugenics perspective, the survival of the mother to ensure the survival of the child was crucial for the progress of a population.<sup>451</sup>

A step towards this demand was taken in Sweden in 1938 with the introduction of the maternal allowance. What was special about the *moderskapspenning* [maternity allowance] that it was paid directly to the mother. The Social Board examined every application individually and paid by needs. Married women, whose husbands had a regular income, were for example widely excluded from the *moderskapspenning*.<sup>452</sup> The system was initiated by the leftist women's organization *Svenska Kvinnors Vänsterförbund* (Swedish Women's Left Federation) in 1935 and implemented through the parliament in 1938.

The demand for financial support for mothers was based on feminist initiative, including eugenic feminists but not exclusively, in all Nordic countries. It was the feminists who shed light on the situation of especially poor mothers and introduced the topic into policy-making. These examples show that their case was based on two

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<sup>450</sup> Anker Møller, Katti, "Moderskapsföriskring." In: *Nylænde*, 19.03.1913, p. 105.

<sup>451</sup> e.g. Jensen, *Frivilligt moderskab*, p. 20; Jacobsen, *Fosterfordrivesesparagraffen*, p. 12; Mohr, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 79ff; Myrdal, Alva, *Folk och Familj*, Stockholm 1944; Ottesen-Jensen, Elise, *Människor i nöd. Det sexuella mörkets offer*, Stockholm 1932, p. 98ff.

<sup>452</sup> Andreen-Svedberg, "Mödrahjäl", pp. 150–151.

arguments. Firstly, the importance of healthy children for a society, in particular in the context of the population question. Secondly, the recognition of motherhood as productive labour which contributed to economic progress in a society. The result must be considered mixed. On the one hand, the public discussion of motherhood increased the attention paid to the poor conditions of working class mothers and certainly provided support for many women individually. On the other hand, this opened the gates to stronger monitoring and regulating of pregnant women. Their pregnant bodies were now a societal good. Compulsory examination of all pregnant women to decrease the child death rate in Denmark since 1938 was one of these methods.<sup>453</sup> Motherhood was yet again not voluntary or liberated, as many eugenic feminists had advocated, but squeezed into the corset of state regulations to serve the greater good of the nation.

### 3.5.3. The Question of Race in Maternalism

Motherhood was placed at the heart of the debate about the survival of the race in both eugenic and broader social discourse, in particular in the interwar period, as I showed before based on Marius Turda.<sup>454</sup> The importance of motherhood in the population question justified societal support and restriction, because motherhood was no longer a private matter but had to serve the whole community. A great responsibility was imposed on all mothers.

Anneli Anttonen shows in her study about the female working citizen in Finland that maternalism played a vital role in the early twentieth century. The rhetoric of motherhood as national service was only replaced in the 1960s by the idea of motherhood as individual choice, according to Anttonen.<sup>455</sup> The discussion of race and motherhood in Finland differed from that in the other Nordic countries. In Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland the debate about the effects of motherhood on the race was largely based on an understanding of race as population. However, Finland actually found itself in a struggle between two population groups considered to be hierarchically organized races, the Swedish-speaking Finns and the Finnish-speaking Finns. These struggles increased after the end of the civil war in 1918: the Swedish-speaking elite

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<sup>453</sup> Caspersen, *Moderskabspolitik i Danmark*, p. 137.

<sup>454</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 59.

<sup>455</sup> Anttonen, "The Female Working Citizen", p. 34.

feared that they would lose their power in the newly-formed nation state, as Marius Turda shows.<sup>456</sup>

The reproduction of healthy Swedish-speaking Finns was not only of economic importance here, but of actual racial significance. The *Florinska Kommissionen* [Florin Commission] was founded in 1911 (from 1921 onwards *Samfundet Folkhälsan i Svenska Finland/ Society for Public Health in Swedish Finland*). The non-profit organization, led by the geneticist and professor Harry Federley (1879- 1951) and physician Ossian Schauman (1862-1922), aimed to monitor and improve the health and well-being of Swedish-speaking Finns based on eugenic principles. Federley argued that only eugenic discipline could bring racial improvement.<sup>457</sup> The organization called for racial protectionism of the Swedish population in Finland, stating that

On our own will, on our innate power, ultimately depends the future of the Swedish race in our country. A people that is mentally and physically strong can hold out even under heavy external pressure.<sup>458</sup>

The statement continued that Swedish-speaking Finns should preserve their health and wealth, and not sell their Swedish-owned property.<sup>459</sup> Here biological or racial, as well as social, cultural and economic differences were proclaimed to invent ethnic distinctions between groups within a nation state as the basis for power struggles.

An example of this initiative directed towards mothers were the mother awards conferred by *Samfundet Folkhälsan i Svenska Finland*. Though the mother awards, initiated in 1920, rewarded successful Swedish-speaking mothers with certificates or monetary prizes, they had a predominantly controlling and regulating aim. An article in the magazine *Husmodern*, which strongly promoted the awards (the practical side of the prizes was managed by the *Martha* organization), reported that in 1922, 379 applications were submitted to the expert commission consisting of mainly medical experts, and 139 successful mothers were selected. Of these women, 91 were awarded with a monetary prize.<sup>460</sup> Another article on the topic quoted Fanny Hult, who stated that, "like all work for the public health, betterment is of the highest meaning in the hereditary

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<sup>456</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 107.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>460</sup> E.S., "Prisbelöningen av mödrar i Nyland." In: *Husmodern*, 1922, p. 8; Hietala, "From Race Hygiene to Sterilization", pp. 209-212.



sense."<sup>461</sup> Hult further emphasized the importance of motherhood for these undertaking, and thanked mothers for their work and sacrifice.<sup>462</sup>

However, Hult's praise was confined to the Swedish-speaking Finnish women. Mother prizes were only awarded to mothers of the "Swedish tribe", which meant that both parents had to be healthy Swedish speakers who produced at least four healthy and alive children between four and 17 years old.<sup>463</sup> Harry Federley, the initiator of the mother awards, was concerned with the decline of the birth rate among Swedish-speaking Finns and considered positive eugenics, like the mother awards, a good solution to encourage their reproduction in the context of quality as well as quantity.<sup>464</sup>

The question which should be raised now is whether the mother awards, an initiative from Federley and Schauman executed by the *Martha* organization, were a method to create racial segregation in Finland in favour of the Swedish speakers. Ossian Schauman argued that "Finland is inhabited by two different races, the Finnish and the Swedish."<sup>465</sup> He continued that,

I beg, here especially to point out, that Swedish culture is of a considerably earlier date than Finnish. (...) Lately, thanks to intense Finnish propaganda, an ever-increasing number of Finnish schools have been founded and the Finnish educated classes are steadily increasing in number.<sup>466</sup>

Although Schauman speaks of the two races which inhabited Finland, his notion of race was closely intertwined with what would be called ethnicity today or what was defined by Eugen Fischer as a *Volk*. He emphasized the cultural, social and economic differences between Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking Finns but did not claim a genetic difference between these two groups.<sup>467</sup> Federley, in contrast, argued against the hierarchical organization of the population and his eugenic ideas were directed at the improvement of the entire population.<sup>468</sup> Mother awards can be understood as a eugenic method to strengthen the Swedish-speaking population not in the context of a racial

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<sup>461</sup> "Vid allt arbete för folkhälsans förkovran är ärvetkighetens betydelse av allra störstas vikt." "Prisbelöningen av mödrar. Två fester i Helsingfors." In: *Husmodern* 1922, p. 29.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>463</sup> Hietala, "From Race Hygiene to Sterilization", p. 209.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>465</sup> Schaumann, Ossian, "Eugenic Work in Swedish Finland." In: Lundborg, Herman, Runnström, John, *The Swedish Nation in World and Picture*, Stockholm 1921, p. 89.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>467</sup> e.g. Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 107ff.

<sup>468</sup> Federley, "I sterilisationsfrågan", p. 179.

struggle, defined by genetic differences with the Finnish-speaking people as such, but as support system in the cultural, social and economic struggle of both parts of the Finnish population for hegemony in the new developing nation state.<sup>469</sup>

Nevertheless, the survival of the race as synonym for the population was a popular motif in the maternal argument of feminists interested in eugenics. By advocating motherhood and female reproduction as a national matter, and excluding male reproduction from this discourse, extending the responsibility of mothers from their own children to the entire population, the eugenic feminist idealization of motherhood also created, despite its positive measures through the new support systems, restrictions for many women.<sup>470</sup>

I argue that women were continually reduced to their reproductive function by eugenic feminists in the name of emancipation. They had to endure restrictions in their working life, like the widely-implemented night work prohibition for women. This could have economic consequences in particular for women from the working class, whose families were dependent on their full income, as the allowances paid by the state did not cover their full loss of their wage. Their reproductive organs became their most important contribution to society. Despite many eugenic feminists arguing for a voluntary approach to motherhood, the independent decision of women when and if to have children was influenced and controlled by experts and policy-makers on a theoretical level and by nature on a practical level. State measures, like maternity and family laws created the political and social background to normative motherhood, for example in context of family size.<sup>471</sup> Yet, on a practical level conceiving was not as easily regulated as it might seem in the argumentation of many eugenic feminists. Contraception, as I discuss in detail in chapter 4.3., was not only widely unavailable but also not save enough to prevent pregnancies in such a regulated manner as demanded. It was not the woman herself who should consent to pregnancy: the eugenic feminists argued for an education of women about their bodies and their reproduction to be able to make the right decision.<sup>472</sup> The right decision about reproduction was the one most beneficial for the greater good of the

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<sup>469</sup> Federley, Harry, "Samfundets moderpremiering och dess syfte." In: *Folkhälsan i svenska Finland 1921–1946. Festskrift utgiven med anledning av samfundets 25-års jubileum*, Helsinki 1946, pp. 127-135.

<sup>470</sup> e.g. Hult, Fanny, "Några ord om hemmets vård." In: *Husmodern* 1903.1, p. 13; Nissinen, Alli, "Hemmets hjärta." In: *Husmodern* 1903.10, pp. 145-146; Hesselgren, Kerstin, "Husmodersutbildning I." In: *Hertha* 1916.08, pp. 155-157; Hesselgren, Kerstin, "Husmodersutbildning II." In: *Hertha* 1916.10, pp. 199-200; "Vård om mor och barn." In: *Tidevarvet* 1924.06, p. 6; "Mödershjälp. Ett förslag från Socialdepartement." In: *Tidevarvet* 1925.01, p. 2.

<sup>471</sup> Caspersen, *Moderskabspolitik i Danmark*, p. 117.

<sup>472</sup> e.g. Anker Møller, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 33.

nation, rather than the individual. This was led by eugenic consideration of whose genetic pool and social constitution would contribute best.

It cannot be said for certain how far this was intentional or unintentional on the part of the eugenic feminists, but the transformation of female reproduction from a privately patriarchal-controlled topic to publicly patriarchal-controlled topic did not liberate motherhood as such. Surely, this transformation contributed to a betterment of the maternal situation in many ways but it also resulted in many more restrictions. Women had to subjugate their reproduction to a much greater and less tangible system of experts and policy-makers to serve the greater good. The idea of the liberation of motherhood led finally to a transformation of restrictions, supported by feminists and backed up through eugenic arguments. Thus, while eugenics was an appealing ideology to liberate women and centre female problems in the public discourse, it somehow backfired, I suggest. Especially the continuous exclusion of the impact of men on the reproductive process, actively supported by the entire focus on women in the eugenic feminist discourse, prevented an inclusive discussion of societal impact of reproduction. This ultimately encouraged the objectification of the female body as a breeding place for the next generation of citizens rather than the subjectification of the female body through the conscious and independent decision for motherhood.

#### 4. Eugenic Bodies and Sexuality

##### 4.1. "A Good Woman can save a Nation" – Sex and Health Education<sup>473</sup>

At the turn of the century the education of the people about their bodies and sexuality became more and more prominent. Sex education was introduced slowly as part of biology classes in schools and became accessible to all social classes, especially the lower and working class. The female upper class body was no longer the only concern of the sex educators, but also the female lower classes body. Social problems were already a theme before the First World War, especially in Karolina Widerström's books, but the post-war period saw both an increase in the amount of sex education material and a greater focus on the relation between sex education and the prevention of sexual-related social problems, like STIs, abortion or unlimited pregnancies in socially weak families.<sup>474</sup>

One pioneer in Nordic sex education was the first female physician in Sweden, Karolina Widerström. In her two books *Kvinnohygien I* and *Kvinnohygien II* she gave a broad overview about social questions, like prostitution, housing and hygiene, and sexual advice from contraception, abortion, and masturbation to how to educate girls in sexual hygiene. She also gave sex education courses for women.<sup>475</sup>

Other publications included Julia Kinberg's *Sexuell etik* or her joint publication with the physician Alma Sundquist, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning och uppfostran*, in the 1920s. All four of these books had a widespread audience in Sweden and the other Nordic countries. Other relevant Nordic sex education material was for example *Sundhedslære for unge kvinder* by the Danish physician Dida Dederding, the medical advice books of the Finnish doctor Karolina Eskelin or the various articles and speeches of the pioneer of Norwegian health education and care for mothers, Katti Anker Møller. All these books and publications were written by women and directed towards women. The main audience was married women, who were to learn more about their bodies and sexuality and also how to provide their daughters with the same knowledge. The role of men in sexuality and the education of boys was often only a minor topic or

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<sup>473</sup> Parts of these chapter will be published in Sjöberg, Maria (ed.), *Health Care: Demand and Supply in Prehistory and History*, Cambridge, 2018.

<sup>474</sup> e.g. Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 18ff; Levin, Hjärdís, *Masken uti rosen. Nymalthusianism och födelsekontroll i Sverige 1880–1910*, Stockholm 1994, p. 201ff.

<sup>475</sup> Nilsson, Ulrika, *Det heta könet. Gynekologin i Sverige kring förra sekelskiftet*, Stockholm 2005, p. 270.

not mentioned by the eugenic feminists.<sup>476</sup> Boys' sex education was considered as a separate topic.<sup>477</sup>

Sex education became a matter of political interest as it was drawn out of the private sphere, where it had predominately been located before the Great War. Sexuality, especially female sexuality, became a public matter for society and the state in the context of growing interest in public health and the general population question. In the introduction to their sex education book, the Swedish physicians Julia Kinberg and Alma Sundquist argued that sexual hygiene is a matter of public health.<sup>478</sup> Sexual hygiene is social hygiene and most diseases are based on incorrect hygiene, since the daily hygiene is neglected. Although they stated that hygienic principles were the same for men and women, the book focused more on the female perspective than on the male.<sup>479</sup> With the demand made by most sex educators that sex education should be provided predominantly by schools and official educators, like teachers, who had to be provided with a special education to teach sex education, the state took on a leading role in the moral education of the population.<sup>480</sup>

Sexual hygiene, the main topic of most sex education material, was not only concerned with a clean and pure sexuality and sex life. It must be seen in the wider context of the idea of social hygiene in the early twentieth century, as Hjärdís Levin argues.<sup>481</sup> Social hygiene was a comprehensive theoretical and practical network, with eugenics as a sub-category, which aimed to improve the population quality in various stages, for example through better environment or housing, health care, general education or nutrition. Sex education was here an integral component of social hygiene in the context of eugenics. It aimed to advise especially women about their bodies and sexuality, to generate a socially and sexually hygienic population which would improve the population quality.<sup>482</sup>

Especially up until the late 1920s no fixed programme was established, neither in any of the Nordic countries nor jointly, although the developments in the other

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<sup>476</sup> e.g. Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, p. 30.

<sup>477</sup> Hagman, Lucina, "Uppfostra edra söner till renhet." In: *Husmodern* 1910.12, p. 178; Kinberg, Julia, Sundquist, Alma, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning och uppfostran*, Stockholm 1924, p. 19-34.

<sup>478</sup> Kinberg, Sundquist, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning*, p. 19.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>480</sup> e.g. Andreen-Svedberg, *Vissa problem vid sexualundervisningen*; Cederblom, Elin, Widerström, Karolina, "Naturkunnighetsundervisning och barnens sedliga uppfostran." In: *Dagny* (1901), pp. 1-11; Thüring, Nelly, "Den sexuella hygien." In: *Morgonbris*, 1924.3, pp. 2-3.

<sup>481</sup> Levin, *Masken uti rosen*, p. 214.

<sup>482</sup> e.g. Palmblad, Eva, *Medicinen som samhällslära*, Göteborg 1990, pp. 12-17.

Nordic countries were observed. An article in the Swedish social democratic women's magazine *Morgonbris* pointed out two main forms of education, in schools and through lectures and brochures for adults.<sup>483</sup> It was clear that children as well as adults had to be educated and instructed in sexual hygiene.

Nevertheless, the communication about sexuality changed in the 1930s in Sweden with the establishment of *Riksförbundet för sexuell upplysning* [National Association for Sexual Education, RFSU] and Elise Ottesen-Jensen. Ottesen-Jensen changed the attitude towards sexuality in the Nordic countries and opened up the discourse on sex education to a wider audience. The instructional work of the RFSU focused not only on reproduction aspects, as sex education often did before, but on the whole sexual life, as Lennerhed argues.<sup>484</sup> The main target group was married couples which, also for Ottesen-Jensen, provided the only suitable environment for sexuality but also for example single mothers.<sup>485</sup>

A similar change of attitude can be detected in Denmark. Dida Dederding published her book *Sundhedslære for unge kvinder* in 1941. In a similar way to Ottesen-Jensen, she argued that health, hygiene and nutrition were important to improve women's lives, but also knowledge about sexuality was important. She supported the idea that a mutually fulfilling sex life was important for happy marriage. She argued that a non-fulfilling sex life was often based on the inexperience of most women, who were overwhelmed by the demands of their husbands. Dederding also brought male sexuality and the male part in marriage and sexuality to the fore, which rarely happened in the other publications.<sup>486</sup>

Still, Ottesen-Jensen's and Dederding's ideas about mutually satisfying sex life for both sexes, free birth control and sexual education were not new at all.<sup>487</sup> Already in 1924, Katti Anker Møller opened her *Mødrehygienekontor* [Office for Mother Hygiene] in Oslo. It prioritized helping mothers over general sexual advice, similarly to the Swedish clinic of Ada Nilsson. However, these attempts to educate the population in the 1920s were not as successful as the RFSU. The reasons for the lack of public interest and success might be multiple. The political climate changed in several Nordic countries

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<sup>483</sup> Thüning, Nelly, "Den sexuella hygien." In: *Morgonbris* 1924.3, p. 2.

<sup>484</sup> Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 143.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., p. 70ff.

<sup>486</sup> e.g. Dederding, *Sundhedslære*.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., p. 158; Ottesen-Jensen, Elise, *Könslagernas offers. Interiör från de dömdas och sjukas värld. Vad läkare, jurister och riksdagsmän säga. Vad säger det allmänna*, Stockholm 1928, pp. 3/ 12-13.

in the 1930s. Especially in Sweden with rise of social democracy and introduction of welfare state ideas, overall well-being, also the sexual, became a topic of policy-making. Furthermore, several restrictive laws, like the *Lex hinke* (1911-1938), which prohibited the advertisement for contraceptives, were lifted in the 1930s.<sup>488</sup> In Norway from the mid-1930s onwards, the social democrats also introduced welfare reforms to increase the health and education of the entire population.<sup>489</sup> The overall climate in discussions about families and sexuality changed, though this did not mean liberation but rather an emphasis on the importance of the nuclear family for society. It might be argued that Ottesen-Jensen and Dederding rather jumped on the existing bandwagon of sexual modernization, rather than actually inventing it.

#### 4.1.1. Sex Education for Girls

The discussion about the sexual education of the population was dominated by four main questions. Who should educate, who should be educated, how should education be organized and what would be the social effects of a sexually educated population? In the question of who should educate and who were supposed to be educated the schools were to take a central position. Most sex educators in the Nordic countries were united in the claim that sex education must be part of school education. Widerström stated that sex education for boys as part of higher education institutions was regulated in the *Grammar School Charter* of 1905 and that this also applied to certain extent to girls' higher education.<sup>490</sup> However, according to Widerström, that was not enough of a fundamental reform of sex education in Sweden with the help of the schools and the introduction of a special expertise in pedagogy was needed, because children often received their sexual knowledge from unqualified or immoral sources, which would convey the impression that sexuality was unnatural and shameful.<sup>491</sup>

Others argued similarly. Articles in *Tidevarvet*, the magazine of the Swedish liberal women's organization, as well as in *Morgonbris*, the mouthpiece of the social democratic women's movement in Sweden, pointed out the importance of sex education for young people. Although boys and girls were mentioned in these articles, it

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<sup>488</sup> e.g. Levin, Hjärdis, *Kvinnorna på barrikaden. Sexualpolitik och sociala frågor 1923–1936*, Stockholm 1997, pp. 189-202.

<sup>489</sup> Bjørnson, Øyvind, "The Social Democrats and the Norwegian Welfare State. Some Perspectives." In: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 26 (2001), pp. 197-198.

<sup>490</sup> Widerström, *Hygieniska önskemål*, p. 371.

<sup>491</sup> Widerström, Karolina, *Den sexualpedagogiska frågan*, Stockholm 1915, p. 6.

was suggested that in particular girls had to learn how to take care of their bodies.<sup>492</sup> Girls and female education was central in the here discussed eugenic feminist publications about sex education. One reason might have been that sex education, as demonstrated, was predominantly regarded as a female area of activity and this directed the focus on one's own sex.<sup>493</sup> An article by the Finnish teacher Lucina Hagman in *Husmodern* in 1910 argued that the population body is mainly the concern of the women. She continued that men are responsible for the country and women for the health of the people. However, Hagman also added also boys must be instructed in hygiene and morality, not only girls.<sup>494</sup>

Furthermore, in this context the question arose as to why women, who were underrepresented as teachers, physicians and educators, should take a leading role in such an important task as educating the next generation in bodily control, morality and sexual respectable behaviour which was considered to be of great national interest. As Elisabeth Elgán points out, the female role was central in reproduction, as we have seen also we have seen already with Hagman's discussion. Sexuality and regulation of reproduction were considered a female matter which made women the main actors, Elgán concludes.<sup>495</sup> So, it seemed self-evident that women should educate the next generation about health, sexuality and their bodies, since this was their natural area of expertise.

As Lena Lennerhed demonstrates in her study *Sex i folkhemmet* [Sex in the People's Home], early sex education for girls was led by the idea that women have no natural sexual desire so that sex education was without risk to arise their sex drive. Since boys had sexual desire, education was more limited so as not to stimulate unwanted behaviour.<sup>496</sup> This argument must be expanded in order to understand its full scope. First of all, female sex educators based their educational programmes on scientific facts. Swedish teacher Elin Cederblom argued together with Karolina Widerström that the education should start at the age of 15 or 16, for girls maybe one or two years earlier, with instruction about zoology, embryology, evolution and cytology. Also, heredity, reproduction in animals and humans, and finally the anatomical and physiological details should be on the teaching plan. Furthermore, instruction in hygiene would be crucial and

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<sup>492</sup> Andreen-Svedberg, Andrea, "Sexuell hygien. Tre tävlingsskrifter." In: *Tidevarvet* 1931.43, p. 3; Thüning, Nelly, "Den sexuella hygienen." In: *Morgonbris* 1924.3, p. 2.

<sup>493</sup> Widerström, *Uppfostran och sexuell hygien*, p. 8.

<sup>494</sup> Hagman, Lucina, "Uppfostra edra söner till renhet." In: *Husmodern*, 1910.12, p. 178.

<sup>495</sup> Elgán, Elisabeth, *Genus och politik. En jämförelse mellan svensk och fransk abort- och preventivmedelspolitik från sekelskiftet till andra världskriget*, Uppsala 1994, p. 31.

<sup>496</sup> Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 20.



a foundation of sex education.<sup>497</sup> This programme was paradigmatic for sex education until the 1930s. The sex education was to start with intensive biology classes, and other issues related to sex were not as much prioritized.<sup>498</sup>

While the sex education books by Kinberg, Sundquist and Widerström included quite a thorough discussion of sexual problems, like masturbation, contraception, prostitution and abortion, the detailed descriptions were not uncontested among their colleagues. Elisabeth Eurén argued that instruction should concentrate on anatomical and physical facts, practical hygiene and the ethical side. She criticized the lack of practical information in Kinberg's and Sundquist's sex education book, and especially the chapter about sexual abnormality, as not suitable for children, evaluating it more as a medical book than a pedagogical one.<sup>499</sup> Still, these books were not intended as reading for children or young girls but rather as help books for the parents or as shared reading for parents, which meant mothers, and their children.<sup>500</sup>

Another reason for the focus on girls in the debate about the introduction of sex education in schools might have been the general gender understanding in Nordic societies in the early twentieth century. Nordic societies were structured by traditional gender perceptions and neither the early feminism nor the later welfare state reforms changed much about the perception of the role women as foremost mothers of their children and the nation. Ann-Sofie Ohlander, in her study about Swedish social democratic family policy until the 1960s, demonstrates that the focus of this policy was on the mother. The mother was responsible for the well-being of the offspring. Infant mortality, for example, was often considered maternal failure. If a woman had difficulties fulfilling her maternal duties to societal standards, that could lead to discriminatory behaviour.<sup>501</sup>

To sum up, the aim of sex education for girls and young women through eugenic feminists was not only a method of enlightening them but also to educate and prepare them for their societal role as mothers. Through sex education in schools, a direct influence could be enacted on the perception of societal roles of women. Emphasis on issues like heredity and evolution implemented eugenic thinking from an early age. The

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<sup>497</sup> Cederblom, Widerström, "Naturkunnighetsundervisning", pp. 2-6.

<sup>498</sup> Widerström, *Sexualpedagogiska frågan*, p. 12.

<sup>499</sup> Eurén, Elisabeth, "Om sexuell undervisning och uppfostran." In: *Idun* (1910), pp. 2-3.

<sup>500</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, p. 3.

<sup>501</sup> Ohlander, Ann-Sofie, "The Invisible Child? The Struggle for a Social Democratic Family Policy in Sweden 1900- 1960s." In: Bock, Gisela, Thane, Pat (eds.), *Maternity and Gender Policies. Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States 1880s- 1950s*, London/ New York 1991, p. 61.

eugenic choice of the partner could find its foundation here. Furthermore, by concentrating biological education on women, the notion was strengthened that women must act as carers for the well-being of the family and in the wider context of the nation. The limitation of boys from this knowledge led likewise to a greater dependence in sexual questions on women. Boys and later men were released from their responsibility to control their sexuality, because they lacked the education. Instead, girls' responsibility was emphasized because they were equipped with all possible knowledge about their bodies and sexuality. To not act upon this knowledge then was a personal, female failure, as often emphasized through the focus of eugenic debates on female sexuality.<sup>502</sup>

The enlightening of girls and young women was ultimately a two-way street. On the one hand, greater knowledge could be expected to create greater independence and control over the own body and sexuality. On the other hand, it also reinforced the focus on women as predominately mothers and carers in society. Already from a young age, the gendered division of societal roles was increased through separate sex education, more extensive for girls, manifested in the later maternal role of young women.

#### 4.1.2. Sex Education for Women

The majority of sex education material and other forms of education, like advice offices or lectures, were not directed towards young girls but towards women, in particular wives and mothers.<sup>503</sup> A typical form of educational material were health advice books directed towards middle class and upper working class mothers and housewives, which focused on a broad scope of topics like housing and personal hygiene, nutrition, the health of the family and also the sexual hygiene of the mother.<sup>504</sup>

The Finnish physician Karolina Eskelin published several of these books, in Swedish and in Finnish, with the titles *Om hygienin i allmogehemmen och späda barns vård* [About the Hygiene of Homes and Nursing Care, 1914], *Gynekologisk sjukvård* (1924) and *Personlig hälsövård med särskild hänsyn till bostad* (1925), followed by a

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<sup>502</sup> e.g. Lennerhed, Lena, "Steriliseringar och sexuell reform. Om Elise Ottsen-Jensen och Riksförbundet för sexuell upplysning." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Johannisson, Karin, Tydén, Mattias (eds.), *Fem uppsatser om steriliseringen i Sverige*, Lund 2000, pp. 22-46.

<sup>503</sup> e.g. Mohr, Katti Anker Møller, p. 59; Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 31; Knutson, *Kvinnor på gränsen till genombrott*, p. 44;

<sup>504</sup> e.g. Eskelin, Karolina, Tillgren, Josua (eds.), *Hälsa och sjukdom. Den moderna läkarboken. Hur man håller sig frisk och hur man behandlar sjukdomar*, Helsinki 1930; Eskelin, Karolina, *Personlig hälsövård med särskild hänsyn till bostad*, Helsinki 1925/ *Henkilökohtaisesta terveydenhoidosta*, Helsinki 1927; *Husmodern*; Jensen, *Frivilligt Moderskab*; Widerström, *Uppfostran och sexuell hygien*.

Finnish edition, *Henkilökohtaisesta terveydenhoidosta* (1927). Especially *Gynekologisk sjukvård* and the chapter "Om kvinnohygien och kvinnosjukdom", published in the anthology *Hälsa och sjukdom. Den moderna läkarboken. Hur man håller sig frisk och hur man behandlar sjukdomar* [Health and Sickness. The modern Medical Guide. How to stay healthy and how to treat illnesses, 1930] were dedicated to the elucidation of married, sexually active women about their sexual bodies and personal hygiene. "Om kvinnohygien och kvinnosjukdom" walked the reader through all stages of female life and explained which type of hygiene was necessary in which phase.<sup>505</sup> The clear focus was on the phase of life when the woman was nubile. Eskelin argued, the greatest attention must be paid to the care of the sexual organs. Especially married women should clean their sexual organs twice daily.<sup>506</sup> The hygiene of the sexual organs of children, unmarried women and women in menopause can, according to Eskelin, be neglected.<sup>507</sup>

It seems curious that hygiene was most important for women of reproductive age and married women. Personal hygiene did not seem to be a personal matter as such but was again viewed in terms of the greater effect on society. The focus on the hygiene of sexually active women was clearly based on the assumption that neglected hygiene will lead to overall problems with reproduction.<sup>508</sup> A great concern in the early twentieth century was the rising numbers of syphilis and gonorrhoea infections. Infants born to mothers infected with these diseases could have severe birth defects such as blindness.<sup>509</sup> A more detailed discussion of sexually transmitted diseases takes place in chapter five in this study. But to return to the topic of sex education, the emphasis on women who were sexually active or of reproductive age had a broader scope than personal enlightenment. It was part of the greater project of social engineering, population policy and the medicalization of society.

Historian Ludmilla Jordanova demonstrates the intertwining between the public and private sphere in medicine. Medicine cannot primarily be situated in the public sphere because it touches very personal, even secret aspects of life.<sup>510</sup> However, the health of the population is indeed also a public topic. Furthermore, Jordanova shows that the

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<sup>505</sup> Eskelin, "Om kvinnohygien", pp. 143ff.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., pp. 145–150.

<sup>508</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, pp. 16–20.

<sup>509</sup> Kinberg, Sundquist, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning*, p. 100ff; Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, pp. 5, 27.

<sup>510</sup> Jordanova, Ludmilla, *Sexual Visions. Images of Gender in Science and Medicine*, New York 1989, p. 136.

relationship between the individual and medicine in the public area is especially shaped by gender.<sup>511</sup> This can be clearly detected in the sex education discourse which focused, as shown, on the woman and her body as recipient as well as distributor of knowledge.

The Danish writer and feminist Thit Jensen created eight rules for the sex education of women. She argued that women had to be trained in hygiene, especially about female diseases and their treatment, and a cultivated cleanliness; how to keep themselves and their children clean. Furthermore, women had to be educated in preventing unlimited pregnancies. It was their highest duty to care for their children. In terms of society, she demanded that the modern society must provide space for a healthy sexual life for men and women to prevent unhappy marriages and create help institutions for helpless women and maternity ward for all women. She concluded that all these rules would finally result in a better population.<sup>512</sup>

Although, Jensen had no medical education whatsoever, she felt that she was an expert in educating women in personal hygiene, family organization and modern sexuality. Jensen's rules were exclusively directed towards women. She demanded that women must be educated in sexual hygiene, health and childcare. It was the duty of the woman to prevent pregnancies. Men were absent from her sex education debate: there was no discussion about sexual hygiene for men in the reproductive age. Some books gave limited attention to how the wife should look after her husband; but only in the context of nutrition or clothing, and never in the context of male personal and sexual hygiene.<sup>513</sup>

Although Karolina Widerström argued for sex education for boys, the education of girls about their bodies, sexual hygiene and health care was more important to her. It was expected that women control their bodies themselves and additionally the bodies of men.<sup>514</sup> The woman was the carer of the family. She was responsible not only for the control of her own body but also the other bodies of her family. As Widerström argued in the context of men's alcohol abuse, instruction about the dangers of alcohol was particularly important in girls' schools, since male abuse was a problem for women. The man needed the help of the woman to fight alcoholism.<sup>515</sup> Eugenic feminists considered

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<sup>511</sup> Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p. 139.

<sup>512</sup> Jensen, *Frivilligt moderskab*, pp. 47–48.

<sup>513</sup> e.g. Eskelin, *Personlig hälsövård*, p. 43; Jensen, *Frivilligt moderskab*, p. 21.

<sup>514</sup> e.g. Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, pp. 30–31; Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 5; Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 197ff.

<sup>515</sup> Widerström, Karolina, *Något om uppfostrans och upplysningens betydelse för de veneriska sjukdomarnas profylax*, Stockholm 1902, p. 12.

the role as carer for health and well-being natural for women, because it was connected to their biologically-defined role as mothers. Furthermore, health became an important aspect of a eugenically clean society. By emphasizing the importance of the female impact on the eugenic health of a nation, eugenic feminists underlined the central, social positioning of women through their biological functions in a eugenic society.<sup>516</sup>

Widerström's views were shared by the Norwegian sex educator Katti Anker Møller. In a book review published in *Nylænde* in 1910, she argued that the mother was responsible for the moral education of the children. The role models that parents provided to their children were most crucial for the children's own moral behaviour. Unlike other Nordic sex educators, Møller was not as much concerned with the organization of sex education, though she also spoke briefly about its importance in schools.<sup>517</sup> Her focus was on giving practical advice for every woman, regardless of class or education. In 1924 in Oslo, she opened the first of her later eleven mother hygiene offices. These mother's advice offices were a practical form of the sex education theory written about by her Nordic colleagues. Though, like Jensen, Møller did not have a medical education, she did not let this prevent her from providing detailed advice about contraception, pregnancy, child rearing and nutrition in her advice office. She even fitted pessaries.<sup>518</sup> A female doctor only provided free consultations there from 1928.

However, as the name of the advice office *Mødrehygienekontor* [Mother's Hygiene Office] already showed, the target group was mothers. Mothers were to receive advice about hygiene, sexuality and raising their children. Especially poor women sought advice in the office.<sup>519</sup> This was for two reasons. Firstly, the advice office was co-financed by the workers' party in Oslo.<sup>520</sup> Secondly, poor women had greater difficulties in gaining access to contraception than middle class women. Contraception was, like most topics discussed here, strongly class-influenced, as we will see shortly.<sup>521</sup>

Nevertheless, reflection on the sex education material has shown that the focus of most of it was on married women. The reproductive woman was the main target of regulation and education. This surely resulted in a greater enlightening of women about their bodies and sexuality. However, it also increased public interest in and influence on

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<sup>516</sup> e.g. Repo, *Biopolitics*, p. 108.

<sup>517</sup> "Sundhetslære for unge kvinder." In: *Nylænde* 1910, p. 299.

<sup>518</sup> Mohr, "Mødrehygienekontorene", p. 237.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>521</sup> e.g. Mohr, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 111; Jacobsen, *Seksualreform*, pp. 168–182; Ottesen-Jensen, *Könslagarnas offer*, p. 4.

female reproduction. In what and how women were educated was influenced by eugenic feminists and their underlining ideologies, which then directly influenced the personal decisions of women. For example, the very concrete advice of limiting the number of children impacted on the sharp reduction in childbirths and encouraged the development of the nuclear family, propagated by many social engineers.<sup>522</sup> As I discuss in the next part of this chapter, sex education also influenced the perception and images of female bodies in society as a breeding place for the future citizen in the context of the eugenic debates.

#### 4.1.3. Images of Female Bodies

The sex education movements and their feminist actors had a dominant influence on the creation of images of the body in the early twentieth century. This influence was not coherent but complex. It created greater confusion with the body rather than clarification, especially for girls and women, whose bodies became the subject of debate in unprecedented ways. The Danish feminist activist Dagmar Nielsen, in a short article in *Tidevarvet*, argued that women must be educated in motherhood and the correct sexual behaviour but women themselves must take the central initiative for education.<sup>523</sup> Women took on the double role of firstly being educated by female experts, who qualified themselves for example through a medical education, like Karolina Widerström or Karolina Eskelin. Secondly, the women were to bring their knowledge into their families and educate their children and husbands in more hygienic and healthy behaviour, for the benefit of future generations.

Susan Bordo, in her study about the body in Western societies, states that women were recognized as the caretakers of the body.<sup>524</sup> In the course of medicalization an obsession with the body arose. The body here was predominantly the female body, Bordo argues, since the medicalization recognized human subjects as male and the pure body as female.<sup>525</sup> However, the body was not only accepted or idealized in a positive sense but negated and also the matter of restriction and limitation. Sex education was a method of influencing and shaping the female body in the context of hygiene and health fixation, to increase the population quality in the context of eugenic ideas.<sup>526</sup> Liberation

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<sup>522</sup> Ottesen-Jensen, *Könslagarnas offer*, p. 4; Lionæs, Skaug, *Dør vi ut?* p. 4.

<sup>523</sup> Nielsen, Dagmar, "Det seksuelle spørgsmaal." In: *Kvinden og Samfundet*, 1924.40, p. 232.

<sup>524</sup> Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 5.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>526</sup> e.g. Repo, *Biopolitics*, p. 108;

as such was not an aim. In the context of sex education and eugenics, the effort to change sexual behaviour meant the subjective transformation of the traditional family structure and softening of the public/private division in the sexual order. Concern about a decline in public health through the rise of immorality, spread of sexual diseases, prostitution, lack of health and hygiene led to an increasing medicalization, observation and control of non-confirmative sexualities.

Following Elizabeth Grosz, the obsession with the female body, which was a central aspect in the sex education movement, was highly dependent on context, location and subjects.<sup>527</sup> Sex education for girls, which focused on getting to know one's own body from a biological perspective, differed from sex education for adult women, which was generated in the context of health care and hygiene, and not only aimed at one's own body but also the other bodies in the family, those of the husband and the children. Sex education was also class-related. Class defined not only the way people were educated, whether through books, lectures or in school, but also the perception of the individual body. Middle class ideas about hygiene, health and self-discipline defined the norm of the health and sex education discourse. The working class was to be educated in middle class terms to reach the same standards of health and not become a eugenic polluter. The educators, like Widerström, Eskelin, Ottesen-Jensen, Nilsson or Møller, came from the middle class, as shown, and aimed to transmit their knowledge to women with less access to knowledge.<sup>528</sup>

In many ways, these demands were blind to reality. Suggestions for example for hygienic housing, like separated living and sleeping areas, daily washing routines or more controlled reproduction, were simply out of reach for the majority of the urban working class. However, the body was an important identity marker for people in modernity. It defined their societal place, as Chris Shilling demonstrates.<sup>529</sup> He continues that the growing interest of people in health, shape and appearance centred the body in the creation of a new individual identity, especially in the bourgeoisie.<sup>530</sup> This resulted in increasing self-control over one's own body but also in control of the individual body by others.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 158.

<sup>528</sup> e.g. Knutson, *Kvinnor på gränsen till genombrott*.

<sup>529</sup> Shilling, Chris, *The Body and Social Theory*, London 1993, p. 1.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Subaltern Studies scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty takes this argument a step further and argues that medicine, public health and personal hygiene must be understood as an undemocratic foundation of modern democracy. All three topics centred on the body of the modern individual and situated the body on the intersection of the private and public spheres.<sup>532</sup> The example of sex education, which intersected all three discourses of medicine, public health and personal hygiene, shows how the private/public division and undemocratic processes within democratization can be detected. The eugenic feminists who were active in sex education did not liberate the female body or sexuality in general. Sex education was an integral method for female activists to educate the female population, especially the next generation, in higher standards in morals, health and hygiene. The aim was to generate a better population quality, although this was not as explicitly pronounced in the beginning as later.<sup>533</sup> However, the focus was very much on the maternal, female body.<sup>534</sup> This excluded various other aspects of sex education. Though the discourse increasingly shifted to the discussion of sexual pleasure and female, sexual satisfaction, especially in the 1930s, female sexuality was still limited to marriage. The maternal body became the only acceptable sexual female body. All other female sexual bodies were seen as unclean, shameful and sinful.<sup>535</sup>

This correlated with the eugenic ideas of the period, though it would go too far to claim that all feminist sex educators were eugenicists. Still, they were indeed strongly interested and influenced by the ideas of their time.<sup>536</sup> However, education about sexuality, hygiene and the body, especially the female body, meant also a restriction and limitation of the female body, not only liberation. Knowledge was supposed to lead to self-control and control of the body, not to a freer experience of the female body. The education was mainly restricted to the body of one's own sex and not of the other, and in particular focused on the female, not male, body and sexuality. The movement was orientated towards the development of the general eugenic debate, largely on an intellectual and scientific level until the late 1920s without greater public interest and

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<sup>532</sup> Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000, p. 44.

<sup>533</sup> e.g. Kinberg, Sundquist, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning*, p. 124ff; Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, p. 85ff.

<sup>534</sup> Kinberg and Sundquist included a chapter about the physiology of the male sexual organs in their book *Handledning i sexuell undervisning och uppfostran*, p. 19-34 but it is considerably shorter than the discussion of female aspects of reproduction.

<sup>535</sup> e.g. Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 90.

<sup>536</sup> e.g. *Ibid.*, p. 12.



opened up to a wider audience in the 1930s with the greater medicalization of sexuality and the beginning of state involvement in education.

To sum up, eugenic feminists working in sex education had a strong influence on the development of bodily perceptions of the individual woman as well as society. Once again, the female body was mainly placed in the discourse of maternalism. Sex education was directed towards supporting the health and hygiene of the maternal body. It was aimed at women of reproductive age, so that they would be able to reproduce eugenically valuable offspring. The focus of the sex education was on maternal sexuality, childbirth and child rearing. This meant that early sex education did not actually contribute to the liberation of the female, sexual body. Instead, it shifted the restriction and regulation from the previously private and often uneducated knowledge to scientific and medicalized knowledge, provided by so-called experts.

#### 4.2. Masturbation – A Eugenic Threat?

Masturbation as a form of self-pleasuring was not always considered socially or medically problematic. It was only in the eighteenth century on the brink of enlightenment and modernity when the Swiss physician Samuel-August Tissot broadly spread the notion that masturbation would lead to severe disease, such as epilepsy, tuberculosis or deformed children.<sup>537</sup> Like the early twentieth century eugenicists after him, Tissot connected masturbation, or onani as it was called back then and is still called in Swedish, with fear of a decline in population quality. He argued that changing lifestyles created problems. From his point of view, the peasants were the healthiest people, because they had a fulfilling occupation. However, the new bourgeoisie was widely without any purpose and focused only on exercising their mind but not their bodies. The related boredom led them to most difficult behaviours, like masturbation.<sup>538</sup>

Historian Thomas Laqueur also defines the appearance of the problematization of masturbation with the publication of the book *Onania* in the early eighteenth century. *Onania* was a pamphlet published anonymously in 1716 in London, which connected self-pollution with physical and nervous diseases. The book was a huge success and reprinted sixty times. Laqueur argues that *Onania* was responsible for the creation of shame, guilt and anxiety in connection with masturbation.<sup>539</sup> He claims that

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<sup>537</sup> Driel, Mels van, *With the Hand. A Cultural History of Masturbation*, London 2012, p. 100.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>539</sup> Laqueur, Thomas, *Solitary Sex. A Cultural History of Masturbation*. New York 2003, p. 13.

the loss of semen through male ejaculation was not the main problem with masturbation, but rather the fact that women could produce their own sexual pleasure and orgasm only by using their own imagination.<sup>540</sup> Although also male self-pleasuring was observed and problematized, female sexuality and the female body was more strongly in the focus of the debate.

The idea that masturbation was evil very much arose in the enlightenment, as these two examples show, and must be seen as partly detached from clerical views.<sup>541</sup> Michel Foucault argues that the problematization of masturbation arose originally in Protestant countries and Great Britain, where *Onania* was first published, and it caught attention only later in Catholic countries.<sup>542</sup> He continues that the early modern discourse differed from the earlier Christian one and also from the later sexual psychopathological one.<sup>543</sup> Surely, it would be exaggerated to exclude the church from the condemnation of masturbation. The discussion of masturbation transformed over time and was taken up as topic for various reasons. However, it can be argued that the origin of the problematization of masturbation in modernity was based on the combination of the rise of science and medicine as well as individualization in modernity, and the church merely joined this debate.<sup>544</sup>

This problematization of masturbation shifted from being seen as a medical-psychological issue to a social-psychological problem in the late nineteenth century, particularly with the popularization of the work of Sigmund Freud around 1900. Freud did not, as is often falsely claimed, regard masturbation as unproblematic, but as a phase on the way to adulthood. He also argued, similarly to Tissot 200 years earlier, that masturbation can lead to neurosis and maybe even organic damage.

Even more interesting in the context of female masturbation was that Freud argued that the clitoral orgasm, usually achieved through female masturbation, was an infantile orgasm, but the vaginal orgasm, accomplished through penetration, was a superior, adult orgasm.<sup>545</sup> Laqueur argues that in 1905 Freud rediscovered the clitoris by inventing its counterpart the vaginal orgasm. The clitoris, which was until then, according

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<sup>540</sup> Laqueur, *Solitary Sex*, p. 21.

<sup>541</sup> Driel, *With the Hand*, p. 124.

<sup>542</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Abnormal. Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, London/ New York 2003, p. 233.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>544</sup> Driel, *With the Hand*, p. 124

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., pp. 128–129; Laqueur, Thomas, *Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge 1992, p. 233.

to Laqueur, considered as a version of the male sexual organ, was now expanded by a second place, where women can experience sexual pleasure, the vagina.<sup>546</sup> Freud argued that the repression of female sexuality, which is marked by the abandonment of the clitoris in puberty creates the heterosexual union on which the nuclear family rests. He continued that the pubertal, female repression stimulates the libido of the man. After the end of the puberty the erotic desire has been transferred from the clitoris to the vagina and the female body is in this way prepared for reproductive intercourse.<sup>547</sup>

I argue that Freud declassified here the female orgasm achieved through self-stimulation, as less worthy and less mature than an orgasm through intercourse with a man. It could be suggested that favoured the reproductive intercourse over the purely pleasurable one. This would fit well in the eugenic argumentation which attached a high societal value to reproduction. Though also sex for pleasure in moderation and in the marital boundaries was not completely condemned, especially by eugenic feminists. However, Freud did not differentiate between types of male orgasm. This is not surprising, since the male orgasm in any case can lead to pollination. Yet, the myth that a woman can only become pregnant when achieving an orgasm, even a vaginal one, stays strong.

Freud's argumentation was important in the sense that masturbation was a gendered problem. In the eugenic feminist sources, the focus was often on either child or female masturbation, but the concern was greater about the later effects of the masturbation of young girls than of young boys. The question, which was raised frequently, was how overworking the sexual organs at a young age would affect the ability to reproduce later in life. Degenerating effects had been feared.<sup>548</sup> This seems somewhat surprising since the nineteenth century discourse was marked by most cruel methods to prevent young boys from masturbating.<sup>549</sup> However, in the emerging debates about degeneration in the early twentieth century, though we have seen based on Tissot that this was not a completely new connection, female sexuality and the related concerns with female reproduction seemed more pressing than male sexuality.

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<sup>546</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 233.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>548</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, pp. 31ff; Eskelin, "Om kvinnohygien", p. 430.

<sup>549</sup> Foucault, *Abnormal*, pp. 235ff.

#### 4.2.1. Contesting Attitudes about Masturbation

The debate about masturbation somewhat differed from other topics discussed by the eugenic feminists. It was led by the medically-educated female eugenicists and exclusively conducted in their own publications. No article about masturbation can be found in any of the official women's magazines but all discussion took place in the medical and sex educational advice books of the female doctors.<sup>550</sup> Though van Driel argues, as mentioned above, for a shift from medicalization to pathologization of masturbation in the late nineteenth century, the topic was still widely in hands of physicians, assisted by psychoanalysts.<sup>551</sup>

In this period, one can certainly detect a shift in or contesting of perceptions about masturbation. The early writers, like Widerström or Kinberg, followed the nineteenth century trends of considering masturbation a dangerous and degenerating disease. From the 1930s onwards, a relaxation in the debate can be detected and masturbation, though still understood as shameful, was more normalized as part of human sexuality.<sup>552</sup>

Karolina Widerström took up the topic of masturbation in *Kvinnohygien I*. She argued that self-control was an important ability, which must be taught by the mother. However, boys should not be educated in too much self-control since this can harm their sex life afterwards.<sup>553</sup> Furthermore Widerström demonstrated a very clear idea about the effects of masturbation. She argued that masturbation must be considered a disease, which can result in nervous problems.

Quite often it is not anything else but thoughtlessness, arising by pure coincidence. There is also good reason to call it a disease. For it is very often a disease. Sometimes it reveals that the baby's nervous system is sick or sickly. In our stampeding, troubled time even children become nervous. This nervousness is inherited from their parents, and it is developed by several concurrent causes from the youngest age, the lack of peace and quiet, being uptight, sedentary lifestyle and indoor sitting in school-aged children, through over-exaltation and over-exertion at work etc.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> e.g. Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*; Sundquist, Kinberg, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning*; Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*.

<sup>551</sup> Driel, *With the Hand*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>552</sup> e.g. Cook, Hera, *The Long Sexual Revolution. English Women, Sex and Contraception, 1800-1975*, Oxford 2004, p. 207.

<sup>553</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>554</sup> "Ganska ofta är den icke annat än tanklös odygd, uppkommen af ren tillfällighet. Man skulle ock på goda grunder kunna kalla den för en sjukdom. Ty den är mycket ofta en sjukdomsyttning. Ibland uppenbarar den, att barnets nervsystem är sjukt eller sjukligt. I vår jäktande, oroliga tid bli till och med barnen nervösa. Nervositeten kommer i arf från föräldrarna, och den utvecklas genom åtskilliga samverkande orsaker

Still, the process of recovery was regarded as very difficult by Widerström. On the one hand, she demanded that the privacy of the child must be respected, and the solution must be found with care and sensitivity. On the other hand, she claimed masturbation was infectious. She argued that constant observation of the child was necessary. It should especially not be left alone with other children to prevent the spread of masturbation. According to Widerström, if masturbation was not treated, it would have serious long-term effects. She claimed that the sexual organs had a very intimate connection to the rest of the body. An overstimulation would have longstanding effects on the nervous system, weaken the body and soul. If not in childhood, the effects would certainly be visible in adult life.<sup>555</sup>

Her debate was connected to eugenic concerns in two ways. Firstly, she claimed a hereditary effect of masturbation. Secondly, she argued that masturbation in children can cause defects in the sexual organs and nervous system in adulthood. These could affect the ability to procreate healthy offspring. If the parents had been masturbators or had a weak nervous system, this behaviour could also be encouraged in the child. It is not clear here from this argumentation whether she thought that the genes of masturbators were defective, and the disorder would be transferred through heredity, or if she considered the social environment of masturbating parents unsuitable for the upbringing of children.

I suggest that Widerström did not believe that the parents' act of masturbation itself caused genetic defects but that the related social and physical characteristics of masturbators were considered dangerous to the offspring. Masturbation was connected with a lack of self-discipline and control over one's own sex drive.<sup>556</sup> Both were crucial from a eugenic point of view to heal a society from degeneration. If parents did not encourage discipline and sexual control in their children, the children were not able to enact self-control at a later stage and the social impact of their uncontrolled sexual behaviour, which would also influence other areas of their life like social behaviour or ability to work, would lead to further degeneration. The physical and social effects of masturbation were not clearly separated by Widerström and overlapped.<sup>557</sup>

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alltifrån den spädaste åldern, genom brist på lugn och ro, genom klemighet, genom det myckna stillasittandet och innesittandet under skolåldern, genom jäkt och öfveranstängning i arbetet m. m.", Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, p. 31.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-34.

<sup>556</sup> Palmblad, *Medicinen som samhällslära*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>557</sup> e.g. Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I. An Introduction*, London 1976, p. 53ff; Repo, *Biopolitics of Gender*, p. 77ff.

Widerström's position towards masturbation was rather common than exceptional. As historian Lena Lennerhed argues, in the early twentieth century an outright campaign against masturbation in the context of a certain human ideal was conducted in the Nordic countries. Self-control and discipline were the central attributes which were propagated, according to Lennerhed. She argues that the anti-masturbation campaign, led by for example Elise Ottesen-Jensen, provided a new perception of children and their sexuality. Children were considered asexual and masturbation abnormal, so that it was to be strictly prevented, as demanded by Widerström.<sup>558</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the focus shifted from being a medical and individual problem to be a social problem. Laqueur argues that especially in the 1930s the focus of the debate was on cultural anxieties. Masturbation was considered a rejection of the social order itself.<sup>559</sup> Self-control was indeed the focal point around which the masturbation debate of the early twentieth century was constructed. Sexual self-control was a crucial part of the civilized society.<sup>560</sup> Also Julia Kinberg pointed out the importance of self-control in her sex education book *Sexuell etik*. She argued that:

We will not reject the modern trends in psychology, (...) that all self-restraint would be a bad thing. By no means. Self-control is our hallmark. Moderation was considered in antiquity as man's first and highest virtue.<sup>561</sup>

Although a sex life was part of every human life and sexual pleasure was important for reproduction, the restriction of sexual desire through, for example, sex education or physical activity was equally important. She continued:

Let us only remember that our sexual education has the same purpose as our other education: to teach our children and our youth to love and understand what is right.<sup>562</sup>

For Kinberg, this had primarily a physiological background. She argued that the nervous system was central for the inhibitions, and self-control is ultimately nothing more than psychological control and inhibition of the nervous system. The restriction of sexual

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<sup>558</sup> Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 19.

<sup>559</sup> Laqueur, *Solitary Sex*, p. 359; van Driel, *With the Hand*, p. 124ff.

<sup>560</sup> Levin, *Masken uti rosen*, p. 136.

<sup>561</sup> "Vi skola ej avvisa moderna strömningar inom psykologien, (...) att all självbehärskning vore av ondo. Ingalunda. Självbehärskning är vårt adelsmärke. Besinning ansågs under antiken som människans första och högsta dygd." Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, p. 19.

<sup>562</sup> "Låt oss blott minnas att vår sexuella fostran har samma syfte som vår övriga fostran: att lära våra barn och vår ungdom att älska och förstå och vilja vad gott och rätt är." Ibid., p. 19.

desire was especially important for the feeble-minded to guarantee them a better life.<sup>563</sup> Although Kinberg did not discuss masturbation here in particular but sexual behaviour in general, the idea that, on the one hand, sexual pleasure must be allowed and enjoyment of sexuality is not immoral but, on the other hand, only in controlled doses, demonstrated the shift of concepts in the early twentieth century.

Eskelin also took up the topic of masturbation and related it to the debate about self-control. In 1930, she argued that mothers must observe their children carefully and educate them in self-control. If the child, she did not specify the sex, shows symptoms, like a lack of appetite or passivity, the first treatment would be more social contact and more physical activity. In severe cases medical treatment is necessary, Eskelin advised.<sup>564</sup> The responsibility of recognizing and treating masturbation lay with the mother. It was her maternal duty to educate her children in self-control and create the foundation for a later healthy sexuality within marriage.

The Danish physician and sexual educator Dida Dederding took the same path as her collaborators in Sweden. She argued in *Sundhedslære for unge kvinder*, that children and adolescents must learn to control their sexual desire.<sup>565</sup> Dederding also claimed that puberty was an especially difficult phase for boys and girls and it could lead to a complete change in character.<sup>566</sup> She did not talk here directly about masturbation but, similarly to Widerström, Kinberg and Eskelin, also emphasized the importance of self-control taught from an early age on to avoid sexual misbehaviour in the adult life.

Sexual pleasure in a marital context was desired and accepted, if it did not lead to disturbance of the social order by for example an unlimited number of children, although a sufficient level of reproduction was welcomed.<sup>567</sup> Sexual self-pleasuring, which happened usually in secrecy and out of any kind of social control, was condemned, however. The idea that a person could achieve sexual orgasm by him- or herself, with the help of only their own fantasy, was regarded as highly suspicious and threatening, as seen by Laqueur.<sup>568</sup> Personal fantasies were completely out of social control and no-one could imagine what the individual visualized to climax. The idea that it might be something

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<sup>563</sup> Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, pp. 18-32.

<sup>564</sup> Eskelin, "Om kvinnohygien", p. 430.

<sup>565</sup> Dederding, *Sundhedslære*, p. 22.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>568</sup> Laqueur, *Solitary Sex*, p. 21.

socially threatening was present. Not only the individual self-control vanished, but also society lost any control over the thoughts of the individual.

One of the few eugenic feminists who problematized masturbation less but considered it as part of a normal human sexuality was the Danish psychoanalyst Jo Jacobsen. In her book *Kærlighedslivets labyrint. En bog om seksualsind og seksualsundhed* (1942), she argued that a lot of people did not really know what masturbation actually was. She noted that it was often marked as disease, which could infect the individual. Jacobsen continued that since it did not produce offspring, but only generated pleasure, masturbation was commonly seen as dangerous and pointless.<sup>569</sup>

Masturbation was certainly not a leading topic in the publications of these female physicians. No discussion of masturbation can be found in the official organization magazines in the Nordic countries. The women's organizations seemed to exclude themselves from the topic. The reasons for this can be several. The publications of the women's movements were directed to a much wider audience than the book publications. Sexuality and its different aspects itself were already a very sensitive topic which was rarely discussed explicitly in the women's magazine. Masturbation constituted here a highly tabooed topic and a public discussion in this setting seemed to be unthinkable.

However, it did come up in one way or another in all their sex education books. The debate was not freed from concern about the hereditary and degenerating effects of masturbation, which situated it within the eugenic discourse. Also, the importance of the emphasis on self-control, as core characteristic of a eugenic lifestyle, cannot be underestimated in the perception of masturbation and human, or rather female, sexuality as such. The voices against the pathologization of masturbation were few, and those of women, like Jacobsen, frequently dismissed. Masturbation was not a publicly discussed topic, though as I will now show, it was a topic of great political concern in the struggle about the race.

#### 4.2.2. De-Purification of the Body and Damaging the Race

The fact that sexuality and sex were used as an instrument of power has been discussed at length by Michel Foucault. As he argues, the relation between sex and power has to be always negative, since power denies sex and pleasure. Foucault continues that power

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<sup>569</sup> Jacobsen, Jo, *Kærlighedslivets labyrint. En bog om seksualsind og seksualsundhed*, Copenhagen 1942, pp. 190-201.



dictates the law of sex and situates it in a binary system, which prescribes the order of sex as defined by permission and forbidden.<sup>570</sup> Sex, whether with others or oneself, is certainly an instrument of biopolitics. The biopolitical usage of sex did not stand alone but intersected with race.

The anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler shows that racism can be considered the most direct effect of biopolitics on the human race and the human reproduction.<sup>571</sup> According to Stoler, racism was a method of cleansing the social body.<sup>572</sup> It was the modern method of the state for normalization.<sup>573</sup> However, the social body did not always have to be cleaned of external pollution. Stoler continues that state racism was also used to identify internal biologized enemies against which society must be defended.<sup>574</sup> This discussion of the intersection of sex and race to identify biological enemies and to keep society and the race pure was highly relevant for the social problematization of masturbation. The question of whether masturbation was considered as a cause of degeneration must be raised now. This debate was not exclusive to the eugenic feminists and was surely also discussed within the male medical profession, but since masturbation was a specific topic in the feminist-led sex education movement, its definition as degenerating can be indeed also assigned to the eugenic feminist debate.<sup>575</sup>

Masturbation was considered especially problematic for women, because it was considered rejection of sociability and the social order. The idea that women might rather engage in intercourse with themselves than in heteronormative sexual relations with their husbands constituted several racial and social threats in the eugenic sense. First of all, masturbation can never result in offspring, whereas, in the eugenic feminist view, female sexuality should primarily be used for reproduction, though the importance of sexual pleasure was in particular in the interwar period not denied.<sup>576</sup> If sex did not produce children, it was useless from a racial-eugenic point of view. Overworking the female sexual organs and nervous system could lead to physical deformation of the vagina

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<sup>570</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 83.

<sup>571</sup> Stoler, Ann Laura, *Race and the Education of Desire. Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, Durham and London 1995, p. 21.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>575</sup> e.g. Le Maire, Louis, *Legal kastration i strafferetlig belysning*, Copenhagen 1946; Sand, Knud, *Die Physiologie des Hoden*, Leipzig, 1933.

<sup>576</sup> e.g. Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 127.

and the uterus and disrupt conception. Besides, it would damage women's sexual pleasure, and female desire was seen as a precondition for motherhood.<sup>577</sup>

Secondly, as demonstrated in the previous section, using the sexual organs for self-pleasure alone meant a lack of control over one's own sex drive and self-discipline. The sex drive is not only a biological process but is manifested as network of the interaction of bodily processes into networks of meaning, which implicates representation and significations.<sup>578</sup> I would take this argumentation a step further and argue that the sex drive is not only an interaction of bodily but also of social, cultural and political processes. Ultimately, sex drive is a constructed concept to normalize and control sexuality through biopower.<sup>579</sup> The gendered perception of the sex drive is one leading example of this biopolitical process. It is usually attested that a man's sex drive is stronger and more accepted, while a woman with a perceived strong sex drive is understood as socially and politically problematic. Furthermore, the sex drive seems impossible to measure. What does it actually mean to have no or low sexual self-control? In the period of this study, but I would argue, the aim of such measuring is the rejection of the heteronormative, marital environment. Sex outside the social and cultural construct of heterosexual marriage was usually seen as the first indication of problematic sexual behaviour and a lack of sexual self-control.

In the context of the eugenic feminist debate on masturbation, the lack of sexual self-control was equated with a general lack of self-discipline in other areas of life, for example the ability to have regular work, which had negative effects on society as a whole, economically and socially. As Widerström repeatedly argued, asocial tendencies could develop in the context of masturbation. Asocial tendencies and a disturbed social behaviour in connection with sexuality, which were seen to increase degeneration, was one of the main fears of the eugenicists. Misdirected sexuality at a young age could cause not only a lack of offspring, but serious social problems in adulthood.<sup>580</sup>

Finally, this would result in a complete rejection of the sexual order.<sup>581</sup> The wanton misuse of the sexual organs to create uncontrolled self-pleasure, the possible damage to the nervous system as well as the sexual organs and its long-term effects on

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<sup>577</sup> Bjerne, Poul, "Sexualproblemet." In: Eskelin, Karolin, Tillgren, Josua (eds.), *Hälsa och sjukdom. Den moderna läkarboken. Hur man håller sig frisk och hur man behandlar sjukdomar*, Helsinki 1930, p. 95.

<sup>578</sup> e.g. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 55.

<sup>579</sup> e.g. Foucault, *Abnormal*, p. 234ff; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 83.

<sup>580</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, p. 34.

<sup>581</sup> Lacquer, *Solitary Sex*, p. 372.

the individual, the rejection of heteronormative intercourse for the purpose of reproducing the race, would eventually danger the population quality and contribute to the perceived ongoing degeneration. According to anthropologist Mary Douglas, the body must be seen as symbol of society: powers and dangers of social structures are reproduced in human bodies.<sup>582</sup> She resumes that the symbolism of the boundaries of the body is used to express the danger of societal boundaries.<sup>583</sup> The loss of self-control was equalized with a social loss and a decline of civilization by eugenic feminists.<sup>584</sup> Thus masturbation meant not only pollution of one's own body but also of the social body, both by lowering the probability of producing valuable offspring and by taking the first steps to generate asocial and abnormal sexual desire, which might result socially threatening or criminal behaviour.

All these aspects seemed to apply to men as well as women. However, the eugenic feminist discussion of masturbation was a gendered one and focused mainly on the female sexual body and sexuality, and the danger to the race. Jordanova argues that the female ability to reproduce defines their physical, psychological and social lives.<sup>585</sup> Problems with female reproduction disrupts their lives and – since female lives are never isolated from society – a conflict over female reproduction always means also a societal conflict, which might be a cause for further degeneration of a whole society. As Jordanova continues, the notion is that a good woman, which means a reproductive woman, could save and civilize a nation but a bad woman, in this context eugenically bad, could destroy it.<sup>586</sup>

Laqueur argues that eugenics, as a dominant topic of the social discourse, became an instrument of national security and the international struggle of race against race.<sup>587</sup> This argument connects with Foucault's discussion on the link between power and sex and the placement of sex in a political power system.<sup>588</sup> It also ties in with Stoler's views on the importance of race as population, shown earlier in this chapter.<sup>589</sup> This all contributed to the social, cultural and political problematization of masturbation in the eugenic-feminist discourse. In this context, masturbation and the following loss of control

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<sup>582</sup> Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London, New York 1966, p. 115.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>584</sup> e.g. Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*; Sundquist, Kinberg, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning*.

<sup>585</sup> Jordanova, *Sexual Vision*, p. 29.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>587</sup> Laqueur, *Solitary Sex*, p. 51.

<sup>588</sup> e.g. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 92ff.

<sup>589</sup> e.g. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, p. 21ff.

over one's own sex drive could not only lead to individual problems, like physical or psychological disturbance. Eugenicists, especially the Nordic feminist eugenicists of the early twentieth century, placed masturbation within a bigger picture. In their view, by producing no offspring or defected offspring, disordered sexuality caused societal degeneration which would weaken the race or nation in comparison to other, more controlled and sexual ordered populations or races. In the worst-case scenario, masturbation and loss of control of the sex drive from an early age could thus result in the disappearance of one's whole race. The concern here was not only the weakening of the individual but the weakening of society, which made masturbation and its consequences such a central problem in the eugenic debate.

To conclude, masturbation discourse was gendered by eugenic feminists, who focused more on the female masturbation than on the male. This might not be representative of the overall masturbation discussion, since especially the masturbation of young boys was central in the nineteenth century debate. Yet, eugenic feminists made their case in the context of eugenic reproduction and degeneration. This added a new topic to the eugenic debates and drew attention to female reproduction and its social effects, away from male reproduction. Furthermore, it added to the gendered perception of sexuality and self-control. Female sexuality and sexual pleasure were placed within the biopolitical institution of heterosexual marriage with the sole outcome of eugenically clean offspring to prevent the further degeneration of the race and the nation.

#### 4.3. How to Regulate Reproduction

Until the mid-twentieth century secure contraception was hardly available. Only with the 1960s and the marketing of the contraceptive pill did birth control become somehow safer. This insecurity shaped the experience of sexuality and made reproduction central to the regulation of sexuality. This shaped the experience of sexuality and made reproduction central in the regulation of sexuality, historian Hera Cook states. She explains that the nineteenth century birth control was far from being effective, but the people experienced other sexual practices, like oral or anal sex, to prevent conceiving but not to have to live in celibacy. However, Cook argues that these practices were not very often described in writings and publications, for example pornography, of the time. The

absence of the oral and anal sex from publications did not mean that there were not practiced or preferred but at least it was not talked about.<sup>590</sup>

The history of contraception can be traced back to the sixteenth century and the first appearance of condoms. In the seventeenth century, the first diaphragms were developed and in the early twentieth century the first coils were invented in Germany. Other popular methods were natural sponges to prevent the semen entering the uterus, vaginal pessaries and sperm-killing sedatives. However, for example in Sweden around 1900, coitus interruptus was still the most frequent contraception method.<sup>591</sup> At the turn of the century a lot of people also used sexual abstinence as method of birth control. From 1900 on the possibilities for birth control became greater and safer, for example through the development of the rubber diaphragm by the German gynaecologist Wilhelm Mensinga in the 1880s, and the overall birth rate decreased until the 1930s in the Western world.<sup>592</sup> Already in the 1930s, 11.5 million condoms were sold per year in Sweden.<sup>593</sup>

Nevertheless, though the possibilities increased, the social debate about the use of contraceptives also arose. Contraception was in many ways a controversial topic. The regulation of reproduction in the context of the discussion about degeneration and the decrease in population quality was a two-sided discussion. The Danish debate about birth control for example was divided into two opposing sides. One was led by the eugenicist Søren Hansen and politician K.K. Steincke, who argued that birth control was only in the interest of rich, spoiled women who wanted to enjoy their lives. On the other side stood physician J.H. Leunbach together with the writer Thit Jensen, who considered birth control predominantly applicable to poor and premature women who feared conceiving.<sup>594</sup> Leunbach and Jensen were the Danish pioneers of birth control in the interwar period. Leunbach established several privately financed clinics where he gave sexual advice, fitted diaphragms and performed illegal abortions.<sup>595</sup> Reproduction control was defined in many ways by class. Middle class women were criticized for restricting their reproduction too much, often for selfish reasons, and lower class women were singled out for not regulating their procreation enough.<sup>596</sup>

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<sup>590</sup> e.g. Cook, "Sexuality and Contraception", pp. 915-918.

<sup>591</sup> Elgán, *Genus och politik*, pp. 36-38.

<sup>592</sup> Cook, "Sexuality and Contraception", p. 923.

<sup>593</sup> Elgán, *Genus och politik*, p. 38.

<sup>594</sup> Hansen, "Something Rotten in the State of Denmark", p. 49.

<sup>595</sup> Caspersen, *Moderskabspolitik i Danmark*, p. 148.

<sup>596</sup> Jacobsen, *Seksualreform*, p. 168.

Many eugenic feminists took a positive stand towards the regulation of reproduction, though certainly not all of them. However, most Swedish feminists were united in their demand for free access to birth control. Here the debate about birth control circulated mostly around the contraception regulation legislation *Lex hinke*.<sup>597</sup> Although by far not all feminists were positive towards birth control, the *Lex hinke* united them to a certain extent, differently from the other Nordic countries, in the idea that the law was in fact a male attempt to control female sexuality and made men subjects in the question of reproduction and sexuality.<sup>598</sup> Not men but women themselves should be the ones who controlled women's sexuality. Nevertheless, as Kaisa Ohrlander argues, contraception as part of social medicine did not liberate women as such but shifted the existing male control of female sexuality to a share of power between husband and state.<sup>599</sup>

Part of the discussion about the regulation of reproduction was also the question of the legalization of abortion. Abortion was widely discussed in a national context. The debate was strongly connected to the national legislation and the prohibition of abortion. The national abortion debates in the Nordic countries circulated around the question of whether or not abortion should be legalized under certain circumstances, for example where the mother's life was endangered. Abortion was even more controversially discussed than other forms of reproduction control. Feminists showed great concerns about the effects of back-street abortions on women's health and advocated widely for a decriminalization of abortion. However, they were also united in the idea that abortion should only be an emergency method and could not be used as birth control as such.<sup>600</sup>

Most Nordic countries started to legalize abortion on social, medical and eugenic grounds in the 1930s; Iceland in 1935, Denmark in 1937 and Sweden in 1938. Norway's ban on abortions was lifted under German occupation in 1943 and Finland decriminalized abortion only in 1950.<sup>601</sup> Remarkably, the decriminalization of abortion was usually connected to the implementation or reform of sterilization legislation in the Nordic countries. Eva Palmblad argues that abortion was part of the Swedish, or maybe

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<sup>597</sup> *Lex hinke* prohibited between 1911 and 1938 to spread information about contraceptives and their use in Sweden.

<sup>598</sup> Elgán, *Genus och politik*, p. 120.

<sup>599</sup> Ohrlander, Kajsa, *I barnens och nationens intresse. Socialliberal reformpolitik 1903–1930*, Stockholm 1992, p. 20.

<sup>600</sup> e.g. Jacobsen, *Seksualreform*, pp. 51–54; Aas, Ingeborg, "Abortus provocatus och de olika indikationerna." In: *Tidevarvet* 9/ 47 (1931), p. 4; Olow, John, "Abortprovokation och preventivmedel." In: Kinberg, Olof (ed.), *Sex läkare om sexualproblemet. Medicinskt, psykologiskt, socialt*, Stockholm 1934, pp. 167–178; Anker Möller, *Katti Anker Möller*, p. 59.

<sup>601</sup> e.g. Meskus, Mianna, "To Exclude or to Enclose. Medicalization of Abortion in Finland 1900– 1950." In: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 30/ 1 (2006), pp. 45–46; Caspersen, *Moderskabspolitik*, pp. 140–142.

even Nordic, social policy project.<sup>602</sup> She continues here the argumentation of Elisabeth Elgán, who argues in her discussion of Swedish abortion policy that eugenics was a most important argument in the fight for the liberalization of abortion in Sweden. This was not only based on the socio-economic situation of the individual but also the overall physical and mental improvement of the population.<sup>603</sup> The control of reproduction through different methods like contraception, abortion and sterilization was of great interest for eugenic feminists. It connected their interest in the liberation of the female body and sexuality as well as the overall development of the population quality and the female impact on this.

#### 4.3.1. Methods of Contraception

While contraception was not exactly safe, the options for controlling reproduction were still many. I discuss now more in depth the different contraceptive methods from a eugenic perspective. The most common method of preventing pregnancy, which was also considered fairly safe, was the diaphragm. The Swedish physician Andrea Andreen-Svedberg argued in a 1936 governmental commission report on contraception that the diaphragm was the safest option. However, since its use was quite complicated, it was not suitable for all women.<sup>604</sup> Further, she advocated condoms, which according to her was the best mechanical method so far. Coitus interruptus and abstinence were not suitable methods in her view, since both were insecure and could lead to physical and mental problems.<sup>605</sup> Sterilization was, according to Andreen-Svedberg, the safest but also the last resort to prevent a pregnancy. She recommended it for example for women who could not have more children for economic or health reasons, as well as for eugenic reasons. Yet, she did not mention the possibility of sterilizing men, though this was easier and safer than for women. As a eugenic option, she argued that:

Sterilization is better than any other method in these cases because it is unerringly effective. Especially when you are dealing with unintelligent, poor or mentally defective individuals, there is often no way to otherwise get them to practice birth control.<sup>606</sup>

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<sup>602</sup> Palmblad, Eva, "Abortpolitikens dolda dagordning under trettio- och fyrtiotalen." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Johannisson, Karin, Tydén, Mattias (eds.), *Fem uppsatser om steriliseringen i Sverige*, Lund 2000, p. 48.

<sup>603</sup> Elgán, *Genus och politik*, p. 146.

<sup>604</sup> Andreen-Svedberg, *Preventivmedel*, p. 312.

<sup>605</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 317-320.

<sup>606</sup> "Sterilisering är bättre än varje annan metod i dessa fall emedan den är ofelbart effektiv. Särskilt när man har att göra med ointelligenta, undermåliga eller psykiskt defekta individer finnes ofta ingen möjlighet att på annat sätt få dem att utöva födelsekontroll." *Ibid.*, p. 323.

Andreen-Svedberg's text was one of the few publications which openly gave advice about contraception. In Sweden, the open publication of information about contraception was prevented by the *Lex hinke* until 1938. Andreen-Svedberg's text was not advice for ordinary people but part of the official report of the population commission *Betänkande i sexualfrågan* [Report on Sexual Questions]. However, the *Lex hinke* prevented other sex educators, like Julia Kinberg or Karolina Widerström, from discussing contraception in their sex education books, published in the 1920s. Nevertheless, both of them, as trained doctors, fitted diaphragms in their practice and as part of their lectures.

In Denmark, the atmosphere was more open. The physician Dida Dederding and psychoanalyst Jo Jacobsen, in their books about female health and sexual enlightenment, described the most common contraception methods as diaphragms and condoms.<sup>607</sup> Dederding and Jacobsen, similarly to Andreen-Svedberg, also advocated sterilization as the safest method of fertility control.<sup>608</sup> However, both published their books in the 1930s and 1940s, when the attitude towards sexuality and birth control already started to become more open, also in Sweden.<sup>609</sup> The earlier sterilization legislation, enacted in the Nordic countries between 1929 and 1938, legalized sterilization, making it an actual option for contraception. Before restricting reproduction permanently by choice was still a theoretical possibility only, and thus illegal. The debate was very often connected to the overall discussion about eugenics. The feminists discussed sterilization as method to restrict in particular the reproduction of so-called degenerated individuals, to prevent them from transmitting their disabilities, mental, physical or social, to their offspring.<sup>610</sup> Remarkably, in the eugenic feminist debate too, sterilization was not proposed as a contraception method for men. The entire eugenic feminist debate about contraception was exclusively directed towards women.

In Norway, not only individual feminists but also women's organizations were involved in the discussion about contraception. Most of the members of *Norsk Kvindesaksforening* considered self-control and sexuality within marriage the best solution for reproduction control. The discussion was especially divided along generational lines. The younger generation advocated for birth control, sex education and

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<sup>607</sup> e.g. Dederding, *Sundhedslære*, pp. 65–67; Jacobsen, *Seksualreform*; pp. 168–182.

<sup>608</sup> e.g. Dederding, *Sundhedslære*, p. 67; Jacobsen, *Seksualreform*, p. 171.

<sup>609</sup> Myrdal, Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, p. 38ff; Myrdal, *Folk och familj*, p. 76ff.

<sup>610</sup> e.g. Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, pp. 92ff; Andreen-Svedberg, *Preventivmedel*, p. 323; Jacobsen, *Seksualreform*, p. 126; Dederding, *Sundhedslære*, p. 67.



legalization of abortion. Finally, they took over the leadership of *Norsk Kvindesaksforening* in the mid-1930s.<sup>611</sup> The conflict arose not only in the feminist movements but also in collaboration with the eugenics movements. Katti Anker Møller took a leading role in Norway. She provided advice and contraception in her mother's advice office in Oslo and also on her lecture tours through the country. Finnish Karolina Eskelin did not refer directly to birth control in her health advice books. Her information stayed more on a general level about health and hygiene, without actually going into details.

Abortion was also part of the debate about the control of reproduction. It was not advocated as a contraceptive as such, since it was firstly widely illegal until the 1930s and secondly always connected with a great health risk for the woman. However, abortion was a central topic and widely discussed by eugenic feminists. As Deutscher stated, it was crucial to gaining women's rights, including reproductive rights.<sup>612</sup> Many feminists demanded free access to abortion, while at the same time they all warned about its health and physical effects. It was never to be taken lightly and even feminists in favour of abortion, for example Katti Anker Møller, considered it only a method to prevent further harm to the woman and also society if the child would be born defective or into a poor environment, but not as method of contraception.<sup>613</sup> Dida Dederding stated that abortion could not be considered appropriate as contraception, due to its high health risks and illegal status.<sup>614</sup> The overall aim of the pro-abortion activists was to provide women in need of it with an abortion by medical experts and not illegally on a kitchen table.<sup>615</sup>

Abortion was a very common method of birth control for working class women, as Mianna Meskus shows in her discussion about the history of abortion in Finland. Working class women frequently had difficulty accessing other methods, but often could not cope with further pregnancies for economic or health reasons. Meskus argues that the number of illegal abortions before the legalization in 1950 in Finland was probably around 25,000-30,000 per year. However, these were only the numbers of abortions which came to the attention of the authorities, which meant that the actual numbers were most probably much higher.<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> Lønna, *Stolthet og kvinnekamp*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>612</sup> Deutscher, "Reproductive Politics", p. 219.

<sup>613</sup> e.g. Jacobsen, *Fosterfordrivelsesparagraffen*, p. 12; Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, p. 109.

<sup>614</sup> Dederding, *Sundhedslære*, p. 67.

<sup>615</sup> Mohr, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 101.

<sup>616</sup> Meskus, "To Exclude or to Enclose", p. 46.

#### 4.3.2. Contraception in the Eugenic Feminist Debates

As already hinted above, eugenics was also a topic in the birth control debate, in particular in the context of sterilization. Elisabeth Lønna even argues that eugenics was the ideological foundation for the birth control debate in the Norwegian women's movement.<sup>617</sup> It would be short-sighted to limit this argument to Norwegian feminists. Maria Björkman shows that leading Swedish feminists and medical experts Karolina Widerström, Ada Nilsson and Julia Kinberg connected the question of eugenics and degeneration with birth control. All three of them perceived under class women (see Section 5.1) as often oversexualized and middle class women as more passive in sexual questions. Kinberg argued that the procreation of prostitutes, seen as members of the under class, would lead to degeneration. Nilsson constituted an advice office to provide women with information about contraception, care for children and mothers. They advocated for a reform package of sex education, contraception, sterilization and abortion to prevent further degeneration.<sup>618</sup>

Sterilization, as we have seen, was considered the only hundred per cent safe method of birth control. The fact that sterilization was not available until the 1930s in the Nordic countries, and even then not freely, was frequently criticized by various eugenic feminists.<sup>619</sup> However, the use of sterilization as a method of birth control was connected to social categories like gender, class, economic status, health and education which strengthened the eugenic foundation of the discourse.<sup>620</sup> Sterilization was not recommended for middle class women, whose reproduction was only to be restricted temporarily to recover from pregnancy but not permanently. It was recommended for poor women who were not able to provide sufficiently for their unlimited offspring, as well as women with limited mental capacity, mental illness or disability. They were not to be trusted to control their sex drive and fertility otherwise than with a permanent surgical method, as Swedish Andreen-Svedberg argued.<sup>621</sup> The decision to which group the woman belonged was not made by herself but rather by superordinate authorities, like medical experts or social policy makers.

Sterilization was not the only method of contraception which was affected by eugenic debates. Nevertheless, birth control in general was also a widely contested

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<sup>617</sup> Lønna, *Stolthet og kvinnekamp*, p. 68.

<sup>618</sup> Björkman, *Den anfädda stammen*, p. 81.

<sup>619</sup> e.g. Hansen, "Something Rotten in the State of Denmark", p. 31.

<sup>620</sup> e.g. Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, p. 358.

<sup>621</sup> Andreen-Svedberg, *Preventivmedel*, p. 323.

discourse. Besides class, morality was the leading argument either for or against contraception.<sup>622</sup> This argument can be found in every national birth control debate in the Nordic countries and throughout the Western world. The fear that free contraception would spread promiscuity and sex outside marriage was common and not confined to eugenic feminists. However, arguments for contraception were often based on the need to limit the increased spread of STIs and the hope that a wider use of condoms would achieve this.<sup>623</sup>

The effect of birth control on morality was connected to the wider debate about abortion, prostitution, the liberation of female sexuality and the positioning of women in society. The leading actor in the conflict about birth control in the Norwegian women's organization *Norsk Kvinnesaksforening* was feminist Katti Anker Møller. She thus contradicted the opinion of the majority in *Norsk Kvindesaksforening*, although Møller directed her advice exclusively to the married woman. Her argument for the use of contraception within marriage was that it lowered child mortality while simultaneously improving women's health through less frequent pregnancies.<sup>624</sup>

In the context of the eugenic interest of most actors in the debates, access to fertility control was foremost a question of class. Who should and should not get access to birth control and what contraception method was the best for which group of women? Birth control in the class context could be divided in groups.

There was the group of women who were expected to use self-control to regulate reproduction. This was perceived as the most cultivated form of contraception and was accepted by advocates and opponents of birth control.<sup>625</sup> However this attitude began to change in the 1920s and 1930s. Sexuality per se was no longer considered threatening and a controlled sexuality in the context of marriage was even understood as healthy.<sup>626</sup> No harm could be done through female self-control. Morals would not decline, rather the opposite, and control of the sex drive would also lead to an overall self-control in other areas related to health and hygiene. However, self-control was only seen as a method for especially strong and trustworthy women, in particular married women from the middle class.<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> Elgán, *Genus och politik*, p. 101.

<sup>623</sup> Levin, *Masken uti rosen*, pp. 101-103.

<sup>624</sup> Mohr, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 92.

<sup>625</sup> Olow, "Abortprovokation och Preventivmedel", p. 176.

<sup>626</sup> Andreen-Svedberg, *Preventivmedel*, p. 320.

<sup>627</sup> Levin, *Masken uti rosen*, p. 136.

Abortion was advocated, though not as method of contraception but as emergency solution. It was usually seen as for the group of the lower classes. In all the Nordic countries, the indications demanded were the same, as later for sterilizations; medical, social or eugenic.<sup>628</sup> Ingeborg Aas argued in the Norwegian context that the eugenic indication is necessary to prevent inferior individuals from procreating overall, because their offspring will be costly to society. The social indication aimed, according to Aas, mainly to mothers in socially difficult circumstances. Often, in her view, the social and eugenic indication was also combined:

Often, this indication is of mixed eugenic and social meaning, as the rule applies to individuals who are unable to support themselves and their children, and often cost the public large sums.<sup>629</sup>

The medical indication was directed towards women whose life would be endangered by pregnancy and birth.<sup>630</sup> The definition of these indications was never as clear as they might appear now, neither for the abortion activists nor later in the abortion legislation. Medical abortion was legalized first in most Nordic countries and was quite easily accepted and granted even before it was legalized. However, what a medical condition which might endanger a pregnant woman constituted was not clearly defined and the decision was very much left to the doctor.<sup>631</sup>

More important in the context of eugenic feminism were the social and eugenic arguments which Nordic feminists used to demand abortion legislation. These indications overlapped to a certain extent, as Aas showed.<sup>632</sup> However, the difference between the two indications was that eugenic abortion should prevent women with genetic defects from giving birth at all, and ideally sterilization at an early age would even prevent her getting pregnant. Alternatively, the social indication would prevent further children, if the woman had already given birth. Women seeking a social abortion did not necessarily have to have a genetic defect, but the social environment, for example

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<sup>628</sup> e.g. Swärd, Stefan, *Vaför Sverige fick fri abort. Ett studium av en policyprocess*, Stockholm 1984, p. 30; Gjaever, Øyvind, "Abortion and Eugenics. The Role of Eugenic Arguments in Norwegian Abortion Debates and Legislation, 1920 – 1978." In: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 30 (2005), p. 24; Meskus, "To Exclude or to Enclose?", p. 50.

<sup>629</sup> "Ofta är denna indikation av blandad rashygieniska och social innebörd, då den i regel faller individer, som är ur stånd att försörja sig själva och sitt barn och ofta kostar det allmänna stora summor." Aas, "Abortus provocatus", p. 4.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>631</sup> Meskus, "To Exclude or to Enclose?", p. 46.

<sup>632</sup> Aas, "Abortus provocatus", p. 4.

economic need, exhaustion, or an already oversized family, could make further pregnancies unfavourable.<sup>633</sup> Yet, the eugenic feminists made clear that the authorities did not decide that women should have an abortion; it was often the wish of the women themselves.

Danish historian Lene Koch shows that the Danish women's movement demanded the possibility of eugenic abortions, based on the arguments of Leunbach and Dederding. The physician Jonathan Leunbach, who performed illegal abortions, argued that eugenic and social abortions would be in the interest of society, because it would prevent genetic defects from spreading and society would not have to care for the child for his or her whole lifetime. Dida Dederding, as one of the leading feminists in Denmark, had doubts about the social indication but agreed completely with Leunbach about the importance of eugenic abortion to prevent societal harm through defective children.<sup>634</sup>

The influence of eugenic ideas on abortion and sterilization discussions was certainly stronger and more direct than on the contraception debate. This was based on the fact that abortion and sterilization were directly regulated and granted by the authorities and so based on a legal framework. Alva Myrdal argued that the criminalization of abortion would mean a risk to public health. She continued that the risks of unprofessional abortions, like death, sickness and infertility, were high, not only for the individual woman but also for society.<sup>635</sup> However, contraception as such was rather a topic between patient and doctor or any other medically trained person. As Myrdal claimed, birth control is an economic and personal question.<sup>636</sup> Eugenic considerations played rather a role in the selection of the right contraception method and in overall societal discourse. In 1934, Alva Myrdal argued that the prohibition of contraception, as in her country, Sweden, was unfavourable to society, mentally, physically and socially defective groups, whether this was due to illness or disability, were seen as highly fertile by eugenicists.<sup>637</sup>

It must be concluded that eugenic ideas had a great impact on the birth control debate led by Nordic feminists. Who should reproduce, when, and how much, was not a private question at all but closely intertwined with the social discourse of the overall impact of offspring on society. The aim of the eugenic feminist promotion of

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<sup>633</sup> e.g. Tydén, *Från politik till praktik*, p. 54.

<sup>634</sup> Koch, *Racehygiejne i Danmark*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>635</sup> Myrdal, Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, p. 39.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

reproduction control was to lift the heavy burden on the female body of endless strings of pregnancies. The goal was fewer and healthier pregnancies. In turn, this would contribute positively to the general population. The survival rate of children in families with fewer children was much higher. Children from smaller families were usually healthier and stronger, which then guaranteed a healthier next generation.<sup>638</sup>

However, it must now be discussed how far the regulation of reproduction was likewise a restriction of choices. Was the way in which eugenic feminists advocated for the liberation of birth control also liberating for the female body and the conscious decision of women for children? Or was it rather the authorities, the doctor or any other expert, who granted access to reproduction regulation, yet again making the perceived freedom of choice only a shift in restriction?

#### 4.3.3. Reproductive Rights and Custody of the Female Body

The discourse about birth control, abortion and sterilization was mainly a discussion about who had the right to regulate reproduction. Was it the personal and individual choice of the woman or the family? Or should the state and medical experts take a leading role in regulating reproduction to serve the greater good of society? Commonly, feminist approaches to the topic of reproduction control were associated with an idea of liberating the female body and making the choice of reproduction personal to the woman. This idea was mainly connected to the feminist claims after the period discussed here, in the 1960s and 1970s. Did the eugenic feminist discussion about contraceptive methods lead to a liberation of the female body at all, or was it once again rather a shift of power from the private to the public sphere? Who has custody over the female body?

This question of custody was most pressing in the context of the abortion discourse. Who has the right to decide when a pregnancy should be terminated? This question was not only leading in the abortion debate in the early twentieth century but was connected to similar approaches, also in the eugenic and the feminist movements, questions about who had custody of the female body and reproduction. Penelope Deutscher argues that although first-wave feminists in Germany demanded the extension of women's rights, they also demanded that women take responsibility for their reproductive function. The strong emphasis on the population survival put pressure on

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<sup>638</sup> e.g. Caspersen, *Moderskabspolitik*, p. 116ff.

women to reproduce, so reproductive responsibility was repeatedly understood as anti-feminist, Deutscher concludes.<sup>639</sup>

The debate about the legalization of abortion showed a shift from a criminal to a medical issue in the early twentieth century. Finnish sociologist Mianna Meskus discusses this shift in context of Finland but similar can also be observed in the other Nordic countries. Meskus argues that the transformation of abortion from a criminal to a medical problem consisted of three main aspects.<sup>640</sup> Firstly, the overall concern about the depopulation of society put criminal, which means illegal, abortion in the focus of having an impact on the population quantity. Children, who might be valuable, were not been born and since the abortion took place outside the public eye, authorities could not prevent this. Secondly, Meskus argues that abortion had especially among working class and under class women a high acceptance and was frequently used as contraception. As discussed in the previous chapter, contraception was rather a privilege of the middle and upper class in the early twentieth century. Meskus' third point puts the actors in the focus. More and more medical doctors had started to perform abortions, although illegal. They hoped in this way to prevent criminal abortions and the connected health threat, because they were performed by untrained individuals.<sup>641</sup>

Criminal abortions, as Meskus shows, were mainly connected to the working class due to a lack of contraceptive alternatives. Likewise, the connected problems, like infections, bleeding, infertility or death, were mainly a threat for working and under class women. Therefor the fight against criminal abortions and for a legalization through feminists had to mainly the saving of these women in mind.<sup>642</sup> This might appear as a contradiction to the overall eugenic discourse, which favoured offspring from the upper and middle class, and tried to prevent under class reproduction but it was not. The main purpose of the legalization of abortion in particular for working and under class women was not to prevent birth overall but rather to provide mothers with the possibility to end their infinite strings of births. The Norwegian physician and member of the commission which reformed the abortion law in Norway in the late 1920s Ingeborg Aas, who worked predominately with working class people, argued that an abortion does not make a great difference to physician who performs it, but it makes a great difference

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<sup>639</sup> Deutscher, "Reproductive Politics", p. 218.

<sup>640</sup> Meskus, "To Exclude or to Enclose", p. 45.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-46.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

to the mother, who is prevented from having another child.<sup>643</sup> Similar it was argued in an article in the Swedish social democratic women's magazine *Morgonbris* in 1920.

A mother with four under aged children alone responsible for their care and with a terminally ill and unable to work husband, must undoubtedly have the possibility to cancel an early pregnancy.<sup>644</sup>

The aim of the pro-abortionists was to decrease the birth of too many under class children but likewise provide the women with a secure possibility to do so. Class was here a leading category.<sup>645</sup>

Yet, the demand that women take responsibility for their own reproduction was probably one of the most feminist issues which first-wave feminists raised. The abortion question was central to this debate for several reasons. With abortion, women could actively withdraw from an unwanted pregnancy. However, before abortion was legalized the health risks were enormous and visiting a hospital after complications would lead to serious criminal investigations, so the legal risk was also huge. Part legalization from the 1930s in the Nordic countries onwards decreased, though did not eliminated, the health risks and decriminalized abortion.

Still, this did not mean liberation for women in general. Since the right to grant an abortion lay with the state or the authority, abortion became an instrument of biopower. As Deutscher argues, biopower means the overlapping of "paternalistic governmentality" and "individual, family-based, expert-mediated and state-located care and administration of life" in an "uncontroversial and non-political matter."<sup>646</sup> Even with legalized abortion, women lost their biopower again to an authoritarian power. The eugenic feminists dragged abortion out of its illegality and introduced it into the public and political discourse to provide women safe options of ending a pregnancy. I argue that the eugenic feminists functioned as transitions persons to transfer the power over the female body and the decision to end a pregnancy to the state. Though this meant that women had theoretically the possibility to get an abortion by a trained physician. Yet, they had to apply for the permission for an abortion by public organs and officials decided

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<sup>643</sup> Aas, "Abortus provocatus", p. 4.

<sup>644</sup> "En mor med fyra minderårigs barn som ensak svarar för försörjningen at dessa och den obotligt sjuke och icke arbetsföre mannen, måste otvivelaktigt ha haft välgrundade skal att på tidigare stadium avbryta havandeskapet." Andén, Eva, "Mödrars rätt." In: *Morgonbris* 1920.6, p. 2.

<sup>645</sup> Ottesen-Jensen, *Könslagarnas offer*, p. 16; Jacobsen, *Fosterfordrivelsesparagraffen*, p. 7.

<sup>646</sup> Deutscher, "Reproductive Politics", p. 219.



if the abortion would be granted. If the woman was not applicable for an abortion for eugenic, social or medical reasons, she was not able to have an abortion and the custody over her body was denied.

Norwegian Tove Mohr provided examples of typical women who were seeking for an abortion for social and eugenic reasons. The first case Mohr described was a 35-year-old woman with nine children, whose husband suffered from tuberculosis. The survival of the family was based on the woman's labour power and a further pregnancy would prevent her from working. The second case Mohr discussed was a 32-year-old woman with five children. Her husband was only released from a mental hospital and had impregnated her immediately with the sixth child. The last case Mohr showed was a 39-year-old woman with 14 children, who had spent the last 16 years with constant nursing. The first two cases had neither the eugenic preconditions to have children, because of their defective husbands, and were also socially not able to care for the children. The last case was on the one hand overwhelmed by the number of children and care and on the other hand physically exhausted from constant pregnancies, according to Mohr.<sup>647</sup>

Especially interesting in this context were the abortions which were carried out together with a sterilization. This practice can be mostly found after the Second World War in Sweden. Although this time period exceeds the scope of this work, it is shortly discussed here for two reasons. Firstly, the combination of abortion and sterilization showed the importance of sterilization also for eugenic reasons even after the Second World War in the Nordic countries. Secondly, the abortion-sterilizations were an example how physicians exercised actively their power over their female patients to persuade them from not only the abortion but in particular also a sterilization. A request most of the women did not raise themselves.<sup>648</sup>

Maija Runcis describes in her book *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet* a rising number of abortion-sterilizations from 1950 on in Sweden. In 1950 17 per cent of the abortions applications were connected to a sterilization application. In 1960 the number was 40 per cent and 60 per cent in 1965.<sup>649</sup> These sterilizations were not classified as eugenic but as medical. The abortion-seeking women were often also diagnosed with a

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<sup>647</sup> Mohr, Tove, "Hvorledes kan spørsmålet abortus provocatus best ordnas juridisk of medicinsk?" In: *Tidsskrift for den norske lægeforening* 1930/ 1931, p. 599.

<sup>648</sup> e.g. Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, p. 218ff; Broberg, Tydén, "Eugenics in Sweden", p. 121ff; Tydén, *Från politik till praktik*, p. 61.

<sup>649</sup> Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, p. 221.

weakness.<sup>650</sup> This weakness diagnosis was not a fixed concept but was rather connected to wider social problems of the women. Runcis argues that women with an alcohol abusing or sick husband, who had problems to provide proper care for the home and the children were mostly likely receive the diagnosis of weakness and be advised to apply beside the abortion also for a sterilization.<sup>651</sup>

The question of who governed women's choice for abortion and finally custody over their own bodies was leading in the abortion debate. The eugenic feminists never questioned that it had to be the state which decided who should be granted an abortion and that the state would dictate the rules, or indications, for an abortion. The free choice advocated by the feminists was rather the free choice to ask a trained physician for an abortion and not to have to get an abortion by an untrained person.<sup>652</sup> However, the final decision as to whether the abortion would be granted would still be made by the physician or state authorities, like the National Medical Board. In Sweden for example, the Nordic country with the most advanced abortion law in the 1930s, an abortion could only be granted by the Royal Board of Health in the context of a serious medical condition.<sup>653</sup>

I argue that the emphasis on the social and economic effects of pregnancies which were cited by the feminists demonstrate that the free choice was not limited to the physical female body but extended to the female social body. An unwanted pregnancy was considered a general problem, not only for the woman herself, but for the whole society, which had to deal with the later effects on care for mother and child. Abortion activists certainly aimed to provide in particular lower class women with less access to contraception and safe abortion with a choice. Yet, they also paid attention to the overall societal effects of free abortion. The claim of the feminists was to end illegal abortion, as formulated for example by Julia Kinberg:

From the knowledge which is provided by societal organs it is clear that birth control can contribute effectively to the fight against prostitution and female criminal abortion. Admittedly, this latter is permitted even if

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<sup>650</sup> Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, p. 223.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>652</sup> e.g. Nilsson, Ada, "Inför abortfrågan." In: *Tidevarvet*, 1934.42, p. 1; Jacobsen, *Fosterfordrivesparagraffen § 241*, p. 12; Mohr, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 60.

<sup>653</sup> e.g. Broberg, Tydén, "Eugenics in Sweden", p. 122.

performed by a doctor for a so-called social indication, but this must remain an emergency measure.<sup>654</sup>

This discussion about custody has focused heavily on the abortion question, though birth control as such, and in particular sterilization, bore a similar weight.<sup>655</sup> The fact that birth control was widely more accessible to middle and upper class women than to women of the working and under class, constituted another problem in the question about custody and reproductive rights. The demands for a rational population policy were not only topical in political discourse but also part of the eugenic feminist discussion, as Hjördis Levin argues.<sup>656</sup> The debate was in many ways influenced by neo-Malthusian ideas, in particular the idealization of the nuclear family with no more than two or three children.<sup>657</sup> The feminist demand for more widely accessible birth control, especially for women from the lower social classes who traditionally had more children, was part of the rational population policy. The health risk of endless strings of pregnancies and births for the individual woman should be lifted.

Feminists also had the greater good of society in mind. The Norwegian politician Aase Lionæs argued, in a 1936 pamphlet about the population question and the workers' movement that restricting the reproduction of the working class had to be central in the population question. This would not only improve their societal position but also better the situation of the entire society.<sup>658</sup> The expansion of access to contraception to the working class had not exclusively individual interests in mind but much more societal ones. Even if the eugenic feminists advocated strongly for and actively provided access to contraception for all women, this did not go hand in hand with granting all women the right to decide how and if they wanted to regulate their reproduction, I suggest. Working class women in particular were encouraged to restrict their reproduction with a greater social purpose in mind.<sup>659</sup> Yet, custody of one's own body and reproduction was in the hands not of the individual woman but of the experts and legal framework which provided her with the access to the contraception.

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<sup>654</sup> "Ty den kunskap som meddelas av samhällets organ, dess oförvitliga sakkunnighet, om födelsekontroll, kan medverka till prostitutionens och den för våra kvinnor förödande kriminella abortens effektiva bekämpande. Visserligen kan denna sistnämnda göras obehövlig genom att abortering av läkare blir tillåten även på s.k. sociala indikationer, men detta måste förbli en nödfallsåtgärd." Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>655</sup> e.g. Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 27.

<sup>656</sup> Levin, *Kvinnorna på barrikaden*, p. 55.

<sup>657</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>658</sup> Lionæs, *Dør vi ut?* p. 1.

<sup>659</sup> Myrdal, *Folk och familj*, p. 72.

Even more problematic was the situation of women from the lower classes. As discussed previously, under class women, for example with mental illnesses, physical and mental disabilities, low intelligence or substance abuse problems, were especially defenceless regarding state and expert intervention into their reproduction. Several feminists argued that the reproduction of women with mental or physical disabilities as well as asocial behaviour must be restricted permanently through sterilization.<sup>660</sup> The establishment of sterilization legislation, targeting specifically women, was demanded by many feminists as part of the population policy and to promote public health.<sup>661</sup> This was very much connected to eugenic ideas and the request that the state and society must protect itself against reproduction by the unfit.<sup>662</sup> Alienation took place here: others who, deliberately or not, had a negative social and economic impact, were controlled by society. Since these others were seen as acting selfishly, society took away their right to have custody over their own bodies and reproduction. Interestingly, this was predominately directed towards women and their bodies, not to men. Eugenic feminists did not constitute a different approach here but rather followed, or maybe even created and influenced, the general societal debate.

To conclude, the question of the regulation of the people's reproduction was a crucial point in the eugenic feminist debates and the broader population discourse in the early twentieth century. The feminist demands for all women to access birth control, the legalization of abortion and sterilization had the health of the individual woman in mind. Fewer children meant also better physical and mental health of the mother. Child mortality was also reduced through smaller family sizes. Women should themselves be able to decide when to have children and how many.

This also had a downside, because women could not only decide about their reproduction independently. In particular eugenic feminists, through their advice offices and their information brochures, guided the right approach to contraception. They advised and influenced how many children each woman should have. Abortion and sterilization were an even more complex problem. Both were widely granted by state authorities. Though, after the broad legalization in the 1930s in the Nordic countries, sterilization applications were an individual matter, they were usually initiated by doctors, health

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<sup>660</sup> e.g. Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, p. 92; Andreen-Svedberg, *Preventivmedel*, p. 323.

<sup>661</sup> Levin, *Kvinnorna på barrikaden*, p. 82.

<sup>662</sup> Karlsdóttir, "Sterilization Policy in Iceland", p. 180.

authorities or heads of institutions.<sup>663</sup> It was not the woman's individual choice to regulate her reproduction in one way or another, but she was highly influenced by social, medical and political authorities. Women did not have custody of their bodies, but their bodies were situated in the discourse of the population question and serving the greater good of society. The perceived liberation of women through access to birth control was only apparent. In the end, it was rather a biopolitical shift from being helpless and left alone before to being regulated by a biopolitical force.

#### 4.4. Questions of Clothing, Menstruation and Physical Activity

Menstruation was a biological as well as a cultural act.<sup>664</sup> The perception of menstruation was subject to constant changes. It is tabooed in many ways in almost every culture and time. Sharon Golub argues that menstrual blood has been considered everything from magical to poisoning. Menstruating women have been usually conceived as dangerous or at least special in the community.<sup>665</sup> By researching menstruation taboos in 64 societies Golub concludes that one third of the communities prohibit women to prepare food for men and 20 per cent of the societies isolate women during their menstruation. Abstinence from sexual intercourse is self-evident for nearly all societies. Although Golub states that there are indeed some cultures which design their customs to protect menstruating women, the overall perception is that menstrual blood is endangering men.<sup>666</sup>

As Emily Martin argues, before the nineteenth century menstrual blood was often understood as impure. However, in modernity not the blood but the entire process of menstruating was part of a cultural discourse. This did not result in a more positive understanding but the definition of menstruation as a disorder, mainly by medical doctors.<sup>667</sup> The early twentieth century showed another shift, which looked on female menstruation from a stronger medical perspective. Especially the new female doctors, who, as we have already seen, showed a great interest in the female body, also approached the topic of menstruation in some new ways. The idea that menstruation was unnatural, or a disorder was widely rejected by these eugenic feminists. Their approach to

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<sup>663</sup> e.g. Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, pp. 117-120.

<sup>664</sup> Lee, Janet, "Menarche and the (hetero) Sexualization of the Female Body." In: *Gender & Society* 8 (1994), p. 343.

<sup>665</sup> Golub, Sharon, *Periods. From Menarche to Menopause*, Newbury Park 1992, p. 2.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>667</sup> Martin, Emily, *The Woman in the Body. A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*, Boston 1987, p. 35.

menstruation was that it was a natural, physical process, which was nothing shameful or dangerous.<sup>668</sup>

The topic of menstruation usually did not stand alone in the discourse but was regularly connected to two other topics, female clothing and sports. This connection was not a random one. Clothing, physical activity and menstruation were in so far related that if treated correctly, or socially accepted, and had a great influence on the female body and its ability to procreate. In the same way as menstruation, physical activity and clothing were now also widely discussed by medical professionals, so that such ordinary topics suddenly became a matter for experts in the course of increasing awareness and focus on health and hygiene.

The discussion of clothing, menstruation and sports focused on keeping the body healthy and fit. In some cases, these topics were discussed together, for example when female doctors advised about physical activity during menstruation.<sup>669</sup> However, mostly they were discussed in separate articles but found common ground. All three topics concentrated in particular on the female sexual organs. For example, corsets were condemned because they could squeeze the abdominal area into unnatural forms and result in serious health risks.<sup>670</sup> Regular exercise was advised to strengthen muscles and organs but also to encourage order and discipline.<sup>671</sup> During menstruation women were to be especially concerned with hygiene, since menstrual blood was considered a particular breeding place for infections.<sup>672</sup> The advice provided by the eugenic feminists based on the eugenic ideology. In this way, they introduced eugenics in the most personal parts of human life. The keeping clean and hygienic of the body in the eugenic sense became the highest task for women. I suggest, that eugenic ideology defined the way women should move, the way they should dress and the way they should maintain their sexual organs to ensure a eugenic lifestyle. These measures contributed to the transformation of eugenics from a science and policy to a lifestyle ideology which influenced the way people choose to live their lives.

The focus in the discussions was predominantly on the female body. Male clothing was also discussed, rather as a positive example that clothing did not have to be

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<sup>668</sup> Widerström, Karolina, "Om menstruationen och dess hygien." In: *Idun* 3 (1896), pp. 20-21.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>670</sup> Dederding, *Sundhedslære*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>671</sup> Tanner, Lauri, "Gymnastik, sport och idrott och deras praktiska utövande." In: Eskelin, Karolin, Tillgren, Josua (eds.), *Hälsa och sjukdom. Den moderna läkarboken. Hur man håller sig frisk och hur man behandlar sjukdomar*, Helsinki 1930, p. 61.

<sup>672</sup> Widerström, "Om menstruationen", p. 20.

damaging and uncomfortable but could be indeed practical.<sup>673</sup> These topics were not actually private before, maybe rather intimate, especially menstruation, but they became medicalized and subject to regulation and control. The individual body, its health and well-being, was redefined as a representation of the national and collective body by the eugenic and biopolitical discourse.<sup>674</sup> Clothing, menstruation and physical activity were excellent examples of this redefinition of the body. Individual health or beauty standards were no longer the only factors in the perception of the female body, but also its effects on the overall society. Women, and women were the overwhelmingly predominant targets of the discourse, were to maintain their bodies so that the best possible outcome of their reproduction was guaranteed. Most advice regarding clothing, menstruation and sports was directed towards the procreating female body or in preparation for reproduction.<sup>675</sup> If the body was beyond reproductive age, the eugenicists lost interest in it, because it was not seen to benefit (or harm) society anymore.

The debate about clothing, menstruation and sports was surely not only led by eugenic feminists. Since the focus was on the female body, it was female physicians who started to raise awareness about health and well-being for women and connected these ideas to the greater good of the nation. Yet, many female physicians in the Nordic countries had a great interest in eugenic ideas. In the following I show how eugenic feminists defined the new health and well-being of women and what advice they gave to make clothing, menstruation and sports eugenically clean. Furthermore, I demonstrate how this resulted in a medicalization and biological engineering of the female body but also in a source of empowerment.

#### 4.4.1. Health, Well-Being and Hygiene

The discussion about appropriate clothing, not only morally but especially physically, the right behaviour during menstruation and physical activity, was led by the medically educated eugenic feminists. They found new approaches to the topics, predominately from a medical point of view, which on the one hand resulted in a higher political awareness of intimate subjects, but on the other hand also in the transformation of control from the private to the political. The aim of their advice was to improve the personal

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<sup>673</sup> Eskelin, *Personlig hälsovård*, p. 44.

<sup>674</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 5.

<sup>675</sup> e.g. Widerström, Karolina, *Om den kvinnliga klädedräkten. Beträktad ur hälsans synpunkt*, Stockholm 1893, p. 5; Dederding, Dida, *Kvinden omkring de halvtreds*, Copenhagen 1939, pp. 10-13; Dederding, *Sundhedslære*, pp. 7-14; Eskelin, *Personlig hälsovård*, p. 48.

situation of women and their relationship to their bodies, for example through a positive approach to menstruation. However, the discourse was situated within the general idea of improvement of the individual and society through biological engineering.<sup>676</sup> Gymnastics and comfortable clothing not only improved the well-being of the individual woman but ultimately also the well-being and health of society. A healthy body would be a productive body from an economic and social point of view, I suggest. The healthy worker would be able to work to the maximum of his or her ability and contribute in this way to the economic success of the nation. Furthermore, a healthy person would also be a better citizen, because an active member of the community was able to contribute to the social and cultural advancement of a society, as I show.

Menstruation was a regular and rather openly discussed topic by Nordic feminists. Still, one limitation must be made, menstruation was exclusively discussed by female medical professionals. I suggest, this was related to the medicalization of the female body.<sup>677</sup> From the late nineteenth century onwards women were able to become medical doctors, which provided women with much greater opportunities for access to medical help for issues related to their sexual organs and their sexuality. This resulted in an increasing interest in the female body from a medical perspective and as also from the woman's point of view.<sup>678</sup> The medicalization of the female body seemed to be a welcomed way of discussing previously taboo topics, like menstruation problems, on an apparently scientific level, thus lifting the semblance of shame from them.

Since predominantly female physicians were concerned with the female body and its health and well-being, this influenced the space in which the discussion took place.<sup>679</sup> The sex manuals and health education books, so popular in the early twentieth century, became the main forum. Advice about the right clothing, the benefits of physical activity, care and hygiene of the menstruating woman, all became part of the project to educate women, especially wives and mothers. In turn, they were to generate an increasing awareness about health, hygiene and well-being in the overall society.

Interestingly, one of the few articles which actually connected menstruation, clothing and physical activity was published by Karolina Widerström in

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<sup>676</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 2.

<sup>677</sup> Oinas, Elina, "What is a Normal Menstruation? Accounts conveyed by Young Women and Medical Experts in Medical Advisory Columns." In: Riska, Elianne (ed.), *Images of Women's Health. The Social Construction of Gendered Health*, Åbo 1997, pp. 31-58.

<sup>678</sup> e.g. Palmblad, *Medicinen som samhällslära*, p. 39/ 71.

<sup>679</sup> e.g. Nilsson, Ulrika, "Kön, klass och vetenskaplig auktoritet. Om kvinnliga läkarpionjärer." In: Widmalm, Sven (ed.), *Vetenskapsbärarna*, Gidlund 1999, p. 152.



the Swedish weekly magazine *Idun* in 1896, which was mainly read by bourgeois families. It is quite surprising that the seemingly sensitive topic was published in a one-page article in a well-read and widely published Swedish magazine. We have seen before that similar sensitive topics, like masturbation, were not discussed in women's magazines. However, the article was published under the section *Iduns läkarartikler*, as medical advice column, which gave it the appearance of being professional and scientific, and not from a doubtful nature. The article titled *Om menstruationen och dess hygiene* [About Menstruation and its Hygiene] argued that menstruation is the sign of a healthy body. Widerström explained that menstruation constituted a special process of the female body. It demonstrated the activity of the sexual organs. Nevertheless, women had to pay special attention to their bodies during menstruation, because a high amount of female diseases, like a cold or rheumatism, had their origins during this time of the month.<sup>680</sup>

Widerström explained in detail how the daily hygiene of a menstruating woman should look like. She advised for local cleanness, which meant the cleaning of the vulva, since the menstrual blood was a perfect nest for bacteria. The woman should wash herself twice a day with warm water and soap. Bath should only be short. Though bandages to soak up the menstrual blood were a hazard, according to Widerström, they were necessary for hygienic reasons. However, they have to be kept clean too and prepared with anti-septum before taken into use.<sup>681</sup>

Her advice was detailed and educational with an expert voice. Widerström challenged the perception that menstruation was something abnormal or unhygienic as such and opened up the awareness that since the male, non-menstruating body was not the norm, the menstruating body must then be understood as normal: the processes of the female body are likewise healthy and important.<sup>682</sup> Widerström concluded that menstruation was important for a healthy body. If young girls lived a healthy lifestyle with physical activity, fresh air and taking care of their nervous system, the first menstruation was usually without complications. When they keep up their healthy lifestyle no problems with their menstruation should arise what so ever.<sup>683</sup>

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<sup>680</sup> Widerström, "Om menstruationen", p. 20.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

Nevertheless, though Widerström was seeking a normalized understanding of menstruation, she still advised for special hygiene and observation of the menstruating body, since

The onset of the disease often can be dated from one menstrual period, during which the diseased risking any harmful influencing factor, which at another time would be rejected by the organism, or to whom this would have reacted in any other way.<sup>684</sup>

Further, Widerström advised that women avoid physical exhaustion, as well as dressing in a way which protects their bodies from the cold.<sup>685</sup>

Nevertheless, the distinct treatment of menstruating women by female doctors demonstrated the impact women had not only in medicine but also in the arguing that menstruation was a special time in a woman's life, the importance of reproduction and the reproductive role in the societal and eugenic context was supported. Menstruation was not desexualized here, but explicitly sexualized. The argument that women had to stay healthy and hygienic during their menstruation, and that care of their sexual organs was crucial for a woman's life, degraded them from being a woman to be a mother, from a subject to an object.<sup>686</sup> The objectification of women in the eugenic and medical discourse was introduced and supported especially by female and feminist medical experts.<sup>687</sup>

Finnish Karolina Eskelin, in her book *Personlig hälsövård med särskild hänsyn till bostad*, took a similar approach to Widerström. Overall the debate was not so much led by national trends, but rather international and scientific tendencies. Eskelin argued that the main purpose of female clothing should be to protect the body from cold, weather and other negative influences. Male clothing usually provided this, but women's clothing did not.<sup>688</sup> She continued that women in those days did not look after their petticoats. They were often too thin and did not keep the women warm, which was especially important in Northern Europe. If women did not pay enough attention to their underwear and their abdominal areas experienced too much cold, this could lead to serious infections. In the clothing question, Eskelin directed special consideration to the

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<sup>684</sup> "Att sjukdomens början ofta kan dateras från någon menstruationsperiod, under hvilken den sjuka utsatt sig för någon skadligt inverkan, hvilken vid annan tidpunkt skulle fördragits af organismen, eller för hvilken denna skulle reagerat på annat sätt." Widerström, "Om menstruationen", p. 20.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>686</sup> e.g. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 79.

<sup>687</sup> e.g. ibid., p. 77ff.

<sup>688</sup> Eskelin, *Personlig hälsövård*, pp. 43.

female abdominal area and sexual organs.<sup>689</sup> Although, in her article *Om kvinnohygien och kvinnosjukdom*, she referred also to the fact that it was crucial to keep the lungs warm to protect and to prevent infections, she stated further that the female physical life was strongly influenced by their sexual organs.<sup>690</sup>

Eskelin's discussion about clothing and its suitability was not only gendered but also defined by further social categories, in particular class, social geography and education. She, similar to Widerström directed her advice to educated middle class women in urban centers, whose life consists of maybe some light housework but mainly feminine, bourgeois tasks like reading, embroidering, going for a walk and social engagements.<sup>691</sup> Widerström's and Eskelin's articles provided women with detailed information about their bodies and how to prevent illness. On the one hand, this can be considered beneficial for women who often lacked substantial knowledge about menstruation, clothing and how to exercise. On the other hand, the advice given by the eugenic feminists also had a paternalistic tone. With their unique advice, they created a norm and deviation from their norm was considered reckless or irresponsible. Since their advice had a normative tone, the aim to liberate women through new knowledge resulted in a similar objectification and limitation to the previous lack of advice or the approaches by male physicians. The eugenic feminists did not give women the choice of following the advice or disregarding it; it was imposed as the only way to live a eugenically clean life to be a good citizen. Disregard would lead to social exclusion, as in the case of lower class women.

The female sexual organs were central in the discourse. Widerström argued that the wearing of a corset deforms the uterus and has negative effects on the development of the foetus. She stated that wearing a corset during pregnancy can seriously harm the child.<sup>692</sup> She condemned women who put fashion over health care.<sup>693</sup>

The sexual organs were also important for Eskelin, since they made reproduction possible, which was the most important function of human being.<sup>694</sup> While social scientist Elina Oinas claims that menstruation and sexuality were usually separated in the medical discourse, this separation cannot be seen everywhere in these sources.<sup>695</sup>

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<sup>689</sup> Eskelin, *Personlig hälsovård*, p. 48.

<sup>690</sup> Eskelin, "Om kvinnohygien", pp. 448-449.

<sup>691</sup> Widerström, *Om den kvinnliga klädedräkten*, p. 7.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>693</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>694</sup> Eskelin, "Om kvinnohygien", pp. 422-426.

<sup>695</sup> Oinas, "What is a Normal Menstruation?", p. 49.

Both Widerström and Eskelin linked menstruation, clothing and physical activity to the overall well-being of the body and to maternal ability, although the link was not always direct. Eskelin connected the menarche to reproduction and sexuality, by stating that in Finland and Sweden girls usually started menstruating between the ages of 13 and 15, and the legal age of marriage was 17.<sup>696</sup> The ability to reproduce was seen as a precondition for marriage. Janet Lee maintains that in patriarchal and heterosexist societies the menarche signifies sexual availability and reproductive potential. This sexualization, that is, heterosexualization, implies

that women are taught to live and discipline their bodies in accordance with the prescriptions of heterosexuality experiencing themselves as sexual objects for heterosexual male viewing, pleasure, and also as mothers of men's children.<sup>697</sup>

By connecting menarche and marriage age, I argue that Eskelin implied that it was necessary for women to menstruate and also menstruate regularly, which was very often not the case until the girl grew older, so that her body was prepared for pregnancy and motherhood on marriage. Eugenic feminists often demanded a later age of marriage for girls, usually in their early twenties, to give the female body and mind the ability to develop to the fullest, to also procreate with the best possible outcome. Eugenic feminists considered young girls ill-prepared for pregnancy and the upbringing of children from a physical but also mental point of view.<sup>698</sup>

Physical activity was similarly connected to the preparation of the female body for motherhood on the one hand, but on the other hand also to a certain extent to control of the female body and sexuality. Karolina Eskelin argued that gymnastics and sports were important to strengthen the body.<sup>699</sup> Her audience was rather the educated middle class than the working class, who certainly did not need physical exercise after a day of physical work. The strengthening of the female body referred here to strengthening for motherhood.<sup>700</sup> Also Dederding, in her health and sex education manual for young women, emphasized the benefits of fresh air and regular, moderate physical activity.<sup>701</sup>

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<sup>696</sup> Oinas, "What is a Normal Menstruation?", pp. 434-435.

<sup>697</sup> Lee, "Menarche and the (hetero)sexualization of the Female Body", p. 344.

<sup>698</sup> Jensen, *Frivilligt moderskab*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>699</sup> Eskelin, "Om kvinnohygien", p. 444.

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 444.

<sup>701</sup> Dederding, *Sundhedslære*, p. 9.

Widerström advised that dancing and horse riding should be avoided during menstruation but were otherwise suitable exercise.<sup>702</sup>

The advice given here was directed predominately at bourgeois women and did not fit the reality of working class women. Though Widerström for example reflected that her rules might be difficult to follow for working women, she did not provide alternatives.<sup>703</sup> If working women were considered in the advice, it was only as housewives, as an article in the Finnish housewives' magazine *Husmodern* demonstrated.<sup>704</sup> The body of the woman working in industry and the under class female body were largely excluded from this discussion. Working class bodies were not seen as irrelevant to societal reproduction in the overall eugenic feminist discourse. However, information about menstruation, physical activity and clothing was mainly given through the sex manuals, whose audience was the bourgeois woman and family. Working class women were seen as needing different advice: they already did physically hard labour and needed to know how to put less strain on their bodies. Eugenic feminists also took an interest in educating working class women about these topics, but this took place much more directly, for example through lectures and in the advice offices, rather than through manuals and books.

#### 4.4.2. Menstrual Disability, Medicalization and Female Empowerment

The concept of menstrual disability was a prime nineteenth century example of the medicalization of menstruation through the patriarchal system.<sup>705</sup> In the late nineteenth century in the United States the discussion among male physicians arose that the education of women would lead to an overstimulation of the female brain, which could result in nervousness, difficulties in childbirth or even insanity.<sup>706</sup> Though other studies concluded that education did not have any ill effects on female health and that the health of studying women was within the national average, the idea that the menstrual cycle affected the brain did not die. Health experts advised schools that girls should be given special time for resting during their menstruation, because they were more unstable during this time.<sup>707</sup> The American pharmacologist Edward H. Clarke even spoke of a menstrual

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<sup>702</sup> Widerström, "Om menstruationen", p. 20.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>704</sup> M.N., "Litet om konsten att kläda sig." In: *Husmodern* 1906.5, pp. 69-70.

<sup>705</sup> e.g. Hufnagel, Glenda Lewin, *A History of Women's Menstruation from Ancient Greece to the Twenty-First Century. Psychological, Social, Medical, Religious, and Educational Issues*, Lewiston 2012.

<sup>706</sup> Golub, *Periods*, p. 14.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

disability. He explained that mental activity during menstruation would influence not only the mental capability of women but also their reproductive success. Women who studied very hard would lose their motherly instinct.<sup>708</sup>

Sharon Golub claims in *Periods. From Menarche to Menopause* that the early women's movements tried to dispute the concept of menstrual disability. She argues that the feminists were convinced that the medical facts were not facts at all and rather resulted from myths, which were verified by physicians with gynaecological experience.<sup>709</sup> However, by looking at the publications of female physicians in the Nordic countries it can indeed be detected that the feminist physicians supported the idea of menstrual disability. Menstruation rules were based on patriarchal societal structures and were forced on women but, as with other restrictions on female bodies, menstrual disability and the classification of menstruation as a special time was also supported and encouraged by female physicians, such as Widerström as discussed above.<sup>710</sup> Though Eskelin argued that every type of menstruation is normal, as long as the woman feels healthy, like Widerström she suggested that special attention must be paid to local hygiene during the menstruation to avoid infections.<sup>711</sup>

However, the promotion of menstrual disability was different in feminist and patriarchal medical discourse. Menstrual disability in the male debate was a method of oppressing and excluding women, but in the eugenic feminist debate it was empowering. Menstruating women could produce offspring. The Danish physician Dida Dederding argued that women were much too careless with their menstruation. Most women did not consult a doctor about problems like heavy bleeding or late periods but just hoped for the next month.<sup>712</sup> This lack of care was seen as irresponsible. How can a woman who was not responsible with her own body act responsibly around pregnancy and the upbringing of children? By emphasizing menstruation so much, female physicians demonstrated the importance of reproduction in the eugenic feminist medical discourse. Control of the female body as gynaecologists was their way to empowerment. However, for the ordinary woman, control of her own body by keeping it healthy and clean was the way to empowerment, because a clean body was their entrance ticket to eugenic reproduction and the development of society away from the danger of degeneration back

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<sup>708</sup> Golub, *Periods*, p. 13.

<sup>709</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>710</sup> Widerström, "Om menstruationen", p. 20.

<sup>711</sup> Eskelin, Karolina, *Gynekologisk sjukvård*, Helsinki 1924, p. 149.

<sup>712</sup> Dederding, *Kvinden omkring de halvtreds*, pp. 7-9.

to a clean, healthy and hygienic community. She would fulfil her natural and social duty, as demanded from the eugenic feminists and qualify herself therefore for the highest form of citizenship in a eugenic society, that of maternal citizen, I suggest.

Sports and clothing worked in the same way. The stiff and immobile beauty of the nineteenth century was not in demand anymore but the active and physically strong-looking body was convincing to produce healthy offspring. Widerström argued that

The woman of the future can breathe, move and work without being restricted by her clothes, and those purified and enlightened beauty standards will be expressed in the style of the clothes, we will be able to read with a compassionate pleasure about the days of barbarism, as the claims of the tastes and health were equally infringed.<sup>713</sup>

Julia Kinberg and Alma Sundquist also took up the topic of the effects of physical activity on the female body during menstruation. They argued that gymnastics and dancing can indeed be beneficial when a woman was menstruating. Moderate movement and fresh air could reduce problems, like nervous moods or pain, during menstruation. Physical exhaustion should be avoided. Nervous tendencies were very common, according to Kinberg and Sundquist, and had great influence on menstruation. Environmental changes or great emotions might cause interruption of the menstruation and usually vanished when the nervous system had calmed down.<sup>714</sup> This perception stood in opposite to most of the other female physicians, who considered the menstruation as time for rest and to certain extent seclusion. Karolina Widerström argued that although the menstruation was a natural process, some care was needed by the woman during this time. Although Kinberg and Sundquist demanded likewise that menstruation was a special time, they recognized problems as natural and self-regulating, when Widerström demanded medical attention. Widerström also took up the notion of nervous tendencies and emotional tempers during menstruation. She advised women to avoid hast or fast decisions during menstruation.<sup>715</sup>

Additionally, women should avoid any kind of strong body movements, like sports or dancing, which was a very violent activity. The reduction of work time was also recommendable because heavy lifting and long standing might be harmful. Sexual

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<sup>713</sup> "Den framtida kvinnan, som kan andas, röra sig ock arbeta utan något hinder av sina kläder, ock vars renade ock uppfostrade skönhetssinne ger sig uttryck i dessa kläders snitt, kommer nog att med ett med lidsamt nöje läsa om gångna tiders barbari, då smakens ock hälsans fordringar i lika hög grad åsidosattes." Widerström, *Om den kvinnliga klädedräkten*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>714</sup> Kinberg, Sundquist, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning*, p. 53.

<sup>715</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, p. 45.

abstinence was absolute necessary during menstruation.<sup>716</sup> Widerström addressed here indeed also the working woman different from Eskelin. However, also Widerström referred not to a woman who had a full-time work outside the house or urgent task within an agricultural household, which was also in Sweden the average life environment of a woman in the early twentieth century. This woman could not take off a week every month and rest her body.

A short article in *Husmodern* stated that clothing, in particular for work, must be first of all comfortable and suitable. Physical working women and housewives should wear shorter skirts to avoid accidents. Corsets should be avoided completely, because they restricted the body and its movement.<sup>717</sup> The condemnation of corsets was shared topic of the feminists. Dederding warned that corsets cause serious health issues. Widerström argued that female clothes were very often impractical.<sup>718</sup> The Danish women's magazine *Hvad vi vil* argued in 1890 that women should pay more attention to sports, because these had a great impact on human health. The best was movement in fresh air because it increased the mobility and blood circulation and supplied the body with fresh energy. The author criticized the fact that most knowledge about exercising was just applied to men and the male body. Women had fewer possibilities to develop their body.<sup>719</sup> The authors stated that:

The woman, however, has energetically begun to take up the battle against these prejudices and the consequence is that they are now moving much more freely than before, you see them participate in public life in almost all spheres, despite the obstacles they often have to struggle against.<sup>720</sup>

Physical empowerment was also social empowerment. By strengthening the body through sports, suitable clothing, health and hygiene, measured by regular menstruation, women could improve their visibility in public life.

Schmidt and Kristensen argue that the health programme was also a moral programme. Characteristics like good blood, strong muscles and a strong nervous system

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<sup>716</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>717</sup> M.N., "Litet om konsten att kläda sig." In: *Husmodern*, 1906.5, p. 69.

<sup>718</sup> e.g. Dederding, *Sundhedslære*, p. 14; Widerström, *Kvinnohygien I*, p. 40.

<sup>719</sup> "Kvinderne og Sporten." In: *Hvad vi vil*, 1890.9, p. 71.

<sup>720</sup> "Kvinden har imidlertid energisk begyndt at tage Kampen op mod disse Fordommene og Følgen deraf er den, at de nu bevæger sig langt friere end tidligere, man ser dem deltage i det offentlige liv paa næsten alle Omraader, trods de Hindringer, de ofte har at kæmpe imod." Ibid., p. 71.



were linked to eugenic characteristics like bravery, self-control and punctuality.<sup>721</sup> These physical and mental traits were very important from a biopolitical point of view. The biological understanding of culture defined the eugenics discourse in the early twentieth century in the European and Nordic context.<sup>722</sup> The healthy body became more than a part of personal well-being but a social and cultural lifestyle. The body, in particular the female body, was the main source of eugenic propaganda. The pathological, sick body became the societal enemy and the regulated, healthy body its guarantee not only of improvement but even of national survival.<sup>723</sup> Since the motherhood became a patriotic cause, as Turda argues, the strengthening of the maternal body became equal with the strengthening of the nation.<sup>724</sup> The eugenic feminists used this debate skilfully to achieve certain forms of liberation. More comfortable clothing and the ability to be physically active outside the house constituted a form of liberation after the restrictions of the nineteenth century. The emphasis of menstruation as special time helped to educate women about their natural bodily functions and drew their attention to their health and well-being. For the first time, it was possible for women to actually receive information about their menstruation, whereas in the past many girls had experienced their menarche completely clueless.

Nevertheless, as we have seen before, there was another side to the coin. The eugenic feminists picked up on the patriarchal discourse and the notion of menstruation as disabling did not result in a generally more natural treatment of menstruation. The feminists advocated for strengthening the body on all levels not only to be prepared for motherhood physically, but also mentally and most importantly morally. They objectified the female body to subjectify their own role as experts and their public visibility.<sup>725</sup> The female medical experts thus took over the role of guardian of the female body. The individual who was finally liberated through this discourse was not the individual woman but the female expert in the public, medical discourse.

Additionally, a morally weak woman was seen as more likely to neglect the upbringing of her children and home hygiene, to raise eugenically defective and unclean children, which would continuously pollute the following generations and drive forward

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<sup>721</sup> Schmidt, Lars-Henrik., Kristensen, Jens Erik, *Lys, luft og renlighed. Den moderne socialhygienjes fødsel*, Copenhagen 1986, pp. 187-188.

<sup>722</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 4/13.

<sup>723</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>724</sup> e.g. *ibid.*, p. 59; Palmblad, *Medicinen som samhällslära*, p. 37ff.

<sup>725</sup> e.g. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 77ff.

degeneration. However, a physically strong and self-aware woman was expected to encourage her children to live the same strong and moral life and be an asset to society.<sup>726</sup> The feminist medical discourse about menstruation, clothing and physical activity, did not strengthen the female body, but objectified it. It was positioned in the debate as a nest for the breeding of physically and morally strong offspring by a physically and morally strong mother.

The discourse empowered the feminist physicians themselves as subjects because they mastered an all-female topic as their area of expertise. Yet, the price for their empowerment was the objectification of other women as breeders of the new generation. Not only gender, but class, social geography and education decided in the menstruation discourse whether eugenic ideas resulted in empowerment or oppression of women and their bodies.

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<sup>726</sup> e.g. Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, p. 97; Tydén, *Från politik till praktik*, p. 61.

## 5. The Enemy Within – Eugenically Excluded Women

### 5.1. Under class and Working Class – Who is the Eugenic Polluter?

In the decades between 1870 and 1940 Europe went through major territorial, social and national transformations. The state systems changed from imperial to democratic, communist, authoritarian and fascist regimes.<sup>727</sup> Marius Turda argues that eugenics was part of the biopolitical agenda for all of them. Eugenics must always be seen in the context of the political discourse and national cultures, Turda continues.<sup>728</sup> As Gunnar Broberg and Mattias Tydén show, Swedish eugenics must be seen in the wider framework of the political and social changes in Sweden in the early twentieth century: it was a response to the perceived threat of industrialization, urbanization, secularization and emigration, as well as new political movements, for example of workers or women.<sup>729</sup>

Eugenicists believed the destruction of population, state and culture was certain. Terms like degeneration and hygiene had high suggestive power and correlated with the ideas about morality. This was not only the case in Sweden but must be seen in the wider frame of similar movements in the Western world, Broberg and Tydén argue.<sup>730</sup> Similar argumentation can be found in the study about the Swedish eugenicist Nils von Hofsten by Maria Björkman. She argues that degeneration was a notion which originated among European intellectuals. Biological degeneration was caused by diseases, like mental illness, tuberculosis, alcohol abuse, STIs. In particular egoism and individualism worked strongly against society and sexual morality were seen as socially threatening and degenerative.<sup>731</sup> The situations in the other Nordic countries were similar. Gunnar Karlsson for example discusses the crisis of the Icelandic rural society in the late nineteenth century. Between 1850 and 1870 the number of paupers in Iceland doubled from 2.1 per cent to 5.6 per cent in the overall population. Concurrently the population increased strongly. This resulted in an overpopulation in the Icelandic countryside which only ways out were often the immigration to the United States or the move to an urban centre in the Icelandic context.<sup>732</sup>

Klaus Petersen and Niels Finn Christiansen argue that Denmark appeared to be a special case in the Nordic context. The modernization started earlier than in the

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<sup>727</sup> Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, p. 2.

<sup>728</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

<sup>729</sup> e.g. Broberg, "Scandinavia", p. 3ff.

<sup>730</sup> Broberg, Tydén, *Oönskade i folkhemmet*, pp. 15-23.

<sup>731</sup> Björkman, *Den anfrädda stammen*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>732</sup> Karlsson, *History of Iceland*, pp. 230-233.

other Nordic countries, they reason. The modernization took rather place in the agricultural context than in a replacement of the agricultural labour market by the industry.<sup>733</sup> However that does not change the fact that Denmark in the same way as also Norway and Sweden had to conquer an increasing number of poor people moving from the countryside to the new arising urban centres.<sup>734</sup> Since the industry did not grow fast enough to employ the arriving another new class, besides the working class, emerged which could be described with the rather imprecise term of under class. The distinction between working class and under class was not always clear and it was frequently overlapping. In the writing of the contemporary people as well as in research there is not always a division between the working class and the under class. There are often treated as one and the same. Still, in the context of the eugenic debates it is crucial to divide the lower ranges of the societal hierarchies in the early twentieth century in working class and under class. The working class was not generally considered as responsible for degeneration. Although they were always living on the social edge and the loss of their employment and economic security could transform them to lower class people, with some support and education the workers were indeed considered as valuable and important members of the society.<sup>735</sup>

This is particularly important when discussing the aspect of class in the identification who was responsible for eugenic pollution. In Great Britain, for example, the upper and middle classes widely considered the working class responsible for the social problems in the early twentieth century, as shown by Beverly Skeggs.<sup>736</sup> Yet, the lower classes were different in the Nordic countries, where it can be divided into the working class and the under class, I argue. The working class constituted the industrial workforce. Both men and women worked in factories and contributed to national economic growth. The under class can rather be defined as a social group. It bunched together people from all societal classes by their unproductivity in economic terms since they relied on support from society to survive and were not able to work for an income in socially acceptable ways and worked for example as prostitutes or through criminal acts.

The under class was effectively the former group of paupers. It consisted of people who were either not willing or able to provide for themselves through labour due

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<sup>733</sup> e.g. Christiansen, Niels Finn, Petersen, Klaus, "The Dynamics of Social Solidarity. The Danish Welfare State, 1900–2000." In: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 26 (2001), p. 196.

<sup>734</sup> e.g. Broberg, Tydén, "Scandinavia", p. 3.

<sup>735</sup> Skeggs, Beverley, *Formation of Class and Gender. Becoming Respectable*, London 1997, p. 43.

<sup>736</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

to their physical and mental constitution. The group contained people like mentally and physically disabled, prostitutes, criminals, alcoholics and workshy individuals from all social classes. These were the so-called ineligible poor who were themselves responsible for the situation due to their lack of morality and education. The betterment of their situation by their own initiative was strongly questionable. The institutionalization in workhouses was often considered as only option to control their societal harming behaviour and try to educate them to a better lifestyle, if even possible. However, the line between the working class and the under class was not always clearly drawn. Especially working class women, whose possibilities for paid work were much more limited than for men, were in constant danger of slipping down into the under class, for example if low female wages or the loss of their job forced them into prostitution.<sup>737</sup>

One important aspect in the definition of the under class was moral behaviour. The Swedish racial biologist and leader of *Statens Institut för Rasbiologi* Herman Lundborg argued in several of his publications that degeneration was besides the more general causes like immigration, urbanization and industrialization, mainly based on abuse of narcotics, criminal behaviour and individual behaviour, like selfishness or the wish for a more luxurious life.<sup>738</sup> Lundborg's perception was more a common than an exceptional one. In particular criminality was widely researched as immoral and societal threatening behaviour caused by possible genetic defects. It was considered as one characteristic of under class people and the environmental factors which might lead to criminality, like poverty, were, although considered, not valued as high as the heredity causes especially not until the 1930s. The Swedish physician Olof Kinberg, husband of feminist and physician Julia Kinberg, researched, inspired by studies of the German psychiatrist Gustav Aschaffenburg<sup>739</sup>, intensively about the causes for criminal behaviour.<sup>740</sup> He based his study on data generated by various different researchers which let him to argue that in Trondheim for example 60% of the asylum inmates must be

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<sup>737</sup> e.g. Satka, *Making Social Citizenship*, p. 25, Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, p. 27.

<sup>738</sup> e.g. Lundborg, Herman, "The Danger of Degeneracy." In: *Eugenics Review* (1922), p. 531; Lundborg, Herman, *Degenerationsfaran och riktlinjer för dess förebyggande*, Stockholm 1922, p. 6; Lundborg, *Rasbiologi och rashygien*, p. 16.

<sup>739</sup> In 1903 Gustav Aschaffenburg published his study *Das Verbrechen und seine Bekämpfung. Einleitung in die Kriminalpsychologie für Mediziner, Juristen und Soziologen; ein Beitrag zur Reform der Strafgesetzgebung* as textbook for students of criminal psychology. He dismissed widely the ideas of inborn criminality of the previously leading expert of the field Cesare Lombroso and introduced also social and environmental factors in the discourse about causes of criminality.

<sup>740</sup> e.g. Kinberg, Olof, *Brottslighet och sinnesjukdom*, Stockholm 1908; Kinberg, Olof, *Varför bli människor brottsliga? Kriminalpsykologisk studie*, Stockholm 1935.

classified as mentally ill. Similar, he argued, was the situation in the asylum in Gothenburg with 63.6 per cent criminal inmates and only 6.7 per cent non-criminal inmates. Kinberg discussed widely only male criminals.<sup>741</sup> Furthermore, he argued that every individual who committed a crime did this because of a mental illness. The crime was a manifestation of the mental illness. The mental illness could either be genetic or self-inflicted, for example through abuse of narcotics.<sup>742</sup> Mental illness was widely perceived as under class problem, as I show in detail in chapter 5.5. The Finnish nurse Karin Neuman-Rahn stated that criminality was often connected with pathological mentality, like temper problems, an unbalanced life, alcohol abuse, social misbehaviour and physical and mental illness.<sup>743</sup> Similar argumentation can also be found by the Finnish geneticist Harry Federley who defined criminals as asocial or anti-social individuals.<sup>744</sup>

The shift in the argumentation which can be observed between the early studies before 1930 and the later ones in the 1930s is that in the later ones noticeably the focus was more also on the environmental influences on social behaviour. Especially in the very early twentieth century the so-called family studies were very prominent. The trend began in the United States in the late nineteenth century. The US-sociologist Richard Dugdale published his study *The Jukes. A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity* (1877) and the psychiatrist Henry H. Goddard published his study *The Kallikak Family. A Study of Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness* (1912). Both of them used especially data from prisons but also other social records to trace back the progeny of different American family tribes to prove that degeneration and pauperism had genetic origins.<sup>745</sup> These studies could hardly be understood as solid science. Nevertheless, for the time being they were widely discussed and understood by interested parties, for example eugenicists, as proof for the genetic predisposition of asocial behaviour of so-called paupers and from 1900 on the members of the under class.<sup>746</sup>

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<sup>741</sup> Olof, *Brottslighet och sinnesjukdom*, pp. 145-152.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid., pp. 128-129.

<sup>743</sup> Neumann-Rahn, Karin, "Ett led i brottslighetens profylax." In: *Rikollisuus ja sen vastustamismahdollisuudet. Rikollisuuden vastustamisviikolla Helsingissä tammikuun 7-12 päivinä 1934*, Helsinki 1935, p. 286.

<sup>744</sup> Federley, Harry, "Brottslighet som biologisk företeelse." In: *Rikollisuus ja sen vastustamismahdollisuudet. Rikollisuuden vastustamisviikolla Helsingissä tammikuun 7-12 päivinä 1934*, Helsinki 1935, p. 10.

<sup>745</sup> Carlson, *The Unfit*, p. 168ff.

<sup>746</sup> e.g. Hjort, Bodil, "Om familien Kallikak." In: *Nyt tidsskrift for abnormvæsenet* 15 (1913), pp. 1-7; Hjort, Bodil, "Medicinsk biologisk familjeforskning." In: *Nyt tidsskrift for abnormvæsenet* 15 (1913), pp. 242-251.

To understand the focus of negative eugenics in the Nordic countries the question of who was considered as eugenic polluter must be answered. This chapter demonstrates the important division between working class and under class women in the eugenic feminist discourse. I show that it was not the lower classes per se, or the working class, who constituted the eugenic problem, but the under class. Further, I clarify why the role of under class women was more important in the discussion than of under class men. This was mainly connected to the question of reproduction and production. As I have shown in the previous chapters, reproduction was considered female form of production. The fact that under class women were considered to bear defected and degenerated offspring made them the main targets of eugenic and eugenic feminist debates. The role of men in reproduction was once again not acknowledged as such. That does not mean that the under class man was not likewise a problem but he was rather discussed in the context of criminality than reproduction. After identifying the importance of reproduction in debate on under class and working class women and thus their status in society, I demonstrate how far the notion of productivity was crucial to understand the placement of under class women in Nordic, modern societies and in the economic context.

#### 5.1.1. Under class Women as a Eugenic Problem

The under class consisted of people who were either not willing or able to provide for themselves through labour due to their physical and mental constitution. The group contained mentally and physically disabled or feeble-minded people, prostitutes, criminals, alcoholics and work-shy individuals. These were, as Mirja Satka argues, the so-called ineligible poor who were seen as themselves responsible for their situation due to their lack of morality and education. The betterment of their situation by their own initiative was viewed as highly questionable. Institutionalization in workhouses was often considered the only option to control their societally-damaging behaviour and try to educate them to a better lifestyle, if that was even possible.<sup>747</sup>

Perceived immoral behaviour was not so important in the discourse about the under class and the working class. Immorality of various kinds could be observed in all classes and especially the upper class was often understood as highly snobbish and influencing society badly, as Norwegian eugenicist Alfred Jon Mjøen reasoned:

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<sup>747</sup> Satka, *Making Social Citizenship*, p. 25.

And in the upper class snobbery seduced thousands of young women of the population to sell their health and morals on the street.<sup>748</sup>

Remarkably here is that Mjøen only referred to girls who were seduced by luxury lifestyles and prostituted themselves for it. Though both under class men and women appeared to be socially problematic, women seemed to be considered much weaker and more easily seduced. Especially lower working class girls, working in service or factories, were suspected of drifting down to an under class life as prostitutes in the search for a more luxurious life.<sup>749</sup> The immorality of the under class and lower working class consisted of the selfishness of wanting a better life without the hard work and disregarding the effects on the collective. This notion was also intertwined with the discussion of a social order in which everyone had their place defined by their biological predisposition, and changing this position would mean denying biology, which was considered fundamental from the eugenic point of view.

Male eugenicists, like Mjøen, often did not recognize that the falling through the social network was often not an act of snobbery by the girls but born out of social need and poverty. Yet, many eugenic feminists recognized the social dilemma of women in the working class. The low wages of women and their constant risk of poverty was a great topic among the feminist movement. In 1905, the German feminist and Marxist theorist Clara Zetkin argued in an article for the Swedish social democratic women's magazine *Morgonbris* that:

Finally, the woman turned out to not only be cheap labour but also willing and docile labour; this is the result of her lesser understanding of the conditions, her lack of affinity, her humbler self-respect, and she has so long been suppressed. For several industries or ordinances woman was additionally more suitable and useful than man.<sup>750</sup>

Not only the socialist and social democratic feminists interested in eugenics but also liberal-bourgeois Karolina Widerström argued that not all prostitutes were selling their

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<sup>748</sup> "Og i overklasse-snobberiets slæptåg trækkes de tusen unge kvinder av folkket, som for at kunne hamle op med luksus dyrene sælger sin moral og sin egen og eftreslegtenes sundhet paa gatan." Mjøen, *Rasehygiene I*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>749</sup> e.g. Järvinen, Margaretha, *Prostitutionen i Helsingfors. En studie i kvinnokontroll*, Turku 1990, p. 73.

<sup>750</sup> "Slutligen: kvinnan visade sig icke blott vara en billig arbetskraft utan äfven en villig och foglig arbetskraft, detta i följd af hennes ringare insikt om förhållandena, hennes bristande samhörighetskänsla, hennes ringare själfkänsla och att hon så länge varit undertryckt. För flere industrigrenar eller förättningar var kvinna dessutom mera passande och användbar än mannen." Zetkin, Clara, "Arbeterskorna och nutidens kvinnofråga. Förändringarne i kvinnans ekonomiska ställning." In: *Morgonbris*, 1905.3, p. 2.



bodies out of choice. She made low wages, the lack of working possibilities and the unreliability of men who abandon their families, also partially responsible for working class women falling into the under class.<sup>751</sup>

The Swedish conservative politician Pontus Fahlbeck argued that especially the rise of socialism and the organization of the workers led to an emergence of class morals which were manifested in a special solidarity of the working class. He stated that poverty was not a working class problem but a problem of the age. Fahlbeck did not connect paupers as a group to the working class but described them as intellectually and morally defected. He continued that:

Of these inferior elements are recruited all the population groups which we believe and call the miserable: criminals of some kind, vagabonds, drunks, prostitutes and their friends, the so-called professional beggars and first and last poor. [...] Neither community order nor socialism can eradicate poverty in this its original form of helpless people who are not able to take care of themselves.<sup>752</sup>

Minority groups were frequently mentioned in definitions of the under class. The group of Roma people appeared in discussions about eugenics and social deficiency. In 1943 Erik Bartels and Gudrun Brun published an extensive study of "gypsies" in Denmark, portraying them as European vagabonds. They could mostly be found among the poorest individuals of society and showed often a lack of social ambition. Previously they generated most of their income from begging, but the recent poor laws provided for them now, so they did not need to conduct other activities anymore. They concluded that "gypsies" were expensive for the Danish community.<sup>753</sup>

A similar evaluation of Roma groups was also made in Norway, as Per Haave shows in his study about the Roma people. He argues that in Norway Roma were considered morally defective because of their nomadic lifestyle. Furthermore, as in Denmark, they were also considered to be living at the expense of society, which was one characteristic of people of the under class. In Norway, as in the other Nordic countries,

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<sup>751</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, pp. 27–28.

<sup>752</sup> "Af dessa mindervärdiga element rekryteras alla de befolkningsgrupper som vi anse och kalla samhällets olycksbarn: brottslingar af visst slag, lösdrivare, drinkare, prostituerade och deras vänner de s.k. soutenörerna yrkestiggare och först och sist fattiga. [...] Ingen samfundsordning och alltså icke heller socialismen kan utrota fattigdomen i denna dess ursprungliga form af hjälpbehöfvande människor, som ej kunna sköta sig själva." Fahlbeck, Pontus, *Arbetarefrågan. Villa och verklighet*, Stockholm 1910, pp. 101-102.

<sup>753</sup> Bartels, Erik D., Brun, Gudrun, *Gypsies in Denmark*, Copenhagen 1943, pp. 61-67.

Roma were associated with other social problems like illiteracy, poverty, sickness and social misery.<sup>754</sup> These were also the common problems of other individuals belonging to the under class. By intertwining biological and social aspects, not only their status as an ethnic minority brought Roma to the attention of eugenicists and social reformers, but also their lifestyle and the associated poverty problems which made them appear as under class.

Eugenicists considered the under class the eugenic polluter and the main cause of the ongoing degeneration. The frequent fear of eugenicists was that the reckless and uncontrollable procreation of the under class would result in defective and asocial individuals taking over the population. In their view, the under class man was simply the criminal man. However, the under class woman had many faces. She was the single mother, the prostitute, the mentally disabled woman, the drinking woman, the reckless woman, the fun-loving woman or the woman seeking a luxurious life.<sup>755</sup>

Eugenicists' fear was that women would spread their asocial behaviour, partially considered hereditary, to their offspring. Men were not seen as so dangerous in this respect, though the transmission of the criminal gene was also discussed.<sup>756</sup> This was because women were predominately responsible for the upbringing of children, so their ability as mothers was as important as their genetic disposition. It was the mother's duty to secure the healthy and good upbringing of the child to become a valuable citizen.<sup>757</sup> Middle class norms about housewifery and motherhood were transmitted by the eugenic feminists to the under class women. Surely their poor living conditions could not live up to middle class standards but the women themselves were seen as at fault, not so much the social circumstances. Unlike their working class counterparts, under class women were beyond any possible help, according to eugenic feminists: their reproductive behaviour was out of control and could not be changed through education because these women lacked the intellectual ability to learn. Consequently, in this view, restriction of reproduction or institutionalization was the only solution to the problem of the under class woman as eugenic polluter and economic burden to society.<sup>758</sup>

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<sup>754</sup> Haave, *Sterilisering av tatere*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>755</sup> e.g. Kinberg, *Brottslighet och sinnesjukdom*; Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*; Aschaffenburg, Gustav, *Das Verbrechen und seine Bekämpfung. Einleitung in die Kriminalpsychologie für Mediziner, Juristen und Soziologen; ein Beitrag zur Reform der Strafgesetzgebung*, Heidelberg 1923; Björkman, *Den anfrätta stammen*.

<sup>756</sup> e.g. Kinberg, *Brottslighet och sinnesjukdom*; Kinberg, *Varför bli människor brottsliga?*; Aschaffenburg, *Das Verbrechen und seine Bekämpfung*.

<sup>757</sup> e.g. Palmblad, *Medicinen som samhällslära*, pp. 70-72.

<sup>758</sup> e.g. Andreen-Svedberg, *Preventivmedel*, p. 323; *Tidevarvet* 1926.29, p. 4.

### 5.1.2. Working Class Women as Workers and Mothers

When the new working class emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, it included both male and female workers. Yet, working class women's approach to work was very different to that of both middle class women and working class men, and deserves particular attention. Despite being a latecomer to industrialization, the Nordic countries had developed an independent and politically active working class by the turn of the century.<sup>759</sup> In a Nordic comparison Elina Haavio-Mannila shows that in the early twentieth century most women working outside agriculture were employed in the industrial sector. The figure was highest in Norway at about 25 per cent. Denmark followed in second place (22%) and the lowest numbers were found in Sweden (15%) and Finland (10%), which she presents as a particular latecomer. Even in the interwar period, Haavio-Mannila states, Finland was not as industrialized as Norway, Denmark and Sweden. In Finland, even in 1930 only 15 per cent of the female labour force worked in non-agricultural sectors, compared to about thirty per cent in the other Nordic countries.<sup>760</sup> Despite the relatively low numbers of female workers overall and especially outside the agricultural sector, the new female working class was a socially and politically highly debated topic, since they represented a novel social class, which did not fit into previous societal concepts.

The female working citizen was, as Anneli Anttonen shows, an important representation of Nordic femininity.<sup>761</sup> The idea of the hard-working Nordic woman was broadly based on her role in agrarian, pre-industrial society. Anttonen argues that the Finnish woman was stereotyped as a strong country woman, equal to men.<sup>762</sup> This stereotype might have eased the acceptance of women as workers in the Nordic countries to a certain extent, but it did not mean that female workers were in any way equal to male workers. For women of the working class, labour market participation was not a method of liberating themselves from household and family duties, as it was for some middle class women, but rather a pure economic necessity to assure the survival of their families.

As Rita Christensen, Kirsten Jacobsen and Inger Lise Jensen show in their study about Danish working class women, 39 per cent of the female industrial workers in Denmark in 1897 were married.<sup>763</sup> Married female industrial workers were normal rather

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<sup>759</sup> Broberg, Tydén, "Scandinavia", p. 3.

<sup>760</sup> Haavio-Mannila, "The Position of Women", pp. 555-557.

<sup>761</sup> Anttonen, "Female Working Citizen", p. 33.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>763</sup> Christensen, Jacobsen, Jensen (et.al.), "Arbejderkvinder og uligeløn", p. 19.

than exceptional, although industrialization increased only slowly in the whole Nordic region. Still, from early on it was a female dominated sector. Industrialization and mechanization transformed employment opportunities for women. In particular the textile, food and tobacco industries were dominated by female workers: four fifths of industrial workers in these areas were female in Denmark in the late nineteenth century.<sup>764</sup> Also in Sweden, 75 per cent of textile workers and eighty per cent of chocolate and tobacco industry workers were women.<sup>765</sup>

While industrialization opened up new work possibilities for women outside the family home, the earning possibilities were not as good as for men. Karolina Widerström warned that female wages before the First World War were on starvation level.<sup>766</sup> An article in the Finnish women's magazine *Naisten ääni* stated in 1908 that wages are highly gendered and that female teachers for example earn only one third of the male wages.<sup>767</sup> Alva Myrdal then argued that women's wages had increased more than men's in the years 1913-1936 but were still lower than male wages.<sup>768</sup> Regardless of this positive trend, women of the working class were at high risk of poverty. It was not uncommon for female industrial workers, especially when they were very young, to also work as prostitutes in times of unemployment or in economic difficulty. In a statistical survey of prostitutes in Copenhagen in 1885, 570 women appeared working as prostitutes. The majority of them were aged between 18 and 20 and stated that they were also factory workers.<sup>769</sup> This situated them always on the brink of falling into the under class. An article in the Norwegian women's magazine *Nylænde* stated that "for any obstacle raised against women's work the number of involuntary prostitutes rises."<sup>770</sup>

Especially working class women shifted back and forth between the respected working class and condemned under class. The typical industrial work for women was low paid with a lack of rights and the workers were easily replaceable by new young girls coming into towns from the countryside. So, clear as the line was in theory, in practice it was far from defined, especially since for men these categories and borders

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<sup>764</sup> Christensen, Jacobsen, Jensen (et.al.), "Arbejderkvinder og uligeløn", p. 20.

<sup>765</sup> Myrdal, "Den svenska kvinnan", p. 203.

<sup>766</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, p. 22.

<sup>767</sup> "Siitä me naiset pidämme kiini!" In: *Naisten ääni* 1908.21, p. 293.

<sup>768</sup> Myrdal, "Den svenska kvinnan", p. 204.

<sup>769</sup> Christensen, Jacobsen, Jensen (et. al.), "Arbejderkvinder og uligeløn", p. 39.

<sup>770</sup> "Og for hver skranke som reises mot kvinders arbeide stiger uvilkaarlig tallet paa dem som trækkes ned i prostitutionens malstrøm." Bangs, Dagny, "Fabriktsynsloven. Særlove for kvinder." In: *Nylænde* 19.02.1909, p. 83.

were not as blurred as much as for women who, as we have seen, bore the double burden of work inside and outside the home.

Also, in the working class, the primary task of women was the household and childcare. In comparison to the middle class, working class women had even less access to contraception. Up to 20 or 30 pregnancies were not uncommon for working class women, of which many resulted in miscarriages through the hard labour of the mother and high infant mortality due to the bad nutrition of the child.<sup>771</sup> The poor health of working class women made them especially interesting for the eugenic feminist movements. Their lifestyle of physical hard work and unlimited pregnancies was considered to have a direct impact on the population quality. This must be separated from the impact of under class reproduction on the population quality, since working class women were not generally perceived as socially harming or asocial, especially when they were married and fulfilled bourgeois norms. They were rather considered victims than perpetrators of modernity and capitalist industrialization.<sup>772</sup> Feminists interested in eugenics, aimed to help and educate working class women. An article in the Finnish magazine *Husmodern* argued that in particular working class women should be educated.<sup>773</sup> Working class women were not considered hopeless in the eugenic feminist ideology. They were unfortunate due to their socially difficult situation of being reliant of working in industry besides their natural duties in home and family, but they were not eugenic polluters due to a genetic deficiency like individuals from the under class.

To sum up, the working class woman constituted here another type of the New Woman. She was similar to the bourgeois New Woman a victim of industrialization, capitalism and urbanization, yet middle class feminists perceived her problems as different. The woman of the working class had to bear the double burden of family and work. She did not work out of choice but of economic necessity.<sup>774</sup> In contrast to the middle class New Woman she was mostly married so that her labour market participation did not stand in opposition to her natural task of reproduction. While her offspring might be of lower quality, with the help of education and instruction, as well as other state directed support, like maternity leave, mother homes, childcare, this downgrading to the

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<sup>771</sup> Christensen, Jacobsen, Jensen (et. al.), "Arbjederkvinder og uligeløn", p. 27.

<sup>772</sup> A. Fr., "Fattigdom och kvinnofägring." In: *Morgonbris* 1909.01, p. 9.

<sup>773</sup> Hult, Fanny, "Upplysning åt alla." In: *Husmodern*, 1905.2, pp. 17-19.

<sup>774</sup> Zetkin, Clara, "Arbeterskorna och nutidens kvinnofägan. Förändringarne i kvinnas ekonomiska ställning II." In: *Morgonbris* 1905.02, p. 2; Migray, Josef, "Kvinnofägan och socialismen." In: *Morgonbris*, 1923.11, pp. 4-5.

under class could be prevented.<sup>775</sup> Overall the woman of the working class was perceived as positive by the eugenic feminist, because she fulfilled her natural duty as mother, wife and housewife and only the unfortunate circumstances enforced on her by the capitalist societal order forced her out of the house into the labour force,

### 5.1.3. Productivity as Measure

The crucial categories in the debate about the working class and the under class were productivity and efficiency. The working class was considered morally retrievable because they were able to provide for themselves and their families, mostly through labour market participation. They had to rely only in times of trouble on state support. The under class on the other hand was a constant guest of state and society. This created not only a conflict in the social system but also in the debate about responsibilities and duties of modern citizens and the possibility of receiving citizenship. In Finland for example when the general suffrage was introduced in 1906, receivers of poor relief remained excluded from voting rights and likewise the active performance of citizen rights. They were not considered eligible to be citizens.<sup>776</sup>

The economic aspect was central in the discourse about the under class as a societal threat. Ideas about the welfare state, especially in the late 1920s and 1930s, appeared together with a reconsideration of former forms of poor relief. State support was not only to be given to the poor but equally to everyone in the population. The former poor laws, mostly originated in the mid-nineteenth century, were not efficient to provide social welfare for everyone. The Norwegian poor law of 1863, for example, only supported orphans and mentally ill. Øyvind Bjørnson argues that poor relief was increasingly seen critically in the early twentieth century. It was perceived as encouraging lethargy and demoralization in work-shy people, who were part of the socially dangerous under class. Living of poor relief often meant social stigmatization, Bjørnson states. Receiving poor relief was connected with the loss of voting rights in Norway between 1910 and 1918.<sup>777</sup> Similar legislation could also be found in Finland.<sup>778</sup>

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<sup>775</sup> Myrdal, *Folk och familj*, p. 27.

<sup>776</sup> Satka, *Making Social Citizenship*, p. 25.

<sup>777</sup> Bjørnson, "The Social Democrats and the Norwegian Welfare State", pp. 199.

<sup>778</sup> e.g. Ketola, Outi, Thomsen, Kåre, Nielsen Warming, Hanne, "From Poor relief to Social Rights and Social Care Services' Clienthood." In: Sipilä, Jorma (ed.), *Social Care Services the Key to the Scandinavian Welfare Model*, Aldershot 1997, pp. 77-94.

In Iceland, a law of 1860 restricted the marriage rights of recipients of poor relief. People who had received poor relief needed the official permission of the municipality to get marry. Gunnar Karlsson argues that the aim was to limit the reproduction of the poor. In reality, this was not successful but led to cohabitation outside marriage becoming widely socially accepted in Iceland. This was unique to Iceland and was not representative of the other Nordic countries.<sup>779</sup> Before the welfare reforms, receiving poor relief was widely stigmatized in all Nordic countries. It was considered living at the expense of others and especially members of the under class were considered unable to provide for themselves due to their deficiency. This lack of productivity and efficiency was considered a particular problem in capitalist societies. Productivity was the entrance ticket to citizenship. The lack of efficiency and productivity, especially long term as by individuals in the under class, was connected with the withdrawal of their citizen rights. They became non-citizens. Only active members of society could be citizens. The restoration of activity which would lead to productivity through eugenic measures, for example sterilization and re-inclusion into the labour force, would give the under class individual the possibility to regain their citizen rights.

Dipesh Chakrabarty discusses the importance of worker efficiency in modern societies, where legal rights and citizenship were strongly related to individual productivity. What was produced by the workers was not as important as the fact that they were productive. Their productivity gave the working class social value and the inefficiency of the under class took away their social value. Productivity and efficiency were one aspect of generating access to citizenship.<sup>780</sup> The other aspect was morality and moral behaviour. It might be surprising to connect Chakrabarty's strongly Marxist-orientated argumentation to eugenics. Michel Foucault argues that Malthusian notions of population stood in opposition to Marxist notions of class. According to Foucault, Malthus approached societal problems from a biological-economic point of view, while Marx argued from the perspective of class struggle.<sup>781</sup> However, eugenic ideas were highly flexible, which made it possible to fit them to any political or social ideology. Though socialism and eugenics appeared as different approaches to improve a society, in

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<sup>779</sup> Karlsson, *History of Iceland*, p. 231.

<sup>780</sup> Chakrabarty, "Marx after Marxism", p. 13.

<sup>781</sup> Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 76.

the mind of some socialists, like the British Fabianists, socialism was even a precondition for eugenics.<sup>782</sup>

The positive attitude of Nordic eugenicists, especially eugenic feminists, to their working class sisters, was an example of this interaction of eugenic and socialist thought. As we have seen in this chapter, both social democratic and middle class feminists argued that working class women were beneficial members of society. Their economic poverty was more connected to the capitalist system than necessarily their biological inferiority. In contrast, the under class was defined by its biological inferiority as the cause for their economic inefficiency. Class, productivity and reproduction were the factors which tied all this together. The middle class, with its low fertility and economic success, showed a positive correlation of all factors – enterprise, prudence, character and intellect – which marked a successful citizen from a eugenic point of view.<sup>783</sup> The lack of reproductive success but partial economic importance of working class women situated them as valuable, but in need of control and education. For under class women, all hope of ever being valuable members of society, from a productive and reproductive point of view, was gone. In the eugenicist view, only expensive restriction and social control would prevent them from causing further societal harm. The final eradication of this group was a long-term goal, since they constituted no economic value for the capitalist eugenic-orientated modern society.

### 5.2. Degeneration – The Idea of a Clean and Streamlined Society

Degeneration was the one of the greatest fears of the early twentieth century in the Western world. The idea that through the massive spread of defective heritage the so-called cultivated nations would decline to nations of morons during the next century was discussed animatedly in the research community, among policy-makers and in public debate. This fear was accompanied by the notion that science and science-based measures would be able to stop or at least decelerate this degeneration. The fear of degeneration was closely connected to biopower. Historian Edward R. Dickinson argues that biopower must be understood as a complex social and cultural transformation of patterns of social behaviour. The biologization, or as it is here mostly referred to, the medicalization, of the social defined modernity, Dickinson reasons. He concludes that from the 1920s onwards

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<sup>782</sup> Freeden, "Eugenics and Progressive Thought", p. 651.

<sup>783</sup> Ibid., p. 654.



degeneration or the fear of it fed the modern sense of crisis. Eugenics constituted the link between social Darwinism and the project of social engineering; the connection between science and policy-making.<sup>784</sup>

Degeneration was not exclusively assigned to the feminist discourse but was discussed on various social, political and medical levels, as it was deeply rooted in the discourse about societal modernization and industrialization, as we have seen. Historian Daniel Pick explains that the word degeneration is based on the French term "dégénérescencé", developed in nineteenth century psychiatry and meant obsessed.<sup>785</sup> It was popularized by the Austrian-German psychiatrist Richard Krafft-Ebing, who focused on sexual psychology and also developed concepts of sexual fetishism. However, Pick continues that degeneration was not only a mental condition but "the condition of conditions"; the ultimate signifier of pathology, which explained everything and nothing.<sup>786</sup> Pick is in a way right in his evaluation. Degeneration was a very fluid concept, which seemed to be hard to grasp or frame in a single term. In the first part of this section, I analyse several Nordic and non-Nordic theories of degeneration and set them in the context of the population question.

Nevertheless, degeneration was a gendered theory. Women played a significant role, maybe even a more important role than men in the question of degeneration, because they were affected from two sides. Women were claimed to be crucial in the population question. Andrea Andreen-Svendberg argued in an article in *Hertha* that:

It is in the nature of things that the population question is to some extent also a women's question. [...] It is part of our time that women have great power when the population question is burning – but they also have a great responsibility.<sup>787</sup>

Women were not only passive recipients of the benefits of social measures but also needed to take their active place in the making of them. Their role as recipients put them in focus as cause for degeneration. Social measures and policy were directed towards

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<sup>784</sup> Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism Democracy", pp. 1-3.

<sup>785</sup> Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, p. 8.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>787</sup> "Det ligger i sakens natur, att befolkningsfrågan i viss utsträckning är en kvinnofråga. [...] Detta innebar att vår tids kvinnor har stor makt när befolkningsfrågan är brännande – men också ett stort ansvar." von Och, G.H., "Mor och barn. Ett ord i befolkningsfrågan." In: *Hertha* 1935.2, p. 38.

them, out of political and social necessity, not generally to increase the societal position of women. This idea was not an exclusively Nordic one but can also for example be found in the US context, as Wendy Kline shows.<sup>788</sup> Men were rather considered creators of science and social policy to decrease degeneration but only as minor cause of it, for example in the context of crime.

### 5.2.1. Concepts of Degeneration and the Population Question

The degeneration theory is described by Danish historian Lene Koch as a theory of societal hygiene. It connected social problems, like alcoholism or smoking, environmental factors, like industrial work, poison from industries, child labour and diseases, especially tuberculosis but also STIs. According to Koch, the idea was that the degenerative symptoms increased after every generation until a tribe could no longer procreate and died out.<sup>789</sup> The threat that social and environmental problems, as well as medical diseases, would not only reduce the population quality but finally mean the end of an entire population seemed to be a realistic scenario in the early twentieth century. Statistics about the physical, mental and economic constitution of the population as well as increasing expert knowledge through social, medical and anthropological studies made the perceived decline of the population tangible. The fact that research and data could be provided to support the degeneration theory enhanced its credibility.<sup>790</sup>

Daniel Pick argues that degeneration was a term which connected human sciences, fictional narratives and socio-political commentaries.<sup>791</sup> The idea of a degenerating effect on society was seen as one of the main factors in the biological aspects of human development. Most influential here were Mendel's theory of heritage and Darwin's theory of social selection.<sup>792</sup> Biological aspects were thus connected to political and social theories. Not only was the biological constitution of an individual decisive for degeneration but also the environment increasingly became a factor of consideration.

Pick continues that degeneration was not discussed as a religious, philosophical or ethical problem in European societies but as an empirically proved

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<sup>788</sup> Kline, *Building a Better Race*, p. 2.

<sup>789</sup> Koch, *Racehygiejne i Danmark*, p. 31.

<sup>790</sup> e.g. Kinberg, *Brottslighet och sinnesjukdom*; Lundborg, *Rasbiologi och rashygien*.

<sup>791</sup> When Pick talks here about fictional narratives he refers to the various novelists who addressed the theme of degeneration in the nineteenth century; for example, Emile Zola or Charles Dickens. Their novels often bridged the biological and social level and made the concept of degeneration accessible to a wider, public audience than, for example, scientific or political texts. Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, p. 2.

<sup>792</sup> Koch, *Racehygiejne i Danmark*, p. 23.

medical and biological fact. Degenerative factors like criminality, alcoholism or prostitution were perceived as social pathologies which endangered the European populations. Furthermore, Pick argues that degeneration was not understood as a social condition of the under class but as self-produced force. Degeneration was not the effect but the cause for social problems. The genetic predisposition of some individuals was seen as leading to their degenerative and asocial behaviour, as Pick shows.<sup>793</sup>

Yet I believe Pick's analysis is oversimplified. Surely, many eugenicists considered social problems among the poor to be self-inflicted. Yet the previous section has shown that working class poverty was very different from under class poverty. Even in the under class, poverty had many faces and not everyone inflicted their degeneration on themselves. As Mirja Satka shows, the Finnish system of poor relief around the turn of the century divided the under class into eligible and undeserving poor. The group of eligible poor contained orphans, sick, elderly or disabled individuals and the undeserving poor, for example inmates of workhouses or workshy people, were the ones Pick refers to as self-inflicted degenerative.<sup>794</sup> This differentiation between deserving and undeserving poor cannot be claimed as a Nordic phenomenon, because similar approaches can also be found in other European countries. However, the acceptance of the influence of external and environmental factors on the degenerative might have influenced the idea of individualism in the later development of welfare measures in the Nordic countries.

The often-cited social study *Kris i befolkningsfrågan* [Crisis in the Population Question], by Swedish social reformers Gunnar and Alva Myrdal, argued that grouping individuals into social classes was not a sufficient method of assessing people:

The large real decisive variations from idiocy to genius is found in all social classes, although the tendency to produce overly gifted children appear to be slightly lower in the lowest social group, and vice versa.<sup>795</sup>

However, the Myrdals continued that the better educational outcome among the upper classes was often based on a better economic situation, which provided a better school

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<sup>793</sup> Pick., *Faces of Degeneration*, pp. 20-22.

<sup>794</sup> Satka, *Making Social Citizenship*, p. 25.

<sup>795</sup> "De stora verkligt utslagsgivande variationerna från idioti till geni påträffas inom alla socialklasser, även om tendensen att producera överbegåvade barn synes vara något lägre inom den lägsta socialgruppen och vice versa." Myrdal, Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, p. 70.

education, rather than higher intelligence of the upper classes per se.<sup>796</sup> Consequently they also argued that restricting the reproduction of lower classes must be considered with caution, since current research was not sufficient yet to prove a hereditary predisposition of degeneration.<sup>797</sup>

Degeneration was not as certain a concept as Pick might imply. Surely, degeneration of the population was perceived as fact in many Western societies in the early twentieth century, but the cause-effect construct was very much based on uncertainties. I would argue that idea of degeneration functioned ultimately as a circle. Defective genetic predisposition left individuals in severe life circumstances from the start. However, the lack of opportunity and environmental factors behind their poverty did not contribute to any improvement of the generations. From the point of view of the officials, the circle had to be broken from above, partly with harsh methods and force, to end the ongoing degeneration and create possibilities for progress. The Nordic social welfare measures suggested by experts like the Myrdals, such as extensive school education, health care, improvement of housing and nutrition, but also segregation and sterilization of undeserved poor, were examples of this.<sup>798</sup>

Nonetheless, the idea of degeneration was a typical phenomenon of the early twentieth century and shaped the making of the Nordic welfare states. Gunnar Broberg and Mattias Tydén argue from the Swedish perspective that the population was caught in pseudo-problems, like the consequences of emigration, the rising cost of industrialization and the increasing number of mentally ill or disabled.<sup>799</sup> They likewise argue that the discussion of degeneration in Sweden opened the gates for eugenic propaganda. In their view, the discussion correlated strongly with the concept of hygiene and the creation of a hygienic society. Hygiene was closely related to morality, which in turn introduced the moral factor into the degeneration debate.<sup>800</sup>

From today's point of view degeneration indeed seems a fictional problem and the notion that poverty could be genetically based appears eccentric. Yet this was not the case for the contemporaries, who took the phenomenon seriously. After the First World War, the topic of degeneration moved from scientific circles to the public debate, in the Nordic countries but also in other parts of the Western world.

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<sup>796</sup> Myrdal, Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, p. 74.

<sup>797</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>798</sup> e.g. Ibid.; Broberg, Tydén, "Scandinavia", pp. 5-6.

<sup>799</sup> Broberg, Tydén, "Eugenics in Sweden", p. 78.

<sup>800</sup> Broberg, Tydén, *Oönskade i folkhemmet*, p. 23.

Herman Lundborg, racial biologist and leader of Sweden's institute for racial biology, discussed the origins and effects of degeneration in several English and Swedish publications in the early 1920s. Lundborg reproduced the most common ideas, reasoning that the middle class reproduced too little and the under class reproduced too much. Furthermore, he named the origins of degeneration as urbanization, migration, genetic diseases, abuse of narcotics, suicide and individual asocial behaviour, like egoism or the desire for a luxurious lifestyle.<sup>801</sup> Similarly to other race researchers, like the Danish Søren Hansen or his Swedish colleague Nils von Hofsten, Lundborg also perceived a decline in population quality.<sup>802</sup>

In Finland and Norway, both young Nordic nations, the situation was different. In Norway, the degeneration debate was divided between the scientists Kristine Bonnevie and Otto Mohr on one side, and the pharmacist and popular scientist Jon Alfred Mjøen on the other. Mjøen might indeed be considered racist. He not only described different races in his book *Rasehygiene* but also created a hierarchy of races.<sup>803</sup> This was strongly criticized by the research community around Bonnevie and Mohr. Mjøen was degraded as not scientific enough to draw his conclusions.<sup>804</sup> In Finland the leading experts in racial theory can especially be found in the Swedish-speaking community. Ossian Schauman and Harry Federley, the founders of the non-governmental health organization *Folkhälsa*, published widely about the degeneration of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations. Federley based his argumentation on the Swedish role model and used the concept of race as population.<sup>805</sup>

It is suspected that racial hygienic aspirations go out to offend a particular race to victory at the expense of another. But this has not at all been the case in the original application of rational eugenics. This has been applied to take advantage of the good disposition of the people regardless of race and allow

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<sup>801</sup> Lundborg, *Rasbiologi och rashygien*, p. 19ff; Lundborg, *Degenerationsfaran och riktlinjer*, p. 5ff; Lundborg, "The Danger of Degeneracy", pp. 531–539.

<sup>802</sup> Hansen, Søren, "Degenererer overklasserne?" In: *Månedsskrift for sundhedsvæsen* (1914), pp. 97-99; Hansen, Søren, "Racehygiejne." In: *Månedsskrift for sundhedsvæsen* (1915), p. 166; von Hofsten, Nils, *Ärftlighetslära*, Uppsala 1919, p. 480; von Hofsten, Nils, *Modern ärftlighetslära*, Stockholm 1920, p. 53.

<sup>803</sup> Mjøen, *Rasehygiene I*, p. 68ff.

<sup>804</sup> See for the debate Mjøen's and Bonnevie's dispute in *Tidens Tegn*. Mjøen, Jon Alfred "Segregation av lavværdige raceelementer. Svar til professor i zoologi Bonnevie." In: *Tidens Tegn* (23. April 1915), pp. 9-10. Bonnevie, Kristine, "Om racehygiene og om dr. Alfred Mjøens nye bok." In: *Tidens Tegn* (24. March 1915), pp. 6-9. Bonnevie, Kristine, "Dr. Mjøens racehygiene for siste gang." In: *Tidens Tegn* (24. April 1915), p. 2.

<sup>805</sup> Federley, "I sterilisationsfrågan", p. 179.

them to become dominant, and conversely to prevent the bad from succeeding.<sup>806</sup>

In contrast, Ossian Schauman used the concept of degeneration to define the Finnish-speaking population of Finland as a lower race and eugenic polluter who threatened the racial and overall superiority of the Swedish speakers.<sup>807</sup> The factor of race in the degeneration debate was often based on the individual preferences of the experts rather than an overall concept. In legislation which tried to tackle degeneration race often seems to play a minor role. Explicitly racially-based arguments in Nordic degeneration discussions were often dismissed by the majority of experts, as was the case in Norway.

### 5.2.2. Degeneration and Female Bodies

The debate about degeneration took place not only in the scientific, male-dominated context but also in the wider society, especially in the context of eugenic feminism. The eugenic feminists appeared here on two different levels. In all Nordic countries, some eugenic feminists were part of the academic discourse or educated, for example, as medical experts. They functioned as a bridge between the male, scientific discourse and the wider societal discussion which focused more on women's role as guardians of the family and the race. Other, non-academic or not medically educated, eugenic feminists discussed degeneration from a social point of view.

This division was particularly dominant in the Nordic context. As Mary Ziegler shows, US feminists engaged in eugenics debates came from other professions or worked as philanthropists. Ziegler cites the case of the stockbroker and newspaper editor Victoria Woodhull, who was the first female presidential candidate in the United States in 1870. Woodhull got engaged in eugenics after having a mentally handicapped son whose disability she traced back to the alcohol abuse of his father.<sup>808</sup> Another example was Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who voluntarily gave up custody of her children and defined herself as morally deficient.<sup>809</sup> Women became interested in US eugenics from a personal rather than professional experience, and this shaped the discourse. In the Nordic

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<sup>806</sup> "Man misstänker att rashygienens strävanden gå ut på att förhjälp en viss ras till seger på bekostnad av en annan. Men detta har ej alls varit fallet i det ursprungliga programmet för en rationell eugenik. Det har gällt att taga vara på de goda anlagen hos befolkningen oberoende av ras och låta dem bli dominerande, och omvänt att förhindra de dåliga att vinna spridning." Federley, "I sterilisationsfrågan", p. 179.

<sup>807</sup> e.g. Schaumann, "Eugenic Work in Swedish Finland", p. 90; Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>808</sup> Ziegler, "Eugenic Feminism", p. 220.

<sup>809</sup> Ibid., pp. 224-225.

countries, female medical experts were involved in eugenics debates. In the period before the 1930s, this influenced the perception of degeneration as a medical rather than a social problem. Julia Kinberg described eugenics as all-embracing science:

Racial hygiene is namely the science of all the things that touch the upcoming race's health: the laws of heredity, the factors that affect it adversely or improvement in the offspring, and the measures taken to counter increasing deterioration of offspring.<sup>810</sup>

Later, in her sex education book *Sexuell etik*, Kinberg argued that the sterilization of women with a lot of children, promiscuous, work-shy or feeble-minded women, would help to end the degeneration which results from intellectual and moral problems.<sup>811</sup>

Furthermore, she argued that these medical reasons for degeneration were very often also closely connected to social factors. Kinberg suggested that the environment in which the individual lives is closely related to his or her medical problems.<sup>812</sup> She published her book in 1931, when the social and environmental factors behind degeneration were beginning to be recognized, and her argumentation shows the uncertainty of the time. As educated physician, she considered the body from a medical perspective. For her, heritage was one of the leading factors which influenced the physical and psychological development of the body, especially the female body. The absence of the male body in the eugenic feminist degeneration discourse in the Nordic countries was significant for the overall positioning of female bodies and directing of eugenic measures mainly towards women.

Elizabeth Grosz argues in the context of the cultural representation of sexual bodies that all pleasures and anxieties related to them are lived through models, images, representations and expectations. Grosz continues that the established models of sexual bodies do not consider the racial pollution as two-way process. She claims that the cause is in the patriarchal lack of sexual symmetry: male body fluids are here not considered polluting for women as female body fluids are considered polluting for men.<sup>813</sup>

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<sup>810</sup> "Rashygien är nämligen vetenskapen om alla de ting, som röra det kommande släktets hälsotillstånd: lagarna för ärftligheten, de faktorer, som inverka försämrande eller förbättrande på avkomman, och de åtgärder, som kunna vidtagas för att motverka en tilltagande försämring av avkomman." Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, p. 85.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-114.

<sup>812</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>813</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 197.

In the discourse about degeneration, eugenic feminists accepted and adopted the patriarchal ideas of unclean female bodies to define some female bodies as unclean and degenerated, and other female bodies as clean and pure. Thus, they did not question or combat patriarchal assumptions about female bodies but used them to liberate some female bodies. The pure, clean and healthy body of the female middle class was liberated, and the unclean, unhealthy and polluted body of the under class women was sacrificed for its sake. The feminist discourse divided the female body into categories based on health and hygiene and used social categories, including class, social geography, education and disability, to create a multiplicity of female bodies.

This multiplicity was crucial in identifying female bodies as a cause for medical as well as social degeneration. An article in the magazine of the Norwegian women's movement, *Nylænde*, argued that economic dependence led to an unfortunate sexual selection of women in the context of marriage. The article continued that the dominance of interracial marriages must be considered as misfortune, since some races stand beyond others. Women, dependent through the traditional system as care providers, are hindered in their natural instinct to select a racially valuable partner and are very often forced into racially unfortunate marriage due to their oppressed situation and economic dependency.<sup>814</sup> The article concluded that

Inherited from the mother, both sons and daughters, and even the whole family suffers under a strong sex drive, which can become a burden for the whole family (oversexed).<sup>815</sup>

Oversexualization, which was referred to as one cause for degeneration of both male and female children, was originated in the female body, the body of the mother. In this view, external factors, which may be described as social, women's dependency on men, disturbed the natural female sexual selection process. It was ultimately the maternal body who transmitted the pollution to the next generation and fostered its degeneration. While the deeper cause for degeneration was indeed identified in this article in the failed patriarchal societal structures, these were considered an unchangeable fact. Thus, the only solution to prevent degeneration was to also change the maternal body.<sup>816</sup>

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<sup>814</sup> "Kvindens økonomiske afhængighed af manden." In: *Nylænde*, 15.11.1902, pp. 336-338.

<sup>815</sup> "Fra moren nedarves det stadig baade paa søn og datter, og den hele slekt blir lidende under den sterke kjønssarv den blir kjønslig belastet (oversexed)." Ibid., p. 338.

<sup>816</sup> e.g. Mjøen, *Rasehygiene*, p. 141ff; Anker Møller, *Katti Anker Møller*, p. 33.



As I have argued, it was eugenic feminist experts who put female bodies in the focus of the degeneration discourse, and thus identified female bodies as carrier and transmitter of polluted heritage from one generation to the other. These arguments were made elsewhere, but the effects of this argumentation must be understood as particularly Nordic. The access Nordic eugenic feminist experts had to policy-making can be identified as one reason why female bodies and sexuality received such attention in the eugenic-inspired sterilization legislation implemented in all Nordic countries between 1929 and 1938. However, during the 1930s and 1940s the degeneration debate shifted dramatically, also from a feminist point of view. Social reformer Alva Myrdal argued in her study *Folk och Familj* [The People and the Family, 1944] that the defective only constitute a small group in society.<sup>817</sup> This was different from the discourse in the 1920s, when they were considered a growing majority. Still, the fertility of this group was the main concern. Myrdal argued that in particular mentally disabled or mentally ill women had the tendency to be oversexualized, but they were not able to find a husband and build a normal family home. She concluded that in these cases birth control was especially important to prevent these women from reproducing.<sup>818</sup>

Though Myrdal remained critical about the actual effects of eugenic measures, it is unclear how she wanted to restrict the reproduction of these women permanently. It might be argued that her hesitance about eugenic measures like sterilization was based more on their use for overall population control. Thus, in the case of degenerated individuals it can be assumed that she was in favour of sterilization. At least in 1934 in her earlier joint study with her husband Gunnar Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, she declared that sterilization was the right method if research would support it.<sup>819</sup>

It is important to recognize that Myrdal was referring predominately to women, but yet again, the impact of men on the uncontrolled reproduction of these women was not discussed. Applications for sterilizations contained extensive family histories discussed to prove the deficiency of the individual but in the end, it was the woman, the mother or the daughter, who was sterilized, and not the father or the son.<sup>820</sup>

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<sup>817</sup> Myrdal, *Folk och familj*, p. 122.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>819</sup> Myrdal, Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, p. 218.

<sup>820</sup> e.g. Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*.

Unfortunately the statistics for the period before the Second World War were not very detailed but in Sweden for example, the majority of sterilizations of mentally disabled or mentally ill people were carried out for eugenic reasons and on women.<sup>821</sup> Also in Norway a clear majority of women was the target of the pre-war sterilizations, which were often, though not exclusively based on eugenic grounds.<sup>822</sup> Although certainly national particularities shaped the legislation and special cases can be identified in all Nordic countries, the overall picture was of eugenic feminists successfully declaring some female bodies pollutant and responsible for medical and social degeneration. This created the precondition for the focus on women in the later eugenic-inspired sterilization legislation, which was mainly applied to women up until the 1970s.

### 5.3. The Question of Prostitution

The Danish physician and eugenicist Tage Kemp published a comprehensive study about prostitution in Copenhagen in 1936. He stated in the preface that he had examined 530 prostitutes between 1931 and 1935 for their medical psychiatric condition and in particular their personal heritage. He regarded prostitution as a biological phenomenon and the moral and political aspects of it are not considered in his study.<sup>823</sup> Kemp was a vital figure in the political and social eugenics discourse in Denmark. He was a great admirer of the German sterilization legislation and proposed sterilization as central part of any welfare strategy. But he rejected any force.<sup>824</sup> Published in the mid-1930s, Kemp's study might be considered an endpoint in the transformation of the perception of prostitution in the Nordic countries and throughout the Western world, from criminalization of prostitutes in the nineteenth century to medicalization and pathologization.

Prostitution in the Nordic countries was highly regulated by the authorities from the 1830s and the control was exercised by the local police, as Anna Jansdotter and Yvonne Svanström show. The main aim of the controls was to reduce the spread of

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<sup>821</sup> Broberg, Tydén, "Eugenics in Sweden", pp. 109/ 113.

<sup>822</sup> Roll-Hansen, Nils, "Norwegian Eugenics. Sterilization as Social Reform." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Roll-Hansen, Nils (eds.), *Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland*, East Lansing 2005, p. 178.

<sup>823</sup> Kemp, Tage, *Prostitution. An Investigation of its Causes, especially with Regard to Hereditary Factors*, Copenhagen 1936, p. 4.

<sup>824</sup> Koch, *Racehygiejne i Danmark*, pp. 90–94,

STIs.<sup>825</sup> Jansdotter and Svanström further state that this regulation was mainly based on medical control and forced examinations. Women suspected of being prostitutes were registered and monitored. Personal data, like employment or civil status were registered. This regulation mainly concerned prostitutes on the streets. The regulations for brothels were different, since in Norway, Sweden and Finland brothels were overall prohibited but accepted unofficially. In Denmark brothels were not forbidden but their role was not considered great in the overall prostitution question.<sup>826</sup>

Control systems to regulate and monitor prostitution were established in most urban centres in the Nordic countries during the mid-nineteenth century. The regulation of prostitution was mainly a matter of the city itself, but it was supported by national laws, for example the criminal code or health regulations. The main aim of the nineteenth-century regulations was not to control the women themselves but rather to prevent the spread of venereal disease. Stockholm, for example, passed a law in 1860, which submitted prostitutes to weekly medical examinations to test them for STIs.<sup>827</sup> Also Helsinki enacted a regulation in 1875 which forced registered prostitutes to undergo regular medical and police examinations. If a STI was detected during this examination, the woman had to undergo compulsory hospital treatment. Every examination was documented.<sup>828</sup> An article in *Nylænde* noted that in Norway regional control systems were implemented in 1888 but demanded national legislation.<sup>829</sup>

As Merete Bøge Pedersen shows in her study about prostitution at the turn of the century in Denmark, the Danish regulations on examinations, which were similar to the other Nordic countries, conflicted with basic Danish rights. The health of society was prioritized over the individual rights of the prostituting women. Prostitutes were considered to be a deadly risk, not only to their clients but to the entire society. By knowingly transmitting diseases not only to their customers but also to their families, their behaviour was assessed as criminal offence.<sup>830</sup> Yet, these forms of regulation based on

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<sup>825</sup> Jansdotter, Anna, Svanström, Yvonne, "Inledning." In: Jansdotter, Anna, Svanström, Yvonne, *Sedligt, renligt, lagligt. Prostitution i Norden 1880-1940*, Stockholm 2007, p. 13.

<sup>826</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>827</sup> Svanström, Yvonne, *Policing Public Women. The Regulation of Prostitution in Stockholm 1812-1880*, Stockholm 2000, p. 3.

<sup>828</sup> Järvinen, *Prostitutionen*, p. 71.

<sup>829</sup> "Den reglementerede prostitutions afskaffelse over det hele land." In: *Nylænde*, 01.10.1892, p. 253.

<sup>830</sup> Pedersen, Merete Bøge, "Den problematiske prostitutionslagstiftningen och den osedliga osedlighetspolisen i Danmark 1870-1906." In: Jansdotter, Anna, Svanström, Yvonne, *Sedligt, renligt, lagligt. Prostitution i Norden 1880-1940*, Stockholm 2007, pp. 139-143.

the criminal law were abandoned in the Nordic countries by the early twentieth century: in Norway already in 1888, in Denmark in 1906, Finland in 1907 and Sweden in 1918.<sup>831</sup>

However, changes in the penal code did not mean that prostitution was not monitored anymore but rather symbolized the shift from it being seen as a criminal problem to a medical one. The growth of feminist movements in the late nineteenth century had a great impact on the transformation of the perception of prostitution. Particularly in intersection with eugenics, this encouraged the medicalization of prostitution in the early twentieth century. Prostitution was a topic of special interest for the very early feminists in particular. Besides women's suffrage, it was one dominant topic for first-wave feminists. The discussion of prostitution in the feminist movements was not a straightforward one but represented a great diversity of views. Nordic eugenic feminists fought actively against the criminalization of prostitution and demanded an overall debate about societal morals.<sup>832</sup>

### 5.3.1. From Criminalization to Medicalization

During the nineteenth century, the social problems which caused prostitution seemed to have received less public attention than its effects. Rather than protection for the prostitutes themselves, the prevailing view was that the innocent parts of society should be protected from prostitutes. The notion that they attacked society with their venereal diseases made them criminals. This idea shifted at the turn of the century and the feminist movements had a major part in this shift. As the mayor of an unknown city in Sweden declared in an interview for *Tidevarvet*, "the history of prostitution is the history of women."<sup>833</sup> Women were perpetrators but also victims in the prostitution question, by one the one hand causing prostitution but on the other hand suffering from it, when their husbands visited prostitutes.

The Nordic eugenic feminists did not shy away from their chosen responsibility and engaged actively in the debate about prostitution. I do not think it is too farfetched to argue that eugenic feminists had a major impact on the recognition of prostitutes not as criminals but as social victims. The Norwegian feminist magazine *Nylænde* argued that control systems did not solve the cause of prostitution but only

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<sup>831</sup> Svanström, *Policing Public Women*, p. 20.

<sup>832</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>833</sup> "Prostitutionens historia är kvinnans historia." Stéenhoff, Frida, "Samtal med en borgmästare om prostitutionen." In: *Tidevarvet*, 1924.8, p. 4.

overloaded municipalities with too many responsibilities.<sup>834</sup> Danish physician Dederding claimed that prostitution can be found in all societies and cultures and disregarded in this way any imminent connection to degeneration.<sup>835</sup>

Yet, the eugenic feminists still often divided prostituting women into groups, based on the cause of their work as prostitutes and their mental ability. Swedish physician Widerström discussed the causes of prostitution in detail in her book *Kvinnohygien II*. She can be considered one main representative in the Nordic eugenic feminist prostitution debate, because she was one of the very early eugenic feminists specifically interested in prostitution. Her perception of female prostitutes depended on how she classified them, which was significant for the discourse.

Some of the prostitutes are abnormal creatures, derived from offenders, sexually dissolute people and alcoholics, grown up in vice and criminality; they are almost destined to be not only prostitutes but also criminals. Others are initially only thoughtless but also the self-indulgent and lazy; destitute of strength of character and zeal, they slide easily enough, often very early into vice: in the beginning so many wonderful things attract, and the bread is so easy earned. Still others are honest, honourable and industrious; but they happen someday to be abandoned and destitute with illegitimate children to support; work is nowhere to be found, nor mercy; street can give the livelihood for both one and two.<sup>836</sup>

Prostitutes were categorized in the context of their own group but also in comparison to other women. They could only be defined as degenerated when compared with middle class women and their norms. However, by defining some prostitutes as honourable but unlucky and others as simply lazy and self-indulgent, Widerström created a hierarchy. Anna Jansdotter argues in an article about female volunteers of the Swedish Salvation Army that women were divided in two groups by the rescue workers, respectable and not respectable, and the Salvation Army workers considered themselves a member of the former group. However, Jansdotter claims that middle class women, in her example the

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<sup>834</sup> "Den reglementerede prostitutions afskaffelse over det hele land." In: *Nyelande*, 01.10.1892, p. 253.

<sup>835</sup> Dederding, *Sundhedslære*, p. 55.

<sup>836</sup> "En del af de prostituerede äro abnorma varelser, härstammande från förbrytare, sexuellt utsväfvande människor och alkoholister samt uppvuxna uti lastens och brottets nästen; de äro nästan förutbestämda att bli icke blott prostituerade utan ock förbryterskor. Andra äro från början blott tanklösa men tillika njutningslystna och lättjefulla; i saknad af karaktärsstyrka och arbetshåg glida de lätt nog, ofta mycket tidigt, in på lastens bana, där i början så många härliga ting locka och där brödet är så lätt förvärfvadt. Åter andra äro både hederliga, ärbära och arbetsamma; men de råka en vacker dag stå öfvergifna och utblottade med ett illegitimt barn att försörja; arbete står ingenstädes att finna, misskund ej heller; gatan kan ju ge lifsuppehälle åt både en och två." Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, p. 27.

Salvation Army worker, showed solidarity with the under class women to help them out of their misery. Naturally, this constituted a power relation in which class, gender and sexuality became strongly interweaved categories, Jansdotter concludes.<sup>837</sup>

It was considered important to divide the women into desirable rehabilitation candidates and hopeless, because eugenically severely damaged, cases. Prostitutes per se were not considered socially harmful but frequently also societal victims. This was a rare example of feminist critique towards patriarchal societal structures in eugenic feminism. In 1907, two articles in the Swedish social democratic women's magazine *Morgonbris* argued that women were driven into prostitution firstly by poor living conditions (as Widerström had said), and secondly by men and society.<sup>838</sup> However, both articles addressed class as well as gender in the prostitution question. Hereby a clear power relation can be detected. The articles argued that female prostitutes usually came from the lower classes and their male customers frequently from the upper classes. This might also explain why penalties for prostitution were directed towards the woman and not towards the customer, the article proposed.<sup>839</sup> Yet, it is still significant that the social democratic feminists of *Morgonbris* and the bourgeois-liberal Widerström could find common ground in the discussion of social problems related to prostitution. Gender was the joining category, beyond class and other social boundaries.

Morality played a leading role in the categorization of prostituting women, as Pirjo Markkola shows. In her study about prostitution in Finland, she argues that gender was a leading category in the moral discourse. The general idea was that women have higher morals, and men, despite being more sensible and strong, show weaker morality.<sup>840</sup> Markkola demonstrates a hierarchy of morality. Women who control their sexuality were at the top of this hierarchy. Next came men, who were generally considered to have more problems controlling their sexual instincts. Then immoral men ranked before immoral women and fallen women, which meant the prostitutes, constituted the bottom of the hierarchy.<sup>841</sup> Markkola argues that this hierarchy was not only based on gender but in

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<sup>837</sup> Jansdotter, Anne, "Rädda Rosa. Frälsningsarméns Räddningsarbete i Sverige 1890–1920." In: Jansdotter, Anna, Svanström, Yvonne, *Sedligt, renligt, lagligt. Prostitution i Norden 1880–1940*, Stockholm 2007, pp. 109–111.

<sup>838</sup> Nällengren, Carolina, "Den reglementerade prostitutionen I." In: *Morgonbris* 1907.4, p. 3; Nällengren, Carolina, "Den reglementerade prostitutionen II." *Morgonbris* 1907.5, p. 4.

<sup>839</sup> Nällengren, Carolina, "Den reglementerade prostitutionen II." *Morgonbris* 1907.5, p. 5.

<sup>840</sup> Markkola, Pirjo, "Mannen som moralreformist. Manligheten och prostitutionskontrollen i Finland vid sekelskiftet 1900." In: Jansdotter, Anna, Svanström, Yvonne, *Sedligt, renligt, lagligt. Prostitution i Norden 1880–1940*, Stockholm 2007, p. 40.

<sup>841</sup> Markkola, "Mannen som moralreformist", p. 40.

particular on class. Moral reformists came mainly from the middle class and imposed their own norms on the other classes.<sup>842</sup> While this hierarchy may create the impression that fallen women were again dismissed by moral reformists, this was not the argumentation, according to Markkola. Moral humanity was considered to be based on female morality. At the turn of the century, feminists, but also the church, criticized the fact that men and women were not treated equally in the prostitution regulations. The fact that women by nature had better morals than men, made not the fallen women but the men, as clients, responsible for prostitution.<sup>843</sup>

The recognition of prostituting women as not generally responsible for their actions was one symptom of the gradual shift from the criminalization to a medicalization of prostitution and the acknowledgement of the female body as object in modern capitalism. Carole Pateman argues in *The Sexual Contract* that prostitution constituted one variety of the sexual contract in modern patriarchy. The most accepted form of patriarchy which provided access to the female body was marriage, according to Pateman. However, prostitution guaranteed sexual access to the female body on the capitalist market. Prostitution, Pateman claims, was an open trade with the female body, like any other exchange of labour and payment.<sup>844</sup>

However, Pateman's argumentation is problematic in some ways and in particular neglects the recognition of women as actors in patriarchal societies. Pateman argues that prostitution became increasingly violent when women lost control over the brothels in the late nineteenth century and prostitution was taken over by men.<sup>845</sup> Although women's activists campaigned for the decriminalization of prostitution, there is no evidence that they also wanted liberation of prostitution. Though the great impact of male control and male power was emphasized in the eugenic feminist prostitution debate, the solution was still not found by changing the male side of the issue but in transforming the prostituting woman into a better person.

In 1926, Swedish feminists Gerda Kjellberg and Ada Nilsson argued for an extensive programme to help fallen women. They discussed the idea proposed by a state commission that the state actively visit public places, dance bars or restaurants and single out prostituting women. These women should then receive help from a council, for

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<sup>842</sup> Markkola, "Mannen som moralreformist", pp. 49-50.

<sup>843</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-52.

<sup>844</sup> Pateman, Carole, *The Sexual Contract*, Cambridge 1988, p. 185.

<sup>845</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

example provision of education.<sup>846</sup> While this sounds like a very embracing idea, Kjellberg and Nilsson did not feel that comprehensive social work might be in the best interests of society. They argued that social work was primarily a monetary question. It would not be possible to single out a group of individuals who should receive help but the effects for the whole society must be kept in mind. They pointed out that the number of prostitutes in Stockholm, which they estimated at 6000, was very high. Furthermore, they criticized the commission for targeting mainly women aged 20 to 21 when the majority were actually less than 21 years old.<sup>847</sup>

However, the most important aspect, which brings us back to the question of eugenics and medicalization of prostitution through feminists, was that Kjellberg and Nilsson argued that forty per cent of Stockholm's prostitutes were mentally defective.<sup>848</sup> This meant that a state educational programme would not work. These women would have to be forcibly interned in institutions. They estimate that this would cost approximately 4.56 kroner per institutionalized woman per day and the average length of a stay would be eight months.<sup>849</sup> This kind of measure applied to 2500-3000 prostitutes located in Stockholm, according to Kjellberg and Nilsson.<sup>850</sup>

Considering Pateman's claim that the development of patriarchal structures in prostitution increased male control over the female body, we must say that this concept, although it certainly cannot be rejected, must be better nuanced. It would be more fruitful to talk about different female bodies in the context of prostitution than to assume homogeneity. As we have already seen by looking at Karolina Widerström's characterization of prostitutes or Kjellberg's and Nilsson's declaration of that nearly half of Stockholm's prostitutes were insane, the figure of the female prostitute was not homogenous. The female body which was harmed by prostitution, through disease or a lack of hygiene, was also not homogenous. The notion of female bodies being productive beyond reproduction became important in this context.

The Swedish liberal women's organization *Frisinnade Kvinnor*, whose members included Nilsson and Kjellberg, argued that the solution to the prostitution problem would be to integrate these women into working life.<sup>851</sup> Ada Nilsson had a rather

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<sup>846</sup> Kjellberg, Gerda, Nilsson, Ada, *En brännande fråga inlägg i diskussionen om lösdriverilagen*, Stockholm 1926, p. 5.

<sup>847</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-10.

<sup>848</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>849</sup> The average hourly pay for a worker in Sweden in the 1920s was 1 kr.

<sup>850</sup> Kjellberg, Nilsson, *En brännande fråga* p. 11.

<sup>851</sup> Levin, *Kvinnorna på barrikaden*, p. 101.



positive perception of prostituting women, after meeting many of them during her work in a hospital in Stockholm's working class district Södermalm.<sup>852</sup> The idea of integrating prostitutes into working life cannot be considered exclusively with the aim in providing these women a better life. A good woman's life was, in the eugenic feminists' eyes, a patriarchal family life as mother, wife and housewife and not working in a factory. However, these women, in particular the mentally ill or disabled ones, were not suitable for this kind of life. Putting them to work could at least make them productive and release the state and society from the burden of their care. Though, this could not be considered a general cure for prostitution. The idea was to include everyone who was a societal burden in society, according to their ability, including mental ability. Eugenics thus became an inclusive ideology, which aimed to reintegrate individuals into society through eugenic measures, like education or sterilization, as much as possible. Surely, forced or invasive methods must be viewed especially critically from today's perspective. However, in the eyes of contemporaries they often meant a release not only for society, but also for the individual from a great burden and were considered a help, not as punishment.<sup>853</sup>

To understand how prostitution was simultaneously medicalized by examining the mental status of prostitutes and individualized, it is worth looking once more at Tage Kemp's study of Copenhagen's prostitutes in the 1930s. Kemp presented extensive case studies of several prostitutes, in which he not only gave detailed descriptions of the stories, families and defects of the examined women but also suggested individual treatment possibilities. He argued, for example, in the case of a 30-year-old prostitute with nine children, that the woman should have been sterilized at an early stage of her life, because all of her children would be an economic and moral burden to society.<sup>854</sup> Kemp described another case of a 26-year-old female servant who was imprisoned several times for prostitution and wandering on the streets. Although she was diagnosed with a psychopathic condition, as Kemp declared,

Imprisonment (and psychopath imprisonment could not even be used here) is surely the wrong method in this case. Re-education, which would teach this woman to work again, would be more to the purpose, but there are no institutions or laws in Denmark which make this course of action possible.<sup>855</sup>

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<sup>852</sup> Nilsson, *Glimtar ur mitt liv*, p. 66.

<sup>853</sup> e.g. Wessel, "Castration of Male Sex Offenders."

<sup>854</sup> Kemp, *Prostitution*, p. 61.

<sup>855</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

These are only two of the fifty cases of female prostitutes Kemp presented. However, they demonstrate important aspects of the prostitution debate which can also be found in eugenic feminist approaches to prostitutes. Like Kemp, most were in favour of a state-led solution to the prostitution problem. Kemp felt particularly inspired by the German law of 1934, which allowed forced sterilization of the mentally disabled, though he took a critical stand against the use of force.<sup>856</sup> However, as Lene Koch showed for both Denmark and the other Nordic countries, the eugenic-inspired sterilization legislation was a central aspect of the welfare strategy in the context of the social engineering project in the 1930s. Sterilization was part of the programme to control the inferior to which some prostitutes were categorized.<sup>857</sup>

### 5.3.2. Biopolitics and Public Health

Nonetheless, as we have seen before, the regulation of prostitution was not new. The new phenomenon was the medical approach to the regulation of the prostitute's body which was advocated by the anti-prostitution activists, medical experts and eugenic feminists. Prostitution itself was not understood as harmful to society but the prostituting body was perceived as a threat and in need of regulation and control. This shift in perception was part of the emergence of biopolitics and biopower as discussed by Michel Foucault in his lectures *Society must be Defended*. Foucault argues that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries new techniques of power emerged which concentrated on the individual body. He describes this as the basic phenomenon that the power over the man as a biological living being was transferred to the control of the state.<sup>858</sup>

Biopower has, according to Foucault, three main domains: medicalization of the population, neutralization of the unproductive individual and control over the relationship between humans and the environment. In the following I discuss how these three domains relate to the prostitution question in the context of the public health debate, from a eugenic feminist point of view.

The first is medicalization of the population. From the eighteenth century onwards, public hygiene became the central function of medicine which was enacted in a coordination of medical care, a centralization of medical information and a moralization

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<sup>856</sup> Kemp, *Prostitution*, p. 27.

<sup>857</sup> Koch, *Racehygiene i Danmark*, pp. 90-94.

<sup>858</sup> Foucault, *Society must be Defended*, pp. 239-240.

of medical knowledge.<sup>859</sup> In the prostitution question, this domain can be observed in the fact that prostitution came to be viewed as mental disability or illness which needed care to be cured. The Finnish physician Ellen Ahlqvist argued, for example, that prostitutes were often mentally defected.<sup>860</sup> Swedish physicians Alma Sundquist and Julia Kinberg stated that prostitutes were highly infectious and responsible for the spread of STIs. Further, they argued that from a hygienic and ethical point of view the fight against prostitution was necessary, although the current regulations were not effective.<sup>861</sup> Also, Karolina Widerström argued that prostitutes were a serious health risk, because they were most likely to be infected with STIs and spread them not only among their clients but also to their wives, children and other prostitutes.<sup>862</sup>

Public health was certainly also a major concern of the eugenic feminists. In 1918, Ahlqvist, who worked closely with Karolina Eskelin, argued in her study *Kansan terveys* that the prostitution question must be considered in an entire network of social problems, such as alcohol abuse, poverty and poor health. Ahlqvist considered that STIs were a great problem especially among prostitutes and it endangered not only their personal health but also that of the general public. She gave as an example the transmission of gonorrhoea from mother to child. Not only the mother suffered but the child also paid for its mother's sickness.<sup>863</sup> Considered innocent victims, children or women infected by their husbands, who were clients of prostitutes, were a group which needed to be protected from the evil of prostitution, even by harsh measures. The defence of public health was the first priority, not least since Ahlqvist argued that this had a hereditary effect on the population.<sup>864</sup>

The second domain of biopower was the neutralization of individuals who were not productive anymore, for example through old age, accidents or anomalies. Foucault argued that rational mechanisms, like insurance, individual and collective savings or other safety measures, were introduced to combat this.<sup>865</sup> Foucault mainly discusses common measures of social policy. However, it is possible to expand this definition of neutralization of individuals to include eugenic measures, like education,

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<sup>859</sup> Foucault, *Society must be Defended*, p. 244.

<sup>860</sup> Ahlqvist, Ellen, *Om de veneriska sjukdomarna. Folkligt föredrag för kvinnor*, Helsinki 1906, p. 23.

<sup>861</sup> Sundquist, Kinberg, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning*, pp. 118-120.

<sup>862</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, p. 24.

<sup>863</sup> Ahlqvist, Ellen, *Kansan terveys, esitelmä naisten yleisessä siveellisyysskokouksessa*, Helsinki 1918, pp. 19-22.

<sup>864</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7ff.

<sup>865</sup> Foucault, *Society must be Defended*, p. 244.

institutionalization and sterilization. These also must be considered biopolitical measures to neutralize individuals who were not able to fulfil their capacity in society. The neutralization of prostitutes' harmful behaviour was central in the debate, as Kemp's study shows.<sup>866</sup> The measures were diverse and fitted to the individual case. Alma Sundquist argued for example that the sex education of fallen women must be a crucial part of the fight against prostitution.<sup>867</sup> In another publication with Julia Kinberg, Sundquist indirectly favoured forced examinations of prostitutes. However, they argued that since, at least in Sweden, this was not done thoroughly, education would tackle also the deeper social problems.<sup>868</sup>

The third domain of biopolitics which can also be detected in the prostitution question is the control over the relationship between humans and the environment. Foucault argues that the environment, geographical, climatic or hydrographic, was recognized as important for the body. Likewise, the creation of an unnatural environment, for example urbanization, was understood critically.<sup>869</sup> The environment and its effects played an important role in the prostitution question. Prostitution and the associated rise of STIs were mainly connected to urban environments. Although, Foucault puts the environment in a broader context, it is fruitful to apply it to a specific case, as I do here. The question of environment was controversially discussed in eugenics but its influence on social behaviour was never completely rejected. It rather gained more ground in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>870</sup>

In 1932, Danish Jo Jacobsen took a more critical stand on the influence of social environment. Jacobsen interpreted the capitalist class system as the core of the prostitution problem. Firstly, she argued against bourgeois double standards. On the one hand, men expected their wives to be sexless and on the other hand, they used prostitutes to meet their sexual needs. Secondly, she pointed out that most prostitutes were working class. Jacobsen did not make the crucial distinction between working class and under class used here. She argued that the capitalist system gave women no other choice than to prostitute themselves when they were unable to find employment.<sup>871</sup>

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<sup>866</sup> Kemp, *Prostitution*, p. 13.

<sup>867</sup> Sundquist, Alma, "De smittosamma könssjukdomarnas bekämpande och reglementeringen." In: *Rösträtt för kvinnor* 7 (1918), p. 2.

<sup>868</sup> Sundquist, Kinberg, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning*, p. 120.

<sup>869</sup> Foucault, *Society must be Defended*, p. 245.

<sup>870</sup> e.g. Kevles, Daniel, *In the Name of Eugenics. Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*, New York 1985.

<sup>871</sup> Jacobsen, *Seksualreform*, pp. 140-140.

Also, Karolina Widerström warned that low wages and lack of employment opportunities forced women into prostitution.<sup>872</sup> Here, we can see that the social, geographical and economic environment had an important impact on the prostitution debate. Eugenic feminists considered prostitutes a heterogeneous group, condemning their previously homogenous treatment. From the eugenic feminist point of view, the solution to the prostitution problem was to consider the individual and not lump them together as criminals. The eugenic feminists chose a much more bottom-up approach than the top-down one taken by politicians. Due to their work with the prostituting women, for example Ada Nilsson's described above, they had a greater in-depth knowledge of the actual situation in the poor districts in their cities, than the lawmakers, which gave them differentiated views.<sup>873</sup>

The prostitution debate, led by eugenic feminists in many aspects, was a striking example of how eugenics was an argument to advance the medicalization of social or criminal problems. At the same time, eugenics was one method of developing biopower and biopolitical actions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The individual body and its effects on the overall society became more important than ever. As described by Foucault, new techniques and mechanisms provided new possibilities to rationalize and control the individual body.<sup>874</sup> The new techniques and mechanisms offered alternatives to imprisonment or hard labour for the treatment of behaviour understood as socially abnormal, like prostitution. Now broader and more individual methods were proposed, like education, sterilization or institutionalization.

Eugenic feminists took a leading role in applying these new methods for many reasons. Firstly, they provided ambitious women from the middle class once again an opportunity of empowerment. As we have seen throughout the whole thesis, eugenic feminists took this opportunity, were open for new methods and considered them a way of influencing the public and political opinion. Secondly, the engagement of middle class women in reforming prostitution regulations gave them the chance to actively form the perception of the good woman. The eugenic feminists co-created images of female bodies by using eugenic categories of cleanliness, health and hygiene to establish an intersectional perspective along the categories of class, gender and race about the female value in and for society. Thus, it must be recognized that eugenic feminists in the Nordic

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<sup>872</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, p. 27.

<sup>873</sup> Nilsson, *Glimtar ur mitt liv*, p. 71.

<sup>874</sup> Foucault, *Society must be Defended*, p. 253.

countries in the early twentieth century were for once socially critical of the capitalist and patriarchal systems, by demanding more diverse perceptions of prostitutes in society.

#### 5.4. Sexually Transmitted Infections – The Unsanitary Others

Ellen Ahlqvist, who specialized in the treatment of tuberculosis, warned in *Kansan terveys* about a worldwide syphilis epidemic. She claimed that the number of syphilis infections had increased not only in Europe, but also in India, China and Latin America. Especially the urban centres were affected, Ahlqvist argued up to twenty per cent of men in Copenhagen between 20 and 30 years old were infected with syphilis.<sup>875</sup> During the early decades of the twentieth century the rising numbers of people with venereal diseases, in particular in the new urban centres, became a great concern of policy-makers and health care experts. The increased awareness of disease and its effects on the overall population was part of the general discourse about degeneration and population quality, as discussed above.<sup>876</sup>

Several publications in books or magazines provide extensive statistics about the type and increase of STIs and the most endangered groups. By looking at these statistics it soon becomes evident that the perception of people affected by STIs was based on three main social categories, class, gender and age. The Danish women's magazine *Kvinden og Samfundet* observed an increase of STIs in Europe after the First World War. According to the anonymous article 2.35 per cent of the children born in Austria between 1918 and 1921 were infected with syphilis. In Belgium 22 per cent of hospital patients were treated for STIs and Great Britain registered a total of 190,000 new cases of STIs every year since the First World War.<sup>877</sup>

The Danish physician Grethe Hartmann, who published in 1946 a study about sexual relations between Danish women and German troops during the occupation period, argued that around 1900 15-20 per cent of gonorrhoea cases and thirty per cent of syphilis cases were women. According to Hartmann, these numbers increased steadily until the beginning of the Second World War to 27 per cent for gonorrhoea and 35 per cent for syphilis infections. Hartmann explained this increase by arguing that promiscuity, which had previously only been common in the lower classes, was increasingly being

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<sup>875</sup> Ahlqvist, *Kansan terveys*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>876</sup> e.g. Levin, *Masken uti rosen*, pp. 44-45; Palmblad, *Medicinen som samhällslära*, p. 11.

<sup>877</sup> "Veneriske Sygdomme." In: *Kvinden og Samfundet* 1931.47, p. 12.

seen in all social classes.<sup>878</sup> Similar argumentation can also be found in Widerström's writing before the First World War.<sup>879</sup> So increasing promiscuity was not only understood to be connected with the social and cultural shock of the world wars.

Julia Kinberg, looking at statistics provided by the Stockholm health board, showed that overall infections with venereal diseases decreased between 1920 and 1928 by about 0.5 per cent. However, looking at the numbers divided by age groups, the infections of 15-20-year olds nearly doubled between 1920 and 1928 from 5.76 per cent to 9.47 per cent. The highest infection rate, about thirty per cent, can be found in 20-25-year olds in the Stockholm area. Kinberg also looked at the gender bias and concluded that women under 20 years old and men between 21 and 22 years old were most affected.<sup>880</sup>

An article in *Naisten ääni* argued that in 1905 7900 out of 100,000 inhabitants of the capital Helsinki were infected with an STI.<sup>881</sup> The great concern was not only the spread of sexual diseases among the current generation but especially the infection of children through their mothers. The article warned further that young married girls were particularly in danger of becoming infected, due to their own lack of knowledge and the previous sex life of their husbands.<sup>882</sup> The fact that women unknowingly got infected by their husbands and then transmitted the disease to their innocent children was a major concern for public health. The article quotes the Swiss physician Forel:

When a sick and weak child is born into the world, it is the societal obligation to take care of the management and mitigate its pains, but, he adds, 'the societal obligation is first and foremost to control and prevent the emergence of such children at all'.<sup>883</sup>

Control and prevention became an important part of the fight against STIs in the Nordic countries. The categorization of individuals was crucial here. Women and their sexuality were once more in the focus of the debate. While the eugenic feminists encouraged the

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<sup>878</sup> Hartmann, Grethe, *The Girls they left Behind. An Investigation into various Aspects of the German Troops' Sexual Relations with Danish Subjects*, Copenhagen 1946, p. 36.

<sup>879</sup> Widerström, *Något om uppföstrans*, p. 8.

<sup>880</sup> Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>881</sup> Söderman, Tyyne, "Pakkollisista Lääkärintodistuksista avioliittoon aikoville." In: *Naisten ääni* 1908.11/12, p. 157.

<sup>882</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>883</sup> "Kun sairas ja heikko lapsi on syntynyt maailmaan, on yhteiskunnan velvollisuus pitää huolta sen hoidosta ja lieventää sen tuskia, mutta, jatkaa hän, yhteiskunnan velvollisuus on ennen kaikkea valvoa, että tällaisten lasten syntyminen ehkäistään." *Ibid.*, p. 157.

prevailing view that prostitutes, rather than the men who used them, were the main cause of the spread of STIs, the most important actor in control and prevention was the doctor. From the nineteenth century, onwards physicians had more impact on the general public health debate. They became not only responsible for individual health but for the health of the population, which increased their societal position.<sup>884</sup>

The following subsections approach the eugenic feminist discourse on STIs from two different perspectives. First of all, the intersection of the social categories class, gender and age is analysed to identify who was considered victim or perpetrator in the perceived increase of venereal diseases. Then, I consider the people who discussed and analysed the STIs; physicians, politicians and social reformers. Two concepts are important in this context. Firstly, the interweaving of science and medicine resulted in the development of social medicine. Secondly, the concept of biopower is used to investigate motives and argumentations for social medicine.

#### 5.4.1. Intersectionality in the STI Discourse

An intersectional approach has proved especially useful in this study for establishing how eugenic feminists used social categories to promote eugenic measures. As Danish gender researcher Nina Lykke argues, intersectionality is mainly a tool for investigating historical power differences which are based on institutionally and structurally constructed social categories, and the different types of social inequalities these produce.<sup>885</sup> Lykke continues that intersectionality was developed as a methodological tool in post-colonial studies, emphasizing that white, middle class feminists constructed an idea of emancipation for all women and thus failed to acknowledge the difference of interests which arise from different cultural backgrounds.<sup>886</sup>

The discourse of venereal diseases from a eugenic feminist perspective embraced the transmission of female middle class ideas about promiscuity, sexuality and health upon lower classes. Married women were victimized as suffering under the sexual escapades of their husbands outside the marital bed and carrying with their children the burden of the diseases the husbands brought home. Women from the under class, in particular prostitutes, were partly seen as the cause for the families' miseries, though

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<sup>884</sup> Palmblad, *Medicinen som samhällslära*, p. 11.

<sup>885</sup> Lykke, *Feminist Studies*, p. 50.

<sup>886</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.



eugenic feminists sometimes argued that men should be included in the category of perpetrators and women as victims.<sup>887</sup>

Gender was thus the key category here. Ellen Ahlqvist, for example, argued that STIs were more serious for women, because the treatment was more complex, and many women carried the virus longer without showing any symptoms. This could not only lead to the transmission to their offspring but also caused infertility as such.<sup>888</sup> Still, men and their sexuality remained largely absent from the debate about the transmission of venereal diseases. It was self-evident for the eugenic feminists that prostitution was predominately connected to the female sex, although also male, in particular soldier prostitution was not uncommon, as described by Swedish historian Jens Rydström.<sup>889</sup>

Class was, besides gender, certainly an important aspect of the STI discussion. The under class, prostituting woman infected the middle class family through the middle class husband and thus destroyed the valuable and genetically clean members of society. Once more the under class was the perpetrator attacking the health and likewise the quality of the population.<sup>890</sup>

Social geography formed the next crucial category in the STI discussion. STIs were predominately understood as an urban threat. Poverty, crowded living conditions, industrial work environments which mixed the genders as well as loosening moralities were understood by policy-makers and social experts as factors increasing the spread of STIs.<sup>891</sup>

Age was another important category concerning STIs. As we have seen from the different statistics, young people in their twenties were at a higher risk of infection. Since this was also the age of the highest fertility, the threat to the current and the future generation was undebatable. In particular young people between 20 and 25 years old in the urban areas, for example in the Swedish capital Stockholm, were affected by STIs. However, the statistics did not mean this group were the most affected in general. It might also be possible that they more often sought treatment or were more aware of the existence of STIs than other ages or geographical groups.<sup>892</sup>

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<sup>887</sup> e.g. Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, p. 58ff.

<sup>888</sup> Ahlqvist, *Kansan tervelys*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>889</sup> See for more on the topic of male prostitution Rydström, Jens, *Simmers and Citizens. Bestiality and Homosexuality in Sweden, 1880- 1950*, Chicago 2003.

<sup>890</sup> e.g. Hartmann, *The Girls they left Behind*, p. 36; Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*.

<sup>891</sup> e.g. Kinberg, *Sexuell etik*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

An intersectional analysis with the social categories gender, class, social geography and age in mind is helpful because these categories were decisive in the recognition of victims and perpetrators in the debate about venereal diseases which captured the Nordic countries in the early twentieth century. Venereal diseases were understood as one of the main forces behind the decline in population quality. They were perceived as particularly dangerous, because they constituted not only a threat to the physical health of the patient, but also a moral decline. STIs were mainly connected with an unrestrained sex drive and promiscuity, which were considered both immoral and asocial.<sup>893</sup> Alma Sundquist and Julia Kinberg argued for example in their book *Handledning i sexuell undervisning och uppfostran* that STIs were regularly connected to other social problems, for example alcohol addiction:

The link between sexually transmitted diseases and alcohol abuse should also be inculcated in the public consciousness. As it is known, alcohol reduces, even if it is consumed in a moderate dose, self-control and judgment. [...] The danger of infection should be carefully considered. But it must not be exaggerated, so that, for example, a sexually infected person cannot be in the same room as a clean and reliable person.<sup>894</sup>

It is important to combine the analysis of gender in the STI discourse with the categories of class, age and social geography to understand why some women with STIs were identified as victims and others as perpetrators. STIs were regularly connected to immoral behaviour, as Ahlqvist shows. Karolina Widerström also argued that women who have illegitimate relationships more frequently have STIs, although they appear also in legitimate relationships.<sup>895</sup> Prostitutes were identified by many of the eugenic feminists discussed here as the main perpetrators of STIs within society. Julia Kinberg and Alma Sundquist argued that prostitutes were highly infectious:

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<sup>893</sup> e.g. Ahlqvist, *Om de veneriska sjukdomarna*.

<sup>894</sup> "Sambandet mellan könssjukdom och alkoholmissbruk bör även inskräpas i det allmänna medvetandet. Som bekan nedsätter alkoholen, även om den förtäres i rätt måttlig dos, själsbehärsningen och omdömesförmågan. [...] Smittfaran bör noga beaktas. Men den får ej heller överdrivas, så att man t.ex. ej vågar ha en könssjuk, men renlig och pålitlig person i samma rum." Sundquist, Kinberg, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning*, p. 117.

<sup>895</sup> Widerström, *Något om uppfostrans*, p. 3.

It is natural that these so-called prostituting women must be highly infectious, and also that must be the case with their clients.<sup>896</sup>

Prostitution and the prevention of STIs were most closely connected with each other.

As I have shown in Section 5.3., the eugenic feminists did not understand prostitutes as a homogenous group. Yet the problem of a high rate of infections existed among all prostitutes, voluntarily and involuntarily. Nevertheless, the main perpetrator was still considered the prostitute herself and less the male client, who carried only a share of the blame.<sup>897</sup> Sexuality outside the heteronormative boundaries and marriage seemed to be less a social or moral problem for men than for women. Male sexuality ranged outside social control here. A high sex drive for men and an active male sexuality was to a certain extent considered natural by the eugenic feminists.<sup>898</sup> This may explain why it did not appear as an option for eugenic feminists to restrict men's access to prostitutes or non-marital sex but to control the supply.

Eugenic feminists argued for a prophylactic approach to educate the people in preventing infection with STIs altogether. According to Karolina Widerström, prostitutes had to be educated to prevent their degenerative behaviour.<sup>899</sup> As Section 4.1. has shown, the women-led sex education movement considered education more suitable than force to improve the situation of the lower classes on many levels in the long term, also in the context of venereal diseases. This approach was eugenic-orientated by seeking to ensure and improve the eugenic health of the population in the future and not only to limit the damage done in the past.

An article in *Morgonbris* drew a direct connection between the lack of education, especially provided by the authorities, and the rise of STIs in the Nordic countries. The article argued that Norway and Denmark did not have an official programme of sex education and rising numbers of STIs could be observed especially among sailors and the military. Finland was seen as very interesting for implementing a programme in sex education to decrease venereal diseases. The article compared the Nordic development to the rest of the Western world and showed that most Western countries, like France, Germany, Great Britain or the United States, did not have official

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<sup>896</sup> "Det ligger i sakens natur att dessa s.k. prostituerade kvinnor måste vara i hög grad smittfarliga, liksom också att detta måste vara fallet med deras kundkrets." Kinberg, Sundquist, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning*, p. 118.

<sup>897</sup> Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, p. 28.

<sup>898</sup> e.g. Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, p. 98/ 132.

<sup>899</sup> Widerström, *Något om uppfostrans*, p. 9.

sex education programmes to decrease STIs. The article concluded that in countries with a low interest in the implementation of such a programme, usually the women showed an overall lack of interest in sex education.<sup>900</sup> Women were not only considered the main perpetrators and victims of venereal diseases but also the main persons responsible for resolving the crisis.

The eugenic feminists saw the measures taken by the patriarchal government, or mostly by the local authorities, as failed. The criminalization of STI infection was common practice in the Nordic countries in the early twentieth century. The transmission of STIs was considered a criminal offence.<sup>901</sup> Most officials and policy-makers contemplated it their responsibility to protect the population from diseases. STIs were seen as contributing to the ongoing degeneration, because they could lead to birth defects.<sup>902</sup> As the Norwegian women's magazine *Nylænde* showed, focusing on French prostitution control but with the overall European situation in mind, forced visits and examination by the authorities did not work anywhere. The authors were especially worried that the prospect of forced examination rather prevented women with STIs from seeing treatment than encouraging them.<sup>903</sup>

Interestingly enough, only few of the feminists discussed here took a stand against the average perception of individuals with STIs and combined this with an overall societal critique. Danish Jacobsen, who understood herself as a communist, blamed bourgeois morals and double standards for the rise of STIs in Denmark. The promotion of sex only within marriage, which other feminists saw as an important part of the fight against STIs, was for Jacobsen the main cause of venereal disease. She argued that sex only within marriage was against human sexual needs and would lead to a higher level of prostitution, which would increase the number of venereal infections that affect mostly the working class. Jacobsen demanded a new understanding of sexual problems and morals to solve the STI problem.<sup>904</sup>

Her Nordic colleagues, such as the Norwegian women's magazine *Nylænde*, took a similar stand. The magazine argued already in 1892 that women did not cause STIs

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<sup>900</sup> Thüring, Nelly, "Den sexuella hyienen." In: *Morgonbris*, 1924.4, p. 3.

<sup>901</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>902</sup> Björkman, Jenny, *Vård för samhällets bästa. Debatten om tvångsvård i svensk lagstiftning 1850–1970*, Stockholm 2001, pp. 162–165.

<sup>903</sup> "Den reglementerede prostitutions afskaffelse over det hele land." In: *Nylænde*, 01.10.1892, p. 254.

<sup>904</sup> Jacobsen, *Seksualreform*, pp. 161–167.

as such but "[...] that the reason for the spread of STIs was in the low societal morals."<sup>905</sup> The article continues that also the forced treatments, which were so frequent in all Nordic countries, were a sign of the defective morals of the time. It concluded that defective morals, not only individual but also among officials, have a serious effect on public health.<sup>906</sup> Yet, *Nylænde* advocated rather to return to bourgeois values, which they considered as lost in modernity, while Jacobsen demanded a revision of bourgeois sexual norms.

Still, Jacobsen surely represented a much more radical and anti-bourgeois view than the other feminists. Her criticism was directed openly towards the bourgeois and capitalist structures of modern Danish society. She reversed the notion of class and identified the bourgeoisie, with its moral double standards, as the main perpetrator in the STI discussion, and not the lower classes, as the other eugenic feminists did. Jacobsen moved the discussion of STIs away from a public health debate to a general critique of the capitalist system and argued that the capitalist-bourgeois institution of marriage was the main cause for the conflicted sexuality of many people, so only a redefinition of human relationships could solve the STI issue.<sup>907</sup> While the other eugenic feminists sought reform within the existing bourgeois social structures and considered a renewed form of the current system the most promising way to solve the public health issues related to venereal diseases, Jacobsen considered upending the entire social system, from bourgeois-capitalist notions to socialist structures, the only option to increase the public health and stop degeneration through STIs. This shows the flexibility of eugenic ideas, which could be fitted to any political system or social programme, since they promised future-orientated reforms and an overturning of the old, outdated systems.

Public health was the main concern in the STI debate. From the point of view of the eugenic feminists, free and sufficient health care provision, beside the already discussed education, was the main measure to prevent venereal diseases, as the next section will show. While many eugenic feminists condemned the official use of force in the Nordic countries, not all of them completely rejected it. Nevertheless, most eugenic feminists had a more inclusive form of care in mind, involving social and moral measures,

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<sup>905</sup> "[...] at grunden til de veneriska sygdommes udbredelse ligger i en daarlig samfundsmoral." Stoylen, Bernt, "Kvinderne og sædelighedslovgivningen." In: *Nylænde* 01.05.1895, pp. 106-107.

<sup>906</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>907</sup> Jacobsen, *Seksualreform*, pp. 150/ 166ff.

including the entire population, and not focusing on prostituting women as perpetrators alone.

#### 5.4.2. Dualism of Health Care and Social Control

Not only the understanding of who was the perpetrator or victim of STIs was important, but also the form of possible treatment became decisive. Swedish physician Alma Sundquist argued that the new female political influence would have a positive effect on the STI debate, because it encouraged a rethinking of the current health policies from a social and moral perspective.<sup>908</sup> In her perception that meant free health care for everyone and forced care and treatment for individuals with venereal diseases.

As the main weapon against the contagious venereal diseases must be regarded accessible and free medical care [...]. On the other hand, it must be possible to get some penal provisions and sanitary enforcement action, bearing in mind that when such interventions are necessary, they must be careful to ensure that the law-abiding among those sick do not experience any discomfort which would make them liable to avoid their voluntary participation, and secondly that the intervention is aimed at citizens.<sup>909</sup>

The role of the physician and the idea that social policy must be connected to medical treatment to achieve a comprehensive response to STIs and other diseases which were mainly connected to the lower classes was a turning point. It changed both medicine and social policy and led to the development of the idea of state-controlled health in the form of public health.<sup>910</sup>

Bryan Turner argues that the idea of social medicine originated in the eighteenth century and was connected with ideas of state intervention and mercantilism, an economic theory which promoted state intervention in the economy to extend national power. Public intervention in health matters was, according to Turner, connected to the overall development of a police force in the eighteenth century, which was primarily a public health police to observe the population in a paternalistic and authoritarian

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<sup>908</sup> Sundquist, "De smittosamma könssjukdomarnas", p. 2.

<sup>909</sup> "Som huvudvapen mot de smittosamma könssjukdomarna angivas i propositionen dels en för alla lätt tillgänglig och kostnadsfri sjukvård, [...]. I andra rummet komma en del straffbestämmelser och sanitära tvångsåtgärder under framhållande av att man vid ett sådant ingripande givetvis måste noga tillse, dels att detsamma såvitt möjligt icke bereder de laglydiga bland de, sjuka något obehag och därigenom riskerar att bortstöta deras frivilliga medverkan, dels och att ingripandet riktar sig mot medborgare av båda könen, så att likheten inför lagen icke äventyras." Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>910</sup> e.g. Palmblad, Eva, Eriksson, Bengt Erik, *Kropp och politik. Hälsoupplysning som samhällsspegel från 30- till 90-tal*, Stockholm 1995, p. 23ff.

manner.<sup>911</sup> The police also played a significant role in the treatment of STIs, in particular of infections by prostitutes. As part of the *lex veneris*, which was implemented in Sweden in 1918 to reduce infections with sexual diseases, for example, forced medical examinations and treatments were possible. Peter Baldwin argues that the *lex veneris* was a major step forward to an egalitarian health practice. According to him, the *lex veneris* was a classless and genderless law, which enabled all citizens' easy access to medical treatment and treated all citizens in the same way. For Baldwin, this was the "Scandinavian sonderweg" to an equal and egalitarian health care system in Sweden.<sup>912</sup>

However, Baldwin ignores the side effects, which were already condemned by contemporaries, like Karolina Widerström or Elise Ottesen-Jensen, who argued that the *lex veneris* encouraged the harsh treatment of lower classes under legal protection.<sup>913</sup> This was particularly significant for prostitutes, because they could be forcibly examined if they were arrested or monitored by the police. In reality forced examinations were not the norm, but if they took place it happened on a legal basis. Also, the forced treatment and hospitalization of individuals with STIs was possible under the *lex veneris*. Swedish sex educator Elise Ottesen-Jensen argued that the *lex veneris* was not only a class law but in particular a gender law. From her point of view, it was directly aimed at under class women and criminalized women with STIs. Ottesen-Jensen claimed that the law did not help to prevent STIs but rather enforced the spread of infections. In her view, particularly working class women sought medical help late, often too late, because they feared punishment or even imprisonment if they were diagnosed with a STI.<sup>914</sup>

Sweden was not the only country with measures against STIs and likewise prostitution. Both were often closely intertwined and mainly directed at women from the lower classes, as Ottesen-Jensen showed. Elisabeth Koren argues in her study about venereal diseases that all women, who expressed their sexuality outside the societal norms, which meant outside marriage, were frequently defined as prostitutes.<sup>915</sup> This was one reason despite the fact that women often went in and out of working as prostitutes according to their economic need, as Section 5.3 showed.

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<sup>911</sup> Turner, Bryan S., *Regulating Bodies. Essays in Medical Sociology*, London/ New York 1992, p. 129.

<sup>912</sup> Baldwin, Peter, *Contagion and the State in Europe, 1830-1930*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 400-408.

<sup>913</sup> e.g. Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 51ff.

<sup>914</sup> Ottesen-Jensen, *Könslagarnas offer*, pp. 19-22.

<sup>915</sup> Koren, Elisabeth S, "Från oral till hälsa? Debatter om förebyggande av könssjukdom i Norge." In: Jansdotter, Anna, Svanström, Yvonne, *Sedligt, renligt, lagligt. Prostitution i Norden 1880-1940*, Stockholm 2007, p. 177.

Sweden was one of the few countries which enacted a national law to fight venereal diseases. In most other countries, the burden lay on the local officials. In Norway for example, the city of Kristiania, later Oslo, offered free treatment for individuals infected with STIs, after the city had abolished its prostitution regulations in 1888.<sup>916</sup> Here a shift away from the exclusive targeting of prostitutes to a wider targeting of generally infected persons could be seen. However, most people receiving treatment were still prostitutes. The Norwegian city of Bergen, for example, kept its prostitution regulations in the early twentieth century and focused consciously on prostitutes as the main perpetrators in the spread of STIs.<sup>917</sup>

Vibeke Erichsen argues that the involvement of the state in health questions is deeply rooted in the Scandinavian or Nordic system. Erichsen approaches this from three theoretical perspectives. Firstly, she names the modernization theory. In context of economic and political modernization in the early twentieth century scientific progress became part of the welfare state development. Health care research was especially important in the public context. Secondly, Erichsen reasons that political theory was important in the formation of health care in relation to the social interest and political conflict, as well as the focus of political parties on particular interest or social groups, in this case young prostituting women or individuals with sexually-transmitted diseases. Thirdly, Erichsen concludes with the state structure theory, which discusses the reformation of the state in form of autonomous actors, in this case doctors or police responsible for public health matters.<sup>918</sup>

Erichsen's examples show that the Nordic countries had a long tradition of state involvement in presumably private matters, like infection with sexual diseases. It might be assumed that it was the responsibility of the individual to keep his or her own body healthy and that personal health had no effect on the overall society, especially not in the early twentieth century in the absence of tax-financed health care. Yet, already in the 1870s, the first health care acts were implemented in Sweden and Norway, to decrease the spread of infectious diseases, not only STIs.<sup>919</sup>

Nevertheless, the eugenic debates were a starting point for the increasing interest of the state in individual matters, in particular health. The work to improve

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<sup>916</sup> Koren, "Från oral till hälsa?" pp. 170-171.

<sup>917</sup> Ibid., p. 170

<sup>918</sup> Erichsen, Vibeke, "States and Health Care. Scandinavian Welfare State Research." In: *European Journal of Political Research* 23 (1993), p. 389.

<sup>919</sup> Palmblad, *Medicinen som samhällslära*, p. 10.



hygiene was intended to better not only individual situations but also the health of society. These reforms came with the idea of wholesomeness. Health reform was to include a reorganization of mental and social life according to the latest scientific ideas.<sup>920</sup> This correlated closely with the eugenic feminist demands for an all-embracing approach to the fight against STIs. As the previous section showed, education in health, sex and behaviour was to transform the individual's behaviour to not only treat STIs but also prevent them. This happened in a time when most state officials concentrated on the treatment but not on the prevention of diseases.

Health, health improvement and in particular the improvement of sexual health and the prevention of the wider spread of sexually-transmitted diseases, was important in the modernizing and industrializing Nordic societies based on a capitalist system. The population had to be kept healthy in the present and the future workforce had to be born to healthy mothers. This can especially be seen in the focus on women as mothers and the effect of the infection on the unborn child in STI discourse.<sup>921</sup> The connection of state and health care was often marked by some degree of violation of individual civil rights to preserve the overall health of the community. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, in the context of the British public health discourse, that the undemocratic foundation of democracy can nowhere be seen more clearly than in discussions which locate the body on the periphery of private and public: modern medicine and public health.<sup>922</sup> This statement certainly not only applied to the British context but also, maybe even more, to the Nordic context as universalism and welfare models emerged. The forced examinations and treatments of individuals with venereal diseases under the *lex veneris* in Sweden between 1919 and 1938 was just one example.

Alva and Gunnar Myrdal argued that prophylactic social policy, which included also health care, had a direct impact on population quality. They continued that it is more important to increase the quality than the quantity, for humanitarian, social and economic reasons.<sup>923</sup> However, the Myrdals suggested this form of state-led prophylactic social and health policy only in the mid-1930s. The preceding period, which is more crucial in this study and was also more defined by concern about STIs, showed rather confusion about responsibilities regarding public health. It seemed rather clear that the

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<sup>920</sup> Palmblad, *Medicinen som samhällslära*, p. 12.

<sup>921</sup> e.g. Widerström, *Kvinnohygien II*, p. 16; Eskelin, *Gynekologisk sjukvård*, p. 65; Ahlqvist, *Kansanterveys*, p. 13ff.

<sup>922</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 44.

<sup>923</sup> Myrdal, Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, pp. 205/ 238ff.

previous system of targeting the sick only was not sufficient anymore. However, it was also not yet clear how an all-embracing health care system, targeting the healthy and the sick, could be enacted on the national level.

As I have argued throughout this study, while women, in particular the feminists interested in eugenics, often introduced new ideas into health care, they were also part of enacting the state-led control, partially in the form of public violence. Once more this was the case in terms of prostitutes infected with venereal diseases. It was in particular the task of women to inflict this kind of public violence on the individual. One of the main tasks of the first women in the police force (which was founded in Sweden since 1908, Denmark in 1917 and Finland in 1926) was to take over the control of and arrest female vagabonds and prostitutes and to exercise the *lex veneris* in Sweden. The woman police officers, called *Polissyster* [police sisters] in Swedish, did not have the same rights as their male counterparts until 1957 and were only responsible for tasks concerning women and children, such as body searches, searches of women's houses or taking children into custody.<sup>924</sup>

Women were also involved in the exercise of public violence against women in the context of sexual diseases in medical treatment. As discussed by Ulrika Nilsson, gynaecology was regarded as the most suitable medical specialization for the first-generation female doctors in the late nineteenth century.<sup>925</sup> Nearly all medically educated feminists discussed in this thesis, including Karolina Widerström, Julia Kinberg, Dida Dederding and Karolina Eskelin, were indeed specialized in women's medicine. This contributed to their direct impact on the exercise of the state-imposed regulations of sexuality, especially female sexuality, for example in the form of forced examinations and treatments in the suspicion of STIs. These women, who fought on the one hand for women's rights, on the other hand actively took part in the exercise of restriction on female rights through the state and the patriarchal system.<sup>926</sup>

This might seem a paradox, but it was not. It rather leads back to the importance of an intersectional analysis of societies discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The eugenic feminists widely rejected the state-imposed regulation systems directed primarily against women, that is, prostitutes. They emphasized the importance

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<sup>924</sup> e.g. "Vi måste ha kvinnliga poliser." In: *Tidevarvet* 1929.06, p. 2.

<sup>925</sup> Nilsson, *Det heta könet*, p. 56.

<sup>926</sup> e.g. Wessel, Merle, "Female Doctors, Public Health and Prophylactic Health Care." In: Kananen, Johannes, Bergenheim, Sophy, Wessel, Merle (eds.), *Conceptualising Public Health. Historical and Contemporary Struggles over Key Concepts*, London 2018, pp. 33-45.

of a differentiated view of female prostitutes and their contribution to the spread of venereal diseases, as Section 5.3 showed.

I have discussed in depth in this section how the prostitution question and the discussion of STIs were closely intertwined. Prostituting women were considered starting point for the STI epidemics the Nordic countries appeared to experience in the early twentieth century. After the decriminalization of prostitution, the spread of STIs was still criminalized, for example through the *lex veneris* in Sweden. Yet again, these laws were mainly aimed at under class and working class women and intended to protect the middle class, which was seen as more valuable from a biological point of view, I argue. The eugenic feminists opposed this legislation and argued that not force but education was the way to stop the spread of STIs. The aim was to teach women to protect themselves against STIs, recognize if they might already have a venereal disease and prevent it spreading to their offspring.

Another area of great concern was the health of children. Since STIs, like syphilis and gonorrhoea, were likely to be transmitted from mother to child during the pregnancy and could cause severe disabilities, like deafness or blindness, not only the current but also the next generation was in danger. From a eugenic point of view this was catastrophic. By educating women about the detection and prevention of STIs, the eugenic feminists aimed to enhance the independence and responsibility of women about their own health and the health of their children, for the greater good of the population as a whole. The eugenic feminists aimed through the education of the individual woman on the micro level to contribute to the health of the population on a macro level. The positioning of women at the centre of the discourse contributed to the emancipation of women. Firstly, they were able to take control over their own health through the information provided by the health and hygiene educators. Secondly, by also making them responsible for the health of the children and thus the future of the population, they gave women a place in modern society and in the context of the discourse about eugenics, degeneration and the population question.<sup>927</sup>

Still, this certainly was not without a backlash. Women who did not take on the responsibility imposed on them by the eugenic feminists, could easily fall into the group of reckless eugenic polluters, which would also not save from the harsh measures, like segregation and sterilization, supported by eugenic feminists. This was a slippery

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<sup>927</sup> e.g. Wessel, "Female Doctors".

slope for many women, in particular from the lower working class, who faced severe social problems. Despite showing a greater understanding of lower class women, the eugenic feminists also demonstrated little understanding for women who did not meet their education standards. Eugenic feminists were part of the overall eugenic and degeneration discourse and largely supported the restrictive treatments suggested by authorities, even if that required sacrifices from the individual for the good of the collective.

### 5.5. Feeble-mindedness and Mental Illness – Solving Self-Created Problems

The mental health of the individual was a fluid concept, which, according to Foucault, underwent a transformation in the nineteenth century in the context of the conceptualization of normality. Foucault argues that a new interaction between the legal and the medical institutions resulted in a medicalization of disorders previously treated as criminal: more and more people who would have been imprisoned beforehand were hospitalized in the nineteenth century.<sup>928</sup> The medical institutions were aimed at dangerous individuals, who were not physically ill but also not criminal in the sense of the criminal code, so it was felt that society had to be protected from them.<sup>929</sup> The eugenic debates around mental health were led by the transformation of mental illness from being a criminal offence to being recognized as a disorder which needed medical treatment. The discourse focused on defining normality and abnormality in eugenic terms.

Mental health was an extremely unclearly defined concept in the eugenic discourse. It constituted a variety of different ideas and terms, which must be carefully examined. The most common terms which appeared in the debate were mental illness, mental disability, physical disability and feeble-mindedness. All four terms constituted a different form of abnormality. However, they all defined the diagnosed individual as different from the overall society and in need of special attention by the authorities. In some cases, for example diagnosis with a mental illness, this was only short term but in cases of mental or physical disability and feeble-mindedness it was usually long term, or for life.

Mental health was also closely intertwined with the discussion of social problems. In a lecture held at the anti-criminality week conference in Helsinki in 1934,

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<sup>928</sup> Foucault, *Abnormal*, p. 32.

<sup>929</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Väinö Mäkelä discussed the connection between crime, mental illness and alcohol abuse.<sup>930</sup> This link was commonly made, not only by Mäkelä, but also by his more prominent colleague the German psychiatrist Gustav Aschaffenburg.<sup>931</sup> Mäkelä argued that criminal acts could frequently be traced back to mental illnesses. In his view, individuals suffering from mental illnesses often also showed moral defects, which lead them to commit crimes more easily.<sup>932</sup> He also defined alcohol abuse as mental illness, arguing that alcohol poisoned the nerves, which effected logical thinking. So-called alcohol hallucination, according to Mäkelä, was a mental illness caused by alcohol abuse and can result in violent acts, like murder or suicide. However, he concluded:

Furthermore, it must be remembered and constantly borne in mind that mental illness is in no way anything shameful or criminal, but that it is a disease like any other, and that is due to their illness, it must be maintained.<sup>933</sup>

As Mäkelä described it in his lecture, mental illness was not only a private medical condition but, due to its possible threat to the population, also needed public consideration. Especially the possible link to criminal behaviour, which could include capital crimes by men but also prostitution by women, was concerning. During the period discussed in this study mental health care was very much underdeveloped and consisted largely of segregation and institutionalization. Effective therapies were rarely available. Psychoanalysis, which was introduced in the late nineteenth century by the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, was only beginning to be applied slowly to psychiatric care. Institutionalization of individuals who were seen as socially dangerous was intended to protect both society from the individual and the individual from societal threats which might have caused his or her mental difficulties.<sup>934</sup>

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<sup>930</sup> The conference (7-11 January 1934, Helsinki) was an international event, which not only had prominent participants from Finland, like Harry Federley, but also speakers, like the Swedish criminal expert Olof Kinberg.

<sup>931</sup> e.g. Aschaffenburg, *Das Verbrechen und seine Bekämpfung*, p. 78.

<sup>932</sup> Mäkelä, Väinö, "Psykyllisten häiriöiden synnystä sekä mielisairauksien ja rikollista tekojen suhteesta toisiinsa." In: *Rikollisuus ja sen vastustamismahdollisuudet. Rikollisuuden vastustamisviikolla Helsingissä tammikuun 7-12 päivinä 1934*, Helsinki 1935, p. 67.

<sup>933</sup> "Edelleen on muistettava ja alituisen muistettava, että mielitauksissa ei ole millään tavalla mitään häpeällistä tahi rikollista, vaan että ne ovat sairauksia niin kuin muutkin ja että sairauden takia on heistä huollettava." Ibid., pp. 83-84.

<sup>934</sup> e.g. Björkman, *Vård för samhällets bästa*, p. 201; Boréus, Kristina, "Discursive Discrimination of the 'Mentally Deficient' in Interwar Sweden." In: *Disability & Society* 21/ 5 (2006), pp. 441-454.

This section concentrates on two main questions which were particularly important in the eugenic feminist discourse about mental health: the notion of normal and abnormal, and the idea of feeble-mindedness. Feeble-mindedness was a particularly important concept in the overall eugenic discourse. Although it is not possible to give a clear definition of feeble-mindedness as defect, it described more or less a form of social disability; individual asocial behaviour which threatened the overall well-being of society caused by a disturbance of the mind.<sup>935</sup> This was important since in opposition mental illness was often considered as an interaction between society and the individual, both of which needed protecting from each other. Individuals were made sick by the social conditions, like industrialization, industrial work processes or urban poor living conditions. Degeneration as result of mental illness was defined through an interaction of genetic disposition and environmental influences. Yet institutionalization was also costly for society, but there was little alternative due to the lack of other treatment possibilities.

Institutions played a crucial role in defining normality. Mental hospitals, hospitals in general, asylums or schools, were very often the first who observed behaviour as normal or abnormal or even feeble-minded. It was also in the context of these institutions that sterilizations were first demanded and carried out. This was partly done illegally before the Nordic sterilization legislation in the 1930s and more frequently after the implementation of these laws, when sterilizations were extensively carried out on institutionalized individuals, as I will show at the end of this chapter.<sup>936</sup>

Neither the actors nor the targets of these measures assigned mental health a specific gender. However, it might be said that male experts were more active in debates about mental health than women, usually due to the fact that women rarely worked in mental institutions and nearly never as psychologists or psychiatrists. Swedish physician Ada Nilsson, for example, described in her autobiography how she was not able to work in a mental hospital and had to change career to gynaecology, because the mental hospitals did not accept female doctors in the early twentieth century.<sup>937</sup>

Nevertheless, experts assigned very specific attributes to men and women as targets for mental health measures. Male mental defects were widely associated with criminality and female mental defects with sexuality for example, in the context of

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<sup>935</sup> e.g. O'Brien, Gerald V., *Framing the Moron. The Social Construction of Feeble-Mindedness in the American Eugenic Era*, Manchester 2013, p.1

<sup>936</sup> e.g. Broberg, Tydén, "Eugenics in Sweden", pp. 117-119.

<sup>937</sup> Nilsson, *Glimtar ur mitt liv*, p. 37.

prostitution, neglect of female duties like motherhood and overall low morality.<sup>938</sup> Immoral behaviour was a typical diagnosis for actually mentally ill and mentally disabled women in sterilization applications in Sweden in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>939</sup> However, in men and women, the origin of the mental disorder was often found in an abnormal sexuality, as several experts claimed.<sup>940</sup> Normal or abnormal behaviour was widely defined by looking at sexuality, so that it might not be going too far to claim that sexuality was one of the leading aspects which defined social and asocial behaviour and likewise normality and abnormality.

#### 5.5.1. Concepts of Normality and Abnormality

Wendy Kline argues that the invention of the moron constituted a turn in the perception about normality and abnormality and made morality a leading concept in the debate. According to Kline, the understanding of normality was based on moral purity the one hand, and on the other hand on the mental capability of the individual.<sup>941</sup> Kline then takes her argumentation a step further. She claims that eugenicists generated a new understanding of social and scientific efficiency and likewise generated a new target group, women. Kline continues that women who qualified as normal were allowed to be reproductive in the context of the aim for population improvement and women classified as abnormal were restricted in their reproduction to ensure that their abnormality could not be transmitted to their offspring.<sup>942</sup>

To justify Kline's bold claim, which basically cannot be dismissed, a sharper definition of normal and abnormal in the context of eugenics must be found. It is true that eugenics did focus on so-called abnormalities among women, especially in the context of reproduction. However, in particular in the area of mental health, men were also recognized as eugenic polluters in form of criminal behaviour.<sup>943</sup> The symptoms used to define abnormality were gendered. Male abnormality was defined through alcohol and drug abuse as well as personal misbehaviour, such as criminality or irregular working

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<sup>938</sup> Eivergård, Mikael, "Bör först steriliseras. Anstalt, patient och steriliseringar vid Salberga." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Johannisson, Karin, Tydén, Mattias (eds.), *Fem uppsatser om steriliseringen i Sverige*, Lund 2000, p. 124.

<sup>939</sup> Ahlbeck-Rehn, Jutta, *Diagnostisering och disciplinering. Medicinsk diskurs och kvinnligt vainsinne på Sjäälö hospital 1889-1944*, Åbo 2006, p. 41.

<sup>940</sup> e.g. Kinberg, *Varför bli människor brottsliga?* p. 52; Essen-Möller, Elis, *Sterilisationsfrågan. Några social-mediciniska och etiska synpunkter*, Stockholm 1922.

<sup>941</sup> Kline, *Building a better Race*, p. 25.

<sup>942</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>943</sup> e.g. Aschaffenburg, *Das Verbrechen und seine Bekämpfung*; Kinberg, *Varför bli människor brottsliga?*

relationships. Female abnormality was defined through depression, sexual frigidity or paranoia.<sup>944</sup>

In the medical construction of mental illness, the economic aspects played a significant role. As Maija Runcis shows, institutionalized men were considered at least able to do some unskilled labour to contribute to their livelihood. Women, however, lived only at the cost of society, either in institutions or through reckless reproduction, if their disturbed sexuality was not medically controlled. The consequences of female abnormality were seen as having a greater social impact than male abnormality. Not only the woman herself but also her offspring might be affected by her mental disorder. Eugenicists considered the risk of mothers passing on their abnormality to their children more often than the risk that fathers would do so. A mother might not be able to fulfil her role as the main carer of her children sufficiently when she suffered from a mental illness.<sup>945</sup> This constituted a threat to the current but also the future population, which was a great concern for eugenicists in the context of degeneration. Kline's claim that eugenicists singled out women in the debate about abnormality must be revised here. Abnormality was a gendered concept, and while eugenicists also paid some attention to men, they did this in different ways, with biological as well as social differences in mind.

Nonetheless, before we come to the concrete division of male and female abnormality, it appears wise to take a short look at the overall debate about normality and abnormality in the context of eugenics. Previous research presents a rather unified picture. Frequently asocial, oversexualized or violent behaviour or mental deficiency were understood to be the main characteristics for being identified as abnormal.<sup>946</sup> From my point of view, these definitions only scratch the surface of how abnormality was really defined. The unclear concepts which are frequently accepted without question by researchers studying eugenics rather cause more confusion than providing a solution.

When one takes a closer look at the argumentation of male as well as female eugenicists, one component appeared with regularity; the lack of productivity of individuals classified as abnormal. Productivity was understood as both a cause and

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<sup>944</sup> Ahlbeck-Rehn, *Diagnostisering och disciplinering*, p. 48.

<sup>945</sup> Runcis, Maija, "Sinneslöhet som samhällsproblem." In: *Historisk Tidskrift* 2 (1998), p. 552.

<sup>946</sup> e.g. Eivergård, Mikael, "Bör först steriliseras", pp. 121–141; Engwall, Kristina, "Steriliseringspolitiken tillämpning på Västra Mark." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Johannisson, Karin, Tydén, Mattias (eds.), *Fem uppsatser om steriliseringen i Sverige*, Lund 2000, pp. 93–120; Boréus, Kristina, "Discursive Discrimination of the 'Mentally Deficient' in Interwar Sweden."



consequence of abnormality. The Norwegian eugenicist Jon Alfred Mjøen, for example, argued that:

The loss of capacity of work through tuberculosis infected may be assessed at ca. 28m kr. The children who die each year of tuberculosis have cost the country over 1m kr. in catering and education.<sup>947</sup>

Tuberculosis was not considered mental illness then, nor is it now. Yet, the concept of abnormality went beyond mental illness and was defined through deficiencies which prevented individuals from living a normative life. Thus, tuberculosis could be a factor which constituted abnormality because it was connected to uncleanliness and an unhygienic life, as well as the infected person's long-term inability to work. They could not be productive themselves but care for them was expensive for society.<sup>948</sup>

Similar observations were made about criminality. Especially in Finland, female eugenicist medical experts took an interest in the connection between manhood, criminality and abnormality, and its social effects. This was somewhat different from the other Nordic countries, where male scientists and physicians, like Olof Kinberg in Sweden, Christian Keller in Denmark or Jon Alfred Mjøen in Norway, studied male forms of abnormality. In particular, the Finnish nurse Karin Neumann-Rahn and the Finnish psychiatrist Rakel Jalas published academic articles about male criminality. They focused on the overall appearance of criminality as caused by mental illness, the intervention of the state and its economic effects.<sup>949</sup>

Karin Neumann-Rahn, in an article published in 1935, gave a rather grim prediction of the future of the Finnish population:

Our society is filled with anxious and depressed people. A general concern and nervous tension can also be seen in increased unemployment and shortage of money. In turn, this leads to a struggle of all against all, in the form disbelief, hatred, corruption, and crime.<sup>950</sup>

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<sup>947</sup> "Den arbeidskraft som tuberkulosen aarlig berøver landet, kan ansættes til en værdi av ca. 28 mill.kr. De barn som aarlig dør av tuberkulose har kostet landet over 1 mill.kr. i forpleining og utdannelse." Mjøen, *Rasehygiene*, p. 159.

<sup>948</sup> e.g. Björkman, *Vård för samhällets bästa*, p. 143.

<sup>949</sup> Neumann-Rahn, "Ett led i brottslighetens profylax", p. 286; Jalas, Rakel, "Maalaiskuntien mielisairashoidon järjestyksestä maassamme." In: *Sosiaalinen aikakauskirja* 25 (1931), p. 271.

<sup>950</sup> "Vårt samhälle är uppfyllt av nervösa och deprimerade människor. En allmän oro gör sig märkbar och nervspänningen ökas av arbetslösheten och pennknappheten. I sin tur utmynnär detta i en allas kamp mot alla, i misstro, hat, korruption och brott." Ibid., p. 285.

She concluded that mental hospitals will soon no longer be able to cope with the influx of patients. Neumann-Rahn insisted that there was a link between criminality and a pathological mentality, which was connected for example to temper problems, an unbalanced life, alcohol abuse, social misbehaviour, and physical and mental illness. She further argued that the sickness often only received medical attention when it had already become chronic, which was very often connected to the poor economic situation of the families.<sup>951</sup> Neumann-Rahn's linking of poverty, mental illness and genetics was not unique but followed widely the Nordic, and also European, discussion during this period.<sup>952</sup>

Neumann-Rahn's argumentation was also closely related to the discussion of criminality by the Swedish psychiatrist Olof Kinberg. He argued that while mental illness can also be seen a result of genetics, self-inflicted mental disorders, for example through alcohol abuse, are also very common.<sup>953</sup> Furthermore, he also took up the problem of care for mentally ill criminals and mental patients in general. He argued that a great number of prisoners in Sweden are mentally ill, but prisons are not the right place for them. However, also mental hospitals were usually not the right institution for mentally ill criminals, because they were reserved for mentally ill people without criminal tendencies. He concluded that a new legal category must be developed to care for the rising number of mentally ill criminals as a separate category. A special section in a prison was one option he proposed.<sup>954</sup>

The conceptualization of normality and abnormality, as well as of different forms of mental illness, were rather undefined, as we can see in these examples. Even perceived experts, like Kinberg and Neumann-Rahn, but also others like the Swedish eugenicist Herman Lundborg and Finnish eugenicist Harry Federley, defined new categories for abnormality in their works rather than finding solutions or cures.<sup>955</sup> Their works were rather marked by raising new issues and providing a wider understanding of different categories of abnormality than actually solving any of these problems.

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<sup>951</sup> Neumann-Rahn, "Ett led i brottslighetens profylax", pp. 285–287.

<sup>952</sup> e.g. Jalas, "Maalaiskuntien mielisairashoidon järjestelystä maassamme"; Jalas, Rakel, "Tilastollinen tutkimus mielisairaista ja vajaamielisistä on tarpeen." In: *Sosiaalinen aikakauskirja* 27 (1933), pp. 293–29; Kinberg, Sundquist, *Handledning i sexuell undervisning*; Hjort, Bodil, "Medicinsk biologisk familjeforskning."

<sup>953</sup> Kinberg, *Brottslighet och sinnesjukdom*, p. 129.

<sup>954</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166ff.

<sup>955</sup> e.g. Kinberg, *Varför bli människor brottsliga?*; Lundborg, Herman, "The Danger of Degeneracy." pp. 531–539; Federley, "Brottsligheten som biologisk företeelse." pp. 8–33.

Nevertheless, Neumann-Rahn connected three important aspects in the discussion about abnormality: the effects on society as well as from society, the definition of social problems as medical, in particular mental conditions, and the impact of economics from the perspective of both society and the individual.<sup>956</sup> Mental institutions, usually state-financed and governed, were the main actors in the classification of normality and abnormality. This had the effect that inmates of mental institutions were perceived as a social burden, because the institutions were tax-financed. It also had a rather abstract effect: the state acted in the creation of its own inmates. It defined the categories of who had to be kept in an institution and acted with paternalistic governmentality as biopower over the individual's life.<sup>957</sup>

Swedish historian Maija Runcis, in an article about mental health care in Sweden, describes how care for the mentally ill changed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She argues that around 1800 mostly female philanthropists cared for the ill and by 1900 social policy pioneers had taken over this task and created state-led institutions.<sup>958</sup>

The state took on the role of categorizer of normality and abnormality, but also the role of carer. This meant state organs were responsible for deciding who would be institutionalized and who would be discharged, and under what conditions. Sterilization, especially after it was legalized in the 1930s in the Nordic countries, became a common condition for individuals to be released from mental institutions. This especially affected women, who were more likely to be institutionalized. Men, whose abnormality was usually directly connected to a crime, were more likely to be found in prison and were released without conditions after serving their time. In contrast, women disappeared into mental institutions, on a legal basis but without charges or any date of release.

As Foucault argues, modernity showed a shift in the recognition of what was normal and what was abnormal. Previously medical and juridical actors had worked separately in the definition of normality, but in modernity they were united in creating the normal and abnormal, and also techniques for normalization.<sup>959</sup> The juridical-medical power was implemented, Foucault shows, and every criminal required a psychological

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<sup>956</sup> Neumann-Rahn, "Ett led i brottslighetens profylax", p. 285/287/292.

<sup>957</sup> Deutscher, "Reproductive Politics", p. 219.

<sup>958</sup> Runcis, "Sinneslöhet som samhällsproblem", p. 551.

<sup>959</sup> Foucault, *Abnormal*, p. 33.

report in court.<sup>960</sup> In this context, the juridical and medical, or more closely defined psychological, power was transformed into the power of normalization.<sup>961</sup> Criminals were not only punished anymore but it became the task of the prison to transform their abnormal or asocial behaviour into normal behaviour again.

To give a full picture of the concepts of normality and abnormality in the eugenic feminist discourse, gender must be introduced as important social category. As we have seen, the notion of abnormality, and likewise its antithesis normality, was foremost based on gender but also on other social categories, in particular the social status of an individual. Abnormal behaviour, such as criminality or prostitution, was connected to social problems, arising from the social environment but also the genetic disposition. The discussion of abnormal and normal was marked by a strong interaction of the medical and the social, and in particular a medicalization of the social. Social problems, arising from bad living conditions and poverty, like capital crimes or the prostitution of unemployed women, were pathologized. Correction through medical treatment was seen as needed to normalize the individual's behaviour again.

#### 5.5.2. The Construction of Feeble-mindedness

To take one step further in the discussion of the construction of normality and abnormality, we must look at the concept of feeble-mindedness, which frequently served as a medical diagnosis for abnormality. Feeble-mindedness as a concept arose in the context of eugenic debates in the Western world in the late nineteenth century. It was not a fixed concept at all but rather a description of an individual, whose behaviour, whether sexual, social or criminal, harmed the general well-being of society.<sup>962</sup> Gerald O'Brien shows, in his study about feeble-mindedness in American eugenics, that it was often used as diagnosis to justify social control over individuals who had not committed a crime as such yet, but were considered likely to do so in the future.<sup>963</sup> The diagnosis in this definition was a method of prophylactic precaution to prevent possible future harm to society.

Tage Kemp for example, in his study about prostitution in Copenhagen in the 1930s discussed in Section 5.3, provided several international statistics about the

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<sup>960</sup> Foucault, *Abnormal*, p. 40.

<sup>961</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>962</sup> Ziegler, "Eugenic Feminism", p. 218.

<sup>963</sup> O'Brien, *Framing the Moron*, p. 1.

mental constitution of prostitutes. These demonstrated that often 30-50 per cent of prostitutes were considered feeble-minded, which was a separate category in the statistics, besides mental illness, mental disability or psychopathy.<sup>964</sup> Feeble-mindedness was not only a medical condition but also a social deficiency. The *British Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded* defined feeble-minded individuals in 1908 as

persons, who may be capable of earning a living under favourable circumstances, but are incapable from mental defect, existing from birth or from an early age, of competing on equal terms with their normal fellows, or of managing themselves and their affairs with ordinary prudence.<sup>965</sup>

The feeble-minded individual, according to this definition, was someone who had a certain mental deficiency, but was neither mentally ill nor disabled, as such. With some support and guidance, which could be given as social control, the feeble-minded could indeed be a valuable member of society. However, without this prophylactic guidance and control, the individual could easily become a social harm.

Feeble-mindedness appeared as a common diagnosis in mental hospitals. Maija Runcis argues that the concept was current between 1860 and 1960 and mainly described a societal problem.<sup>966</sup> Further, she explains that the diagnosis was mainly based on a so-called intelligence test which tested the work ability, educational level and overall performance of the patient.<sup>967</sup> O'Brien defines the feeble-minded rather simplistically as a community of undesirables.<sup>968</sup> This definition might appear vague but it both captures the real vagueness of the contemporary concept and provides a striking definition of a group of individuals who had not committed any kind of crime, but the authorities had to conceptually justify social control over them.<sup>969</sup> O'Brien does specify his definition a bit more by arguing that the principal target group diagnosed with feeble-mindedness were persons who would be described as mentally or intellectually disabled today.<sup>970</sup>

Nevertheless, feeble-mindedness must be understood as a social disability as well as mental one, because contemporaries emphasized the position of the individual in society more than the individual's medical constitution. Mental deficiency was only

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<sup>964</sup> Kemp, *Prostitution*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>965</sup> Bartley, Paula, *Prostitution Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914*, London 2000, p. 121.

<sup>966</sup> Runcis, "Sinneslöhet som samhällsproblem", p. 547.

<sup>967</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 550.

<sup>968</sup> O'Brien, *Framing the Moron*, p. 82.

<sup>969</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>970</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

one manifestation of asocial behaviour, like stealing, prostituting, or immorality, which meant usually women with illegitimate children. Sociologist James W. Trent Jr. has also studied the concept of feeble-mindedness in the United States. He argues in *Inventing the Feeble Mind. A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (1994) that US eugenicists looked at the whole family when making defining feeble-mindedness, which was widely considered hereditary. Trent argues that affected families were associated with immorality, failure, bad blood and stupidity.<sup>971</sup> Sterilizing the feeble-minded was suggested because they could re-include in society if they were not able to procreate: firstly, because they could not create a new generation of feeble-minded and secondly, because they were incapable of being good parents to their own offspring.<sup>972</sup>

By looking at Trent's argumentation, sexuality or the unrestrained sex drive of the individual seemed to be one important argument for diagnosing feeble-mindedness and proposing sterilization as a method of treatment in the United States. The idea that feeble-mindedness might be hereditary was also held by Nordic eugenicists. Swedish racial biologist Nils von Hofsten argued that marriage between close family members can increase the occurrence of mental illness. However, marriage between a healthy and affected person might lead to a decrease of the illness in the next generation.<sup>973</sup> This was certainly not a common approach and the majority of eugenicists demanded a complete restriction on procreation for people with mental disorders. Nevertheless, it was also frequently emphasized that there was not enough scientific knowledge to make any kind of firm statements about the genetic transmission of physical or mental disability.<sup>974</sup>

I would argue that feeble-mindedness was not only medical diagnosis or a social problem but rather a mixture of both, which captured a zeitgeist phenomenon of overall confusion with the developments of modernity by contemporaries and became an outlet for this. The idea of feeble-mindedness was a prime example of the disunity which the emphasis on biology and science brought. Feeble-mindedness was an artificial concept which was created to explain the changing behaviour of individuals.

By defining various non-normative behaviours, like drunkenness, pre-marital sex or violence, as disease, science and medicine created both a monster and a way to defeat this monster. Without naming these kinds of non-normative behaviours,

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<sup>971</sup> Trent, James W., *Inventing the Feeble Mind. A History of Mental Retardation in the United States*, Berkeley 1994, p. 187.

<sup>972</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>973</sup> von Hofsten, *Modern ärfilighetslära*, pp. 55-57.

<sup>974</sup> Federley, "I sterilisationsfrågan", p. 184.

which were more than human and can be observed in most societies, scientists and medical experts created a problem in order to find a solution for it through the new, seemingly endless scientific findings that modernity made possible. Dickinson calls this the project of the normalization of the individual and the pathologization of differences.<sup>975</sup>

To sum up, the construction of normality and the pathologization of abnormality formed the core of the discourse about mental illness, as well as the construction of feeble-mindedness. The constant sense of crisis and downfall socially, politically or economically shaped the self-understanding of people in the early twentieth century, not only in the Nordic countries but in the whole Western world. The feeling that their world was out of control, out of normality, and the increasing possibilities science seemed to provide to restore normality, defined the development or discovery of new problems and their solutions. Gender and class were two shaping social categories here. They seemed to be out of control with the societal rise of lower classes through the new economic opportunities created by industrialization, the destruction of the traditional gender order and the appearance of women in the public sphere. Both were defined as pathological abnormalities and recognized as problems. Their solution and return to a previous normal order had to take place with the help of scientific methods. This meant firstly pathologization of non-normative behaviour as defective and then treatment by the state with the help of scientific methods, like sterilization, to restore normality.

### 5.5.3. Sterilization in Institutions

I end this chapter with an example of the gendered enactment of control in the mental health discourse: the sterilization of mentally ill and defective women in Nordic institutions. One of the most notorious examples of the act of power over female bodies was the Keller institutions in Denmark. Danish pedagogue Johan Keller founded the first institution for the mentally ill in 1865. The institution was developed to a network of several institutions by his son Christian Keller in the following decades. Most famous are the two isolation institutions, Livø (for men) and Sprogø (for women), which were situated on Danish islands. In particular Christian Keller had the ambition to develop his institutions into modern mental hospitals with latest treatment methods defined by the principles of classification, order and discipline.<sup>976</sup>

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<sup>975</sup> Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism Democracy", p. 4.

<sup>976</sup> Kirkebak, Birgit, *Da de åndssvage blev farlige*, Copenhagen 1993, pp. 203-204.

Birgit Kirkebæk has made a thorough analysis of the Keller institutions. Her studies are used here as an example of the act of biopower in the context of abnormality and treatment of individuals classified as mentally defective. Christian Keller was a strong advocate for sterilization of institutionalized patients and the legalization of sterilization in Denmark in 1929 provided him with new methods of treatment in line with his ideas about classification, order and discipline.<sup>977</sup> Kirkebæk shows that between 1930 and 1970, 1458 operations took place within the Keller institutions. Of these, 89 were male castrations, 285 male sterilizations and the majority, 1084, were female sterilizations.<sup>978</sup> These were about 13 per cent of all sterilizations carried out in Denmark between 1929 and 1967. Kirkebæk argues that sterilization was used as a method both for the individual to be released from the institutions and to fight all kinds of social problems, like criminality, vagrancy, alcohol abuse or poverty.<sup>979</sup> Sterilization as grounds for discharge was used to reduce an overwhelming sex drive, which disturbed him or her so much that a regular life was not possible, and to prevent him or her from having more children. As a method of addressing social problems, sterilization was used to prevent women who already had a great number of children from having any more, to benefit the economic situation of the family and decrease poverty. Social problems seen as passed on by defective genes could also be kept in check by sterilization.<sup>980</sup>

Denmark was not the only country where sterilization took place in institutions. The unique factor was that the landscape of institutions was dominated by a private family. Also, in Sweden, mental institutions were active in advocating sterilization for their inmates, but these were state-governed. As in Denmark, Swedish mental institutions were gender segregated. Salberga hospital, north of Stockholm, specialized in asocial, imbecile men.<sup>981</sup> At Västra Mark hospital in the central Swedish town Örebro, mainly criminal, asocial and imbecile women were institutionalized in the interwar period.<sup>982</sup>

The case for sterilizing patients in mental institutions was made before the 1930s, from the turn of the century, when in the United States first institutions embraced this method of treatment. In 1922, 12 years before the implementation of the sterilization

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<sup>977</sup> e.g. Keller, Christian, "Kønsløsgørelsens problem." In: *Nyt tidsskrift for abnormvæsenet* 23 (1921), pp. 6-9.

<sup>978</sup> Kirkebæk, Birgit, *Defekt og deporteret, ø-anstalten Livø 1911-1956*, Copenhagen 1997, p. 145.

<sup>979</sup> Ibid., pp. 130-131.

<sup>980</sup> e.g. Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, p. 90.

<sup>981</sup> Eivergård, "Bör först steriliseras", p. 122.

<sup>982</sup> Engwall, "Steriliseringspolitikens tillämpning på Västra Mark", p. 93.



legislation in Sweden, the psychiatrist and social democrat Alfred Petrén demanded that institutionalized mentally ill people should be sterilized, not from a hygienic, but from social and economic point of view.<sup>983</sup> Especially in the interwar period, the number of institutionalized patients rose steadily, and most institutions were overcrowded. The number of patients in Swedish institutions increased from 4602 in 1900 to more than 30,000 in 1950.<sup>984</sup> This raise was related to a stronger awareness of mental defects as well as a shift in societal recognition. Sterilization was understood as a method to release people, particularly women, from excessive sexuality and make them safe to be released back into society; safe for themselves as well as others.<sup>985</sup>

Though men were also sterilized in institutions, most sterilizations were performed on women. The Swedish physician and leader of the Swedish State Institute for Racial Biology since 1935, Gunnar Dahlberg, explained the thinking behind this. He argued that although genetic mental defects could equally be found in men and women, they constituted a greater threat in women.

It should of course be established that as many men as women are defective. In fact, the difference is simply of a practical nature. With respect to sexual attitudes presented by men and women, some differences have to be mentioned, which means that the risk that a defected or almost feeble-minded woman becomes pregnant is far greater than that a man in a similar situation is able to initiate an association which results in procreation.<sup>986</sup>

The risks mentally defective women constituted were multiple. Firstly, it was the common impression that they were not be able to take care of their offspring.<sup>987</sup> Secondly, as argued here by Dahlberg, there was also always a greater risk of mentally deficient women being taken advantage of by men without them understanding the consequences of their reckless behaviour. Mentally deficient women were a threat to society, but society was also a threat to them. Their sterilization would free society from the economic and social responsibility of caring for and protecting them. Relieved from their sex drive, they

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<sup>983</sup> Jönsson, Lars-Eric, "Ett skarpt vapen. Om sterilisering som alternativ till anstaltsvistelse." In: Broberg, Gunnar, Johannisson, Karin, Tydén, Mattias (eds.), *Fem uppsatser om steriliseringen i Sverige*, Lund 2000, p. 11.

<sup>984</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>985</sup> e.g. Runcis, "Sinneslöhet som samhällsproblem", p. 552.

<sup>986</sup> "Det bör ju finnas ungefär lika många defekta män som kvinnor. I själva verket torde förhållandet ha berott på hänsyn av praktiskt art. Med hänsyn till den sexuella inställningen företer män och kvinnor vissa skillnader, som medför, att risken att en klen begåvad eller i det närmaste sinnesslö kvinna skall bli gravid är vida större än att en man i motsvarandesituation skall kunna inleda en förbindelse, som medför, att han får barn." Dahlberg, Gunnar, *Normalt och sjukt arv*, Stockholm 1946, pp. 287-288.

<sup>987</sup> Runcis, "Sinneslöhet som samhällsproblem", p. 552.

could also be integrated into the labour market and provide for themselves.<sup>988</sup> Additionally, if society or certain members of society took sexual advantage of them, the risk was lower in the sense that they would not get pregnant. However, this notion was also partly contested, since some eugenicists also feared that sterilization might even cause more reckless behaviour, since women did not have to fear the consequences of pregnancy anymore.<sup>989</sup>

The sterilization rate in the women's institution Västra Mark was between 20-40 per cent in the years 1931-1966. The highest rate, interestingly enough, is found immediately after the Second World War in 1946 with 32.5 per cent and in 1951 with 38 per cent. This means that of the 350 patients during this time, more than a hundred were sterilized during their stay. Many of them were very young, the youngest being 16 years old.<sup>990</sup> Frequently, the application for sterilization was connected to the promise of being released from an institution.<sup>991</sup> But sterilizations without the consent of the patient were also possible, if the person was under guardianship and the guardian agreed.

Mentally ill women received the special attention of sterilization advocates in all Nordic countries, since many later sterilised women were institutionalized prior to their sterilization for other reasons. In Finland in the 1930s the percentage of women among the sterilized remained steady between 70 and 85 per cent. Up to eighty per cent of the sterilized individuals were classified as mentally defective in one way or another.<sup>992</sup> The situation was similar in Norway. Usually 80-90 per cent of sterilized persons were women until the 1950s and at least one third of those sterilized were considered mentally defective.<sup>993</sup>

In other words, a great number of sterilizations from the interwar period to the late 1940s were performed on individuals defined as mentally defective in the Nordic countries and the majority of these were women. As I have argued, the reasons for this were not only to protect and release society from the burden of caring for them and their offspring but also a form of care for the individual and making reintegration into society possible. Thus, sterilization was considered a wholesome form of therapy, and not punishment, to release the women from their sickness, which was often connected to an

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<sup>988</sup> Jönsson, "Ett skarpt vapen", p. 12.

<sup>989</sup> Mjøen, *Rasehygiene*, p. 189.

<sup>990</sup> Engwall, "Steriliseringspolitiken", pp. 109-110.

<sup>991</sup> See for more on this the victim interviews in SOU 2000:20

<sup>992</sup> Hietala, "From Race Hygiene to Sterilization", pp. 234-235.

<sup>993</sup> Roll-Hansen, "Norwegian Eugenics", pp. 178-179.

oversexualization. It was supposed to benefit both the individual and society. That this was often not perceived as such by the individual was often due to lack of explanation as well as the use of emotional (if not physical) force, which was rather common in mental institutions during this period.

To conclude, the state was a leading actor in the renormalization process, but it was not the only one. Social reformer like Gunnar and Alva Myrdal had demanded that the state take on this role.<sup>994</sup> The pathologization of the non-normative was not only a eugenic feminist idea. One might argue it was rather the opposite and feminism was also a non-normative behaviour. Nevertheless, eugenic feminists supported the pathologization of abnormality for their own empowerment and to strengthen their own social position. This shows that the construction of non-normative behaviour was not a one-way street but rather a social phenomenon which was used by various social groups to define their own standing within a changing society. The attitude to mental illness, mental disability and feeble-mindedness might be considered a symptom of an overall struggling society seeking normality as a guide and support in troublesome times.

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<sup>994</sup> Myrdal, Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, p. 252ff.

## 6. Conclusion

Since eugenics is understood as an episode of women's oppression through patriarchal structures and feminism as form of liberation for women, the involvement of feminists with eugenic ideas is often perceived as contradictory, or as an unholy union. However, contemporaries in the early twentieth century did not find this connection surprising or disturbing at all and acknowledged the formative role of eugenics in the feminist movement.<sup>995</sup> In this study, I discussed the connection of eugenics and feminism in the Nordic countries and asked if eugenic feminism created indeed an unholy union. The question is not only if the interest of well-known Nordic feminists in eugenics as such could be considered as an unholy union but also if the results of this union defined, negatively or positively, the fate of women in the Nordic countries until today. Eugenics was (and is) the idea of breeding the perfect human being, and women played a pivotal role in this ideology. The commitment of feminists into eugenic discussions legitimated the objectification of women by eugenicists, after all how could feminists who had the liberation and best interest of women in mind support an oppressive ideology? Feminists became the so-called handywomen of eugenicists but also used eugenics actively as method of empowerment, albeit not of all women, but of those women who mattered to first-wave feminists, the white, urban middle class.

In the Nordic countries, eugenics as both science, and political and cultural ideology had far-reaching influences on the development of the nation and the building of welfare states. From early on, eugenic research was supported by the states and the eugenic ideology of increasing the population quality with the collective in mind defined one pillar of the Nordic welfare ideology. I argue here that eugenics developed in the interwar period to the science of all things, a lifestyle ideology. Eugenic ideals of hygiene, purity and cleanliness were expanded from the genetic and hereditary definition to topics like housing, nutrition or clothing. Neo-Lamarckism played a central role in this expansion in the Nordic countries. The eugenics ideals fitted perfectly the welfare state ideology of a clean, pure and streamlined society which put the collective needs over the individual and the state which controlled all aspects of the citizen's life to guarantee the success of the nation. Additionally, feminism had a strong influence on the political and social developments in the Nordic countries. By international standards, women gained suffrage early on and were therefore able to enter influential positions in politics earlier.

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<sup>995</sup> Allen, "Feminism and Eugenics", p. 477.

However, this applied only to a minority, as the majority of Nordic women continued to live an agricultural-based life in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, the topics of the creation of the welfare state invited female actors, because former private, feminine topics, like the upbringing of the children, health care or the making of the home became state-controlled, yet still feminine topics. Feminists were key in making these topics public but also in influencing welfare policy making in the Nordic countries.

I argue Nordic feminism was not for all women and eugenics was a method for feminists to define the difference between women through a biological-evolutionary argumentation. The notion that feminism was in the Nordic countries an ideology which sought to improve the lives of all women and created equality between the sexes must be strongly questioned. At no point in history and contemporary times have women have been equal to men in the Nordic countries, and women have not been equal to each other. This was not only the fault of patriarchal societies but also the blindness of the feminist movement.

Different factors contributed to this failure. The Nordic countries were notorious for their class-blindness. Especially since the introduction of social democracy in Sweden in the 1930s created the idea that social classes were erased in the Nordic countries and people live in egalitarian societies. First of all, Sweden is not synonymous with the Nordic countries. Secondly, this argument ignores the fact that most Nordic countries do not have a long history of social democratic governments. Only Sweden and Denmark can look back on a history of mainly social democratic and left-wing governments in the twentieth century. Finland for example is dominated by agricultural and conservative parties and Norway's governments alternated between conservative, agrarian and labour prime ministers. Icelandic policy is dominated by the liberal conservative party and the centre-right/ agrarian party. Social democratic prime ministers succeeded rarely. Ignoring class bias is not the same as erasing class boundaries.

Similar observations can be made in the context of race and ethnicity, the second important component in eugenics. The Nordic countries are notorious in not having dealt with their past in the 1930s and 1940s when fascism rose in Europe. They tend to present themselves either as neutral, like Sweden, or as occupied victims of fascism, like Norway, Denmark and Finland. This prevented Nordic governments after the war widely with dealing with their past, especially in the eugenic and racial context. It made it easy for them to continue their eugenic practices from the pre-war period without the recognition of its connection to the zeitgeist of nationalism and the race

struggle, and the Holocaust and systematically continuously restrict and control the reproduction of its population based on class and race.

Eugenics is not dead in the Nordic countries, it is called genetics today but the ideas behind it are still widely the same and feminism has a connection to it, especially in the discussion about the female custody of her body, sexuality and reproduction; an issue which is hardly solved. Denmark introduced as first European country pre-natal screening, especially for Down syndrome, as part of its public health program in 2006. Danish pregnant women are encouraged to take the test and have an abortion in the event of abnormalities. Some researchers propose that if the testing and abortion practice continues as is, in thirty years there will be no more Down syndrome children born in Denmark. Similar practices take place in Iceland.<sup>996</sup> Private clinics in Finland recently suggested to offer genetic compatibility test for couples and the idea to create a genetic data base about all genetic abnormalities in Finland to prevent genetic diseases.<sup>997</sup>

These ideas are not new. US-eugenicist Charles Davenport offered similar services in his Eugenic Record Office from 1910 onwards to guarantee the genetic capability of parents-to-be and prevent any genetic failures in offspring.<sup>998</sup> Measures like these, which are nowadays often understood as medically helpful to prevent suffering, still create the notion of desired and undesired individuals in society. Some people are, because of their genetic predisposition not as valuable for a society. Therefore, they might be seen as a lifelong burden for their families and the society, due to their special needs of care and inability to participate in the same way as "normal" people in the community. Additionally, these decisions are celebrated as the feminist success of a woman's own choices over her body. Thereby ignoring the complex social, medical and legal impacts which influence a woman's decision for or against a child, which can be by no means considered as generated out of her own choice. The Nordic countries prove again to be forerunners in creating methods to influence their female citizen's reproduction and reproductive choices. Men and their role in the reproduction process play only a marginal role in this discussion. The rhetoric has not changed much since the 1930s.

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<sup>996</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/iceland-downs-syndrome-no-children-born-first-country-world-screening-a7895996.html>

<sup>997</sup> [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/finnish\\_researchers\\_to\\_create\\_dna\\_database\\_of\\_500000\\_people\\_for\\_disease\\_studies/10027500](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/finnish_researchers_to_create_dna_database_of_500000_people_for_disease_studies/10027500); [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/couples\\_in\\_finland\\_can\\_check\\_genetic\\_disease\\_compatibility\\_before\\_pregnancies/10014043](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/couples_in_finland_can_check_genetic_disease_compatibility_before_pregnancies/10014043)

<sup>998</sup> Allen, "Eugenics Record Office".

By examining the feminist movement through the lens of eugenics it becomes clear that eugenic ideas were not only implemented in people's lives through high scale medical programmes or by destructive methods which decided between life and death but also through often unrecognised small-scale actions in their everyday life. In this way, I argue that eugenic feminism created unholy union because it softened the eugenic rhetoric through its use by well-known and liked feminists, who were not seen as individuals with negative intentions. On the one hand, the feminists' access to the people's homes through the woman of the house implemented eugenic ideas at the heart of the household. The mother and wife were infatuated by eugenic ideas of the cleanliness of the house, body, sexuality, family and the nation, and passed on these ideas to other members of the family.

On the other hand, the positive understanding of feminism today, especially in the Nordic countries, as a group of women who sought to do no wrong and were immune against the eugenic and patriarchal seduction of their times blindsides us for that fact that these women were in fact products of their time and could not escape the temptation of modernization. In many ways, this made us ignorant about the interest in eugenics by well-known Nordic feminists and helped to prevent the investigation of their writings from a eugenics perspective for a long time. However, ignoring Nordic eugenic feminism, means not only ignoring the far-reaching influence of Nordic feminists in the eugenic movement but also the role of women in policy-making and shaping ideas of society. It should be remembered that eugenics was a leading ideology of their time and feminists were happy to contribute to its advancement.

Nevertheless, Nordic feminists sought to modernize and improve the lives of the group of women who mattered to them. In this sense, eugenics was a highly flexible ideology, which could be fitted to various political, cultural and social circumstances. Eugenic feminism, with its mainly white, urban middle class actors, did not focus exclusively on middle class women but sought to identify the problems of the individual classes and improve them through eugenic measures. In that sense, it showed a broad desire for inclusion, but inclusion had to happen on their terms. It went beyond sterilization and must be understood as a cultural lifestyle ideology which influenced the lives of all individuals in a manifold of ways. It turned into a mass-movement which did not only aim to influence people's reproductive lives, but ideals of purity and cleanliness likewise influenced how people ate, dressed, maintained their bodies, decorated their homes and raised their children.

Eugenics aimed to influence human reproduction to guarantee that only the best-bred people were born, and degenerate individuals did not procreate at all. Methods to influence breeding did not only include the permanent restriction of the procreation of unworthy individuals, but also the active encouragement of the reproduction of worthy individuals. These methods were not necessarily aimed directly at the reproductive body through contraception and sterilization. They could be seen in a broader context, for example in the improvement of health care, housing, nutrition, education and family allowances, which were central tenets of the Nordic welfare state. Though eugenics had its origins in biological ideology, in particular during the interwar period, it developed into a social and cultural ideology, which influenced the making of a welfare state ideology in the Nordic countries.

Thus, eugenic feminists created a new awareness of the role of women in modern societies. They did this by connecting their ideas with eugenic notions and argued for the importance of women, their bodies and sexuality in a society which feared degeneration. Since modern Nordic societies sought more eugenic structures to prevent their biological downfall, the eugenic feminists touched the zeitgeist and could successfully transform their group of women into objects of modern welfare policy-making.

On the one hand, this was a success in the Nordic countries. During the development of the welfare state in the 1930s, special attention was paid to social, family and health policy. Maternity and child care were created, as well as a housing policy designed to ensure safe and healthy homes for all citizens. The control of nutrition and the promotion of physical activity was intended to keep the citizen's body in good health. In many ways, the upbringing of children was taken over by the state. The compulsory medical examinations for mothers and infants, early implementation of childcare facilities and compulsory school education made the state a co-parent from a young age onwards. This raised the living standard of the people and reduced infant mortality, sickness and poverty. These ideas were either introduced or supported by eugenic feminists and often had a eugenic foundation in the context of the desire to increase the quality of the population.

The maternity package, which was issued in Finland in 1938, first only for poor mothers and from 1949 for all expecting mothers, was a prime example of this. The package contained everything an infant needed during his or her first year of life. In this way, the Finnish state ensured equal opportunities for all children from the day they were



born. No child was to be disadvantaged through a lack of clothing, hygiene products or nutrition. However, the issuing of the package was also connected to conditions, such as regular medical examinations of the child. The state took control of how the child would be dressed, cleaned and fed. There was little room left for individual approaches to motherhood. Experts created equal standards for all children to ensure the stable quality of the population. Recently the maternity package became an export hit. Since 2015 Argentina offers a similar package to new-born babies and Scotland and the US state of New Jersey introduced a maternity package in 2017.

On the other hand, by introducing formerly private and intimate topics related to the female body and sexuality, in the context of the maternal function, into policy-making, eugenic feminists generated the political objectification of the female body and sexuality and made it an object of biopolitics in the developing welfare state. The new social policies directed towards women were not only support but also a control system, as the example of the maternity packages in Finland shows. By placing the female body and its reproductive function at the centre of the eugenic discourse, as well as their discussion of female empowerment and female citizenship based on maternity, the eugenic feminists created a strong focus on women through the perspective of maternity in the Nordic welfare state. Though their aim was to make the woman's body a subject in the modern, eugenic state, it rather turned into an object of restriction and regulation to ensure that the female body did not harm the eugenic health of the nation.

Measures, such as maternity and child care, general health care or education, were often either suggested by eugenic feminists in the context of their work in feminist organizations or encouraged and promoted through their political engagement. There is a scholarly discourse on the impact of feminist ideas on the promotion of women's rights and equality, which is seen critically, for example by Yvonne Hirdman or Göran Therborn.<sup>999</sup> However, I disagree with these perspectives and suggest that feminists, in particular eugenic feminists, had a substantial impact on the positioning of women, their bodies and sexuality in Nordic societies in the early twentieth century and in the following period of the Nordic welfare state. Eugenic feminists argued that women were not only the mothers to their own biological children but also the mothers of the race, which should be understood as mothers of the population. The eugenic feminists' centralization of the maternal body in the eugenic-dominated political discourse about the

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<sup>999</sup> e.g. Hirdman, *Att lägga livet till rätta*; Therborn, *European Modernity*.

struggle of the races, while intended to promote equal rights for eugenically beneficial women, backlashed in a greater control of and focus on the maternal body by state and society.

The maternal body became the making or breaking point of the nation. A good woman could save and civilize a nation and a bad woman could destroy it.<sup>1000</sup> This did not only empower women through their maternal bodies but also encouraged control and restriction of them to prevent the destruction of the nation by the female uterus. Eugenically unclean women from the under class and at times from working class, became the object of the harshest regulations. These included the permanent, state-led prevention of their reproduction through sterilization or the restriction of their personal freedom through institutionalization to prevent them from harming the nation through their reproduction.

Yet eugenically favourable women were also objects of regulations and reproductive restrictions to serve the well-being and success of the nations. Workplace regulations, for example the prohibition of night work, advice about family size, health and hygiene, nutrition, housing and the correct approaches to sexuality directed exclusively towards women, provided middle and working class women with many new and helpful insights. Nevertheless, these also set strict and unforgivable norms about lifestyle, which were often based on bourgeois ideas and were blind to the average living conditions of most people.

Despite these serious drawbacks, the new health and hygiene norms had the well-being of the population in mind and improved the living conditions of many. However, the exclusive directions towards women as mothers and wives to implement these norms also made them responsible if the standards fell within society. The eugenic feminist emphasis on the importance of women, their bodies and sexuality created a biopolitical restriction and regulation system, which encouraged not the liberation of women and their bodies as such but a transformation from a private to a public and political regulation of women. Eugenic feminists created an unholy union, albeit in the wish to empowerment of women with control over their own bodies and sexuality, had the side effect of supporting the biopolitical objectification and regulation of their bodies. Finally, this supported the continuous objectification and instrumentalization of the

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<sup>1000</sup> Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p. 83.

female, maternal, body, in the Nordic societies in the name of welfare and the well-being of the collective over the individual.

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