# popolazione e storia

1/2016

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**FORUM**

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edited by Giovanni Favero

# Eugenics in the National and International Context

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# Explicit and Disguised Eugenics:
## A Premise

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Eugenics, as a science aiming at the biological improvement of the human species (as it was defined by Galton 1883: Cassata 2006, 1), has been the subject of half century long debate in historical literature. Research has focused at first on British, American, German and Scandinavian experiences, to shift then to cover other areas of Europe and the world (Kevles 1985; Bashford, Levine 2010; Turda 2010; Gillette, Turda 2014). This brought to discover that the articulation between the scientific positions and the political measures proposed by eugenicists may vary broadly, not only following «multiple national styles» (Cassata 2011, 2), but also inside of them and at transnational level. As a consequence, eugenics has been described as a «multiform archipelago» (Weingart 1999) rather than a coherent scientific movement.

Yet there was not only variation, but also a transformation of eugenics along modern times. The origin of the new discipline are deeply rooted in the positivist milieu and in the intertwining of medicine and psychiatry with demography and statistics. Theodore Porter (2016) argues that a science of human heredity found its empirical origins in the early nineteenth century recording practices of insane asylums, supporting an interpretation of mental illness as a result of biological heredity. At the same time, the emergence of anthropometry was directly connected to the statistical definition of 'normal' as opposed to 'deviant' or 'pathological', whilst the research on individual features for purposes of identification, control and social intervention went hand in hand with the development of vital statistics (Schweber 2006). Debates on the physical, biological or racial characteristics of human beings were also crucial part of the later autonomous development of population studies, which displayed a strong connection with social medicine. As the readers of this journal know well, the first course in demography was taught in 1876 at the École d'Anthropologie de Paris that was part of the Faculty of Medicine, and the series of International Congresses of Demography, opened in Paris in 1878, was soon merged with that of hygiene in 1882.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the convergence between a growing focus on heredity and an interventionist ideology allowed eugenics, as other sciences that emerged in the same time span, to couple a strong political significance and a relatively high level of formalization. The link between physical and racial attributes or social class behaviours became at the end of the nineteenth century the privileged object of study for British mathematicians and statisticians. Francis

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Galton and Karl Pearson (Porter 2004) fully established eugenics as a science through the introduction of universal mathematical tools, the correlation and the regression, which were specifically designed to measure the relationship between the physical and intellectual characteristics of living beings and humans in particular (Mazumdar 1992). During the first decade of the twentieth century, scientific journals specialized in eugenics multiplied, national societies (or special committees) of eugenics were established. In 1912 the first International Congress of Eugenics was held in London, and the second followed in New York in 1921.

The interwar years were the golden age of eugenics, but this was also the period when its features varied more depending on the context. The adopted political measures extended from the application of hygiene to maternity and child care to 'preventive' measures as forced sterilization, up to 'repressive' interventions for the isolation and elimination of the individual carriers of undesirable traits, usually mixing together different approaches. Theoretical positions were even more differentiated: the reference to the Mendelian paradigm rather than to neo-Lamarckian interpretations of heredity were not necessarily corresponding directly to a preference for 'negative' measures rather than for 'positive' interventions.

Kevles (1985) has distinguished eugenicists in three broad groups, mostly making reference to the evolution of scientific and public debate in the United States. «Mainline eugenicists» held conservative political views, and coupled their claims for coercive interventions to protect the breeding with strong racial, class and gender prejudices. «Reform eugenics» since the 1930s discarded such an attitude as non scientific and attached a social progressive meaning to eugenic interventions, focusing on the use of the knowledge of heredity laws for the amelioration of mankind as a whole and justifying coercive practices with the higher interest of the collectivity. Finally, a «new eugenics» that emerged after the Second World War was making use of genetics to suggest prophylactic monitoring and medical measures through expert authority, avoiding direct State coercion on individual family choices (Hampton 2005). The three typologies coexisted in time, as racial prejudice remained widespread for long in part of the eugenic milieu. An explicit refusal of surreptitious coercive practices emerged with the revolts of the 1960s for civil rights and against the Vietnam War.

If such a chronology holds for the United States, it is rather difficult to imagine a perfect timing coincidence, despite of the widespread circulation of eugenic ideas, in countries such as the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy. As far as Italy is concerned, the body of historical studies produced since the 1980s has been reviewed by Cassata (2006, 12-18), showing the role of social medicine and positivist sociobiology in preparing the ground for the spread of eugenics, which found in scholars connected with the Lombrosian criminal anthropology its main enthusiasts. The debate has then focused on the peculiar characteristics of Italian 'Latin' eugenics, on its connections with fascism and on the continuity or discontinuity with the racist turn of the late 1930s. In his book, Cassata took position by disentangling the historical versions of the multiform and peculiar Italian eugenic movement from the proper racist positions emerging in the late 1930s and from anti-

semitism. His documented analysis proves the divergence between the biological racism that inspired 1938 racial laws, and mainstream Italian eugenics, which made reference to a neo-Lamarckian interpretation of heredity, favoured the maintenance of traditional reproductive habits and had a notion of race based on national identity. Such a distinction does not conceal the responsibilities of Italian eugenics in spreading presumed scientific arguments against miscegenation and against Jews, who were identified as strangers. Yet a better understanding of the complexity of interwar eugenic positions helps to explain the presence of surprising postwar continuities in Italian eugenics, identifying their origin in the connections with American racism and in the support of Catholic institutions to Latin eugenics (Cassata 2010).

The articles collected in this special section of «Popolazione e storia» take stock of the results of previous inquiries in order to explore more in depth new research directions.

The first two articles focus on the main promoters of the establishment of the Italian Committee for Eugenic Studies in 1913 (Comitato Italiano per gli Studi di Eugenica), an event reconstructed in detail by Luca Tedesco in this volume. Both Giuseppe Sergi (1841-1936) and Alfredo Niceforo (1876-1960) were influenced by Cesare Lombroso and his views concerning the necessity to prevent degeneration by monitoring and managing the population. His peculiar concept of degeneration as the result of natural variation had also a role in making his pupils more prudent with regard of sterilization and other 'negative' measures (Cassata 2011, 117-118). Both Sergi and Niceforo were also present at the first Eugenic Congress in London in 1912, together with Enrico Morselli, Corrado Gini and other Italian scholars. Sergi was certainly among them the most aware of the scientific developments of British eugenics, as he was acquainted with Francis Galton (Sergi 1911). He was also an out-most critic of humanitarian interventions in defence of the weak degenerates, which contrasted the effect of natural selection, and a consequent supporter of their «elimination». However, on the basis of a textual comparison of his publications, Tedesco suggests as the most likely hypothesis that by this term Sergi actually meant temporary segregative measures preventing reproduction. His attention to the sensitiveness of public opinion to coercive measures as sterilization pushed him to discard this as a viable solution.

Angelo Matteo Caglioti focuses instead on the scientific biography of the demographer Alfredo Niceforo, which he reconstructs using his letters and his file at the Minsistry of Public education. Caglioti follows the evolution of his eugenic project of «social scientific observation» from Lombrosian criminal anthropology and field measurement of skulls to an effective use of statistical data. A pupil of Sergi and of the socialist collaborator of Lombroso, Enrico Ferri, Niceforo learned statistics while working from 1910 to 1913 inside the central statistical office that had produced the same figures he had used to argue the existence of two races in Italy (Niceforo 1898; 1901)[1]. While at the statistical office, as an enthusiast of eugenics Niceforo proposed the collection of data on the academic performance and family background of Italian students, in order to study the hereditary charac-

ter of intelligence. After the First World War Niceforo became a university professor of Statistics, and in 1938 presented at the International Congress of Population in Paris a visual statistical method based on 'graphic profiles' to measure the normality of an individual. Yet the selection biases implicit in the elaboration of data undermined the purported objectivity of this method, as demonstrated by Corrado Gini, at the time not only the leading Italian statisticians, but also the most renown Italian eugenicist. Caglioti argues that this episode highlights the attempt of some Italian eugenicists to use statistics to provide scientific foundations to their claims, and the emergence of deep scientific conflicts among them.

A naïve confidence in the objectivity of statistical elaborations was one of the characteristics of what Kevles (1985) has defined «mainline eugenics», and one of the reasons for his demise by «reform eugenicists» in sought of scientific legitimation by means of a more rigorous approach to the study of heredity. Yet in the Italian case the latter position was also identified with arguments against democracy, which considered as a threat to the interests of future generations (Gini 1937).

The practice of the statistical measurement of the characteristics attributed to heredity was then crucial to a large part of Italian eugenics. Manfredi Alberti proposes here an analysis on the surveys realised and published under fascism on asylum patients as a way to assess the role of quantification practices in the construction of a scientific argument in favour of eugenic measures, focusing on psychiatry as one of the disciplines that most resorted to hereditary explanations in that period. Institutional conflicts, budget constraints and scientific rivalry conjured in making the continuation of the survey impossible, showing how historical contingencies may affect the development of such an hybrid discipline as eugenics was.

As Roser Cussò (2012) has demonstrated in a previous study, quantification was crucial since the interwar period as a tool for the legitimation not only of scientific enterprise, but also of international organisations. In the article here published, she questions the presumed 'silent abstinence' of the League of Nations from any involvement in eugenic programs. Cussò resorts to different levels of analysis, going from the study of the publications cited and used by the Health Offices of the League to the analysis of personal and official correspondence, up to the archival reconstruction of training exchanges of medical personnel between the League and national eugenic institutions. The microanalysis of the working mechanisms of an international organisation allows Cussò to push forward our understanding of the influence exerted by the common cultural frames of diplomatic, scientific and technical élites. The idea of the superior interest of science and human society made possible the surreptitious adoption of an eugenic approach to the organisation of the Health Office in the same way as it pushed the League to neglect the claims of minorities against major nationalistic pressures (Cussò 2013).

This last article shifts the focus from Italy to the transnational level. Yet unexpected similarities emerge, in particular concerning the problem of the 'disguised' nature of eugenics both in Italy and inside the League of Nations. As Caglioti has shown, the hybrid and multidisciplinary nature of Italian eugenics, together with its scarce scientific legitimation, created the conditions for its ubiquitous presence in

scientific texts during the interwar period. In the same way, the official silence of the League of Nations about eugenics concealed the strong interest of the League officers for its applications, which lead to its implicit inclusion in the definition of health adopted by the World Health Organisation. The point is that such connections remain invisible if the historian limits her research to institutional centralised archives: the widespread nature of the phenomenon requires her to triangulate different sources and reading them against the grain, paying an equal attention to what they say and what they are silent about (Decker 2013).

[1] As Silvana Patriarca (1996, 233-240) has suggested, Niceforo's statistical argument was made possible by the peculiar geographical classifications that the Italian statistical office adopted after the unification of the country.

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# The League of Nations and Eugenics:
## an Overview of Transnational Activity

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**1. Eugenics, yesterday and today.** As has been noted in Danièle Carricaburu's and Marie Ménoret's (2004) work on the development of modern medicine, the prevalence of degenerative diseases, especially in Northern countries, has led to health research priorities given to the identification and prevention of the endogenous causes of illness. Without neglecting environmental factors, medicine is thus focused on heredity and genetic manipulation. In addition, we are witnessing the development of the assisted human reproduction movement, stemming from liberal-oriented demands from both heterosexual (freedom of choice) and homosexual (non-discrimination) associations and individuals. While health-based justifications, such as infertility, are not necessarily evoked, state intervention is sought in order to establish a legal framework and even to help finance certain practices (surrogacy, for instance). What international position can be identified in this regard? The World Health Organization's (WHO) approach may be partly inferred from its definition of health, adopted in 1946: «Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity» (WHO 2006).

Firstly, while it eludes identifying institutional responsibility for public health, this definition seems to be implicitly based on individual and social 'outcomes'. The field of education constitutes an analogous example of this approach as regards the evolution of statistical indicators; since the 1990s, pupils school achievement has been at the core of political and scientific debates and studies, to the detriment of the development of school resources (expenditures, pupil-teacher ratios…). This can be interpreted as a sign of a shift from Keynesian policies (based on public planning and structural data) to neoliberalism (based on microeconomics and individual and social performance) (Cussó, D'Amico 2005).

Secondly, the WHO's definition of health also raises questions on the potential perfection of human beings. Is «complete physical, mental and social well-being» possible without eugenics? The common definition of eugenics concerns both organized political and medical movements and independent social and individual practices. It is a philosophy advocating the improvement of human genetics developed at the beginning of the 20th century. Its supporters promoted decreasing the reproduction rates of people, and of traits, deemed less desirable, as the result of a deliberate policy conducted by the state. As regards independent and more liberal practices, eugenics may be taken as the collective result of convergent individual decisions by future parents, in a society encouraging the search for the 'perfect child' or, at least, a child free of serious illness and conditions.

The definition of 'reproductive health' at WHO's website, without directly addressing the search for human flawlessness, is not in contradiction with it, being directly linked to the ideas of responsibility and choice, both reinforced by the liberal dimension of human rights:

> reproductive health addresses the reproductive processes, functions and system at all stages of life. [It], therefore, implies that people are able to have a responsible, satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this are the right of men and women to be informed of and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of fertility regulation of their choice, and the right of access to appropriate health care services that will […] provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant[1].

This article is about the transnationalization of eugenics at, and by, the League of Nations (LoN), a subject little studied by historiography. As noted by Alison Bashford «If we know a good deal about the international eugenic congresses, we know far less about the place of eugenics in the two flagship international organizations of the twentieth century, the League of Nations (1919-1946) and its successor, the United Nations (1945-)» (Bashford 2010, 155). As a political international organization (IO), the LoN is at the centre of several innovations. The acceleration and the reinforcement of the transnationalization of knowledge as well as established practice is one of them (Haas 1992; Clavin 2005). Also referred to by the expression 'international political opportunities' (Barrett, Kurzman 2004), this global interaction could take place without official decisions being adopted by the Assembly, but rarely without governmental representatives and experts informal approval. It is this flexibility of transnational activity which may help to better understand both LoN's lack of official eugenic recommendations and its tolerance of eugenic doctrine.

As regards our hypotheses, the first is that the LoN played a role of 'passeur' of some eugenic ideas and practices, the main reason being that the latter were often intertwined with social and medical hygiene. Our second hypothesis is that the LoN's indirect participation in the dissemination of interwar eugenics had a major role in the presence of eugenics-oriented views in the WHO as well as in the United Nations (UN) more broadly. This article is mainly based on selected LoN internal documents (archives) and publications, which prepare a second phase of research on a specific Health Organization committee and its transposition to the WHO[2]. To keep within the limits of this article, and as this has been analyzed at length by historians, State eugenic policies and institutions will be characterized here only by some of their main features.

**2. A LoN without eugenics?** The history and the characteristics of LoN's Health Organization (HO)[3] have been well studied notably by Iris Borowy (2009) in her comprehensive book. She considers that eugenics did not influence HO's activity:

> An even more remarkable omission was the issue of eugenics. The question arose in 1924, when the Eugenics Education Society in London tried to introduce

> the issue into the LNHO agenda. The proposal was politely turned down under [the] pretext of Rajchman's temporary absence from Geneva. Two years later, a Cuban suggestion to include 'problems of eugenics' into studies into infant mortality and an Uruguayan proposal to study nutrition 'from the standpoint of race improvement'. In both cases, the HC backed away from the idea for being 'not opportune' at the time being, without, however, completely excluding the possibility of later studies. This remained the standard reaction to similar requests (Borowy 2009, 457).

Actually, «the LNHO never had a Eugenic Section» (Borowy 2009, 458).

In contrast to the HO's 'silent abstinence', «All countries, though in different degrees, had eugenic programs, which perceived health as a tool to strengthen the 'valuable' elements of their populations at the expense of those believed to 'damage' the nation» (Borowy 2009, 457). That is probably why, in Paul Weindling's opinion, the HO contrasted with «the racialisation of health in fascist and kindred authoritarian states during the 1930s» (Weindling 1995a, 9).

But is it possible that such a unanimous eugenic perspective was completely absent at the HO? How to explain then that the HO did not explicitly fight against «racialisation of health»? We explore two intertwined channels of both the tolerance and the expression of eugenic ideas in LON's activity. First, we note the existence of studies, data and experts' exchanges related to eugenics. In our parallel study treating the Minorities Section, we documented how the LON's 'silence' covered up the construction of practices that supported majorities' interests and weakened those of the minorities (Cussó 2013).

Secondly, the compatibility between 'positive eugenics' and social medicine and health can be underlined. In Seth Amiel Rotramel's words, before World War I,

> Social hygiene and racial hygiene were both varieties of eugenics. Eugenics was a way to mobilize various fields of study toward the improvement of human health and overall fitness. These fields included, biology, medicine, statistics, education, psychology, genetics, anthropology, and hygiene. […]. Negative eugenics included compulsory sterilization, birth control, and forced euthanasia. Positive eugenics concentrated on welfare measures, mandatory vaccinations, the policing and prevention of illness through state-run outreach programs, and the improvement of the living conditions of the poor (Rotramel 2010, 209).

«Eugenics in Germany and France had followed a similar trajectory, [i.e.] German and French proponents espoused both positive and negative eugenics». However, «after the [World War I] slaughter of millions and the degradation of the health of civilian populations, the majority of both German and French eugenicists turned to social hygienic measures to increase birth rates and to promote health» (Rotramel 2010, 246). This brings us to the period that concerns LON activity.

**3. LoN's health missions and the three spheres of power.** The LON was created in 1919, after World War I. The Allies decided to delegate to the organization the capacity to develop programs in different fields of action: economy, finance, health, education, social affairs, minorities, mandates… The Covenant signed in 1919 included several articles describing the framework for these future activities. Article 23 underlined that «Subject to and in accordance with the provisions of interna-

tional conventions existing or hereafter to be agreed upon, the Members of the League: […] (f) will endeavour to take steps in matters of international concern for the prevention and control of disease». Article 25 sets up that «The Members of the League agree to encourage and promote the establishment and co-operation of duly authorised voluntary national Red Cross organizations having as purposes the improvement of health, the prevention of disease and the mitigation of suffering throughout the world» (*Covenant* 1923).

To implement its missions, the LoN articulated, at the outset, three spheres of power. The LoN had its own permanent Secretariat which prepared different programs and recommendations and ensured their follow-up. It was the international(ist) and technical dimension of the LoN. But the Secretariat's work was not completely autonomous. Programs and recommendations had to be discussed and approved by the representatives of governments. This was the intergovernmental (political) sphere of the LoN's power, the source of its legitimacy. And there was a third dimension: the transnational. In order to define the programs, discuss them, decide about studies to be conducted, etc. different committees were defined. They were regulated by a resolution of the Assembly: «The technical organisations of the League […] are established for the purpose of facilitating the task of the Assembly and the Council by the setting up of technical sections on the one hand and on the other to assist the Members of the League, by establishing direct contact between their technical representatives in the various spheres, to fulfil their international duties» (Société des Nations 1920). That is why Hc's members were medical scientists of considerable status, but also public health officers, many of them heading public health services in their respective countries. In Martin Dubin's words, it was an «elite of biomedical and health specialists» that «served as a coordination body» (Dubin 1995, 56). The transnational sphere provided a link to the political sphere while it developed an 'independent' expertise. The interaction of these three spheres constitutes the original basis of Ios (Cussó 2012) and allows us to examine the role of eugenics in LoN's transnational activities at a crossroads of expertise and government-oriented positions, and under the influence or tolerance, of the internationalist secretariat.

**4. Transnational activity: exchanging information, people and practices on eugenics.** Ho's main objectives were to better coordinate epidemiologic information, share medical knowledge, implement vaccination, promote preventive medicine, produce technical studies, harmonize the classification of causes of death, define health statistical indices… While the Hc (see note 3) discussed and approved these general activities, the Hs had the mission to implement them, translating them into more specific actions. Ludwik Rachjman, a Polish doctor, was the director of the Hs from 1921 to 1939. Under Rachjman's direction, Hs's work concentrated on epidemiological programs and medical and social hygiene. More specifically, Rachjman supported the development of public health policies. He is considered to have been a socialist activist for social rights, interested in the social determinants of health rather than in the biological or racial ones. In this context, it is not surprising that

eugenics does not directly appear in the forefront of HS's activity. What about HC's and more largely HO's activity?

According to Borowy, «LNHO formed part of political, scientific, medical, personal and ideological networks and inevitably their expertise and expectations reflected these spheres. The work of the LNHO reflected what they could agree on» (Borowy 2009, 33). It is precisely what was not officially agreed on but nevertheless discussed and practiced which will be of interest to the analysis here. In other words, we focus on the exchange of experts, ideas and information that an international arena made possible whether those ideas were formally adopted or not.

*Publications, written exchanges, personal contacts: more than gathering information*. One of the first references to eugenics in HO's archives (Palais des Nations, Geneva) is a letter of 1924 from the Eugenics Education Society in London addressed to Rajchman[4]. As also reported by Borowy, the HS did not follow-up. Nevertheless, we can assume that some relationship (or expression of interest) existed or was established between the League and such societies since some of their journals, *The Eugenics Review* or *Annals of Eugenics*, were collected and available in LON's library; from 1925 to 1929 for the second; from 1926 to 1958 for the first, surpassing the World War II period. The list of publications on eugenics which was available in the League's library is shown in box 1 below.

Such publications could have been consulted by the HS to prepare its works. Patrick Zylberman notes that «a 'short bibliography about the causes of decreasing mortality due to tuberculosis' (drawn up by the League of Nations' Health Section[5]) still maintained [in 1925] a balance between the two [hereditary and infectious causation]». Zylberman considers this hesitation as the consequence of «social medicine [being] under the dominance of heredity» (Zylberman 2001, 263).

Several other proposals related to eugenics reached the HS. The suggestion of internationalizing a pre-marriage medical certificate by a member of the Institut International d'Anthropologie, Dr. Haskovec, was followed in April 1927 by Rajchman's expression of his personal interest: «c'est avec un grand intérêt que j'ai lu votre article et votre proposition» while pointing out that a private or personal propositions could not be directly taken into account by the Section[6]. In Dr. Haskovec's opinion, a medical certificate could help couples avoid transmission of diseases from parents to children and also to protect women from men's infections such as syphilis as well as alcoholism, thus preventing procreation of children with these illnesses. «Il faudrait que chacun consultât le médecin avant le mariage; cette consultation pourrait rester secrète. Le certificat délivré par le médecin indiquerait simplement qu'il n'y a pas d'obstacles sérieux au mariage»[7]. The wife's or husband's own interest and the future health status of children are combined with social interest. While resting fruitless as regards the official internationalization of the certificate, the proposal did not provoke any opposition, as far as we know. In fact, the 'marriage advice' was adopted in Berlin in 1926 under the active pressure of Otto Krohne (Weindling 1993), Prussian eugenicist doctor and health official, who participated in 1927 in a medical exchange financed by the League (see next section).

Box 1. *LON Archives Catalogue: LON/BPC/ENF Eugenisme-Birth Control-Sterilization (Subseries)*

Roper, Allen G. (1913) *Ancient eugenics: the Arnold prize essay for 1918…*, Oxford: B. H. Blackwell. Call number: 312.1 R784. Book, 75 p.
*Annals of Eugenics*, Cambridge: University of London, Francis Galton Laboratory for National Eugenics, [1925]-.Serial, Vol. 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1925)-v. 9, no. 4 (Dec. 1939).
Galton, Sir Francis (1909) *Essays in eugenics*, London: The Eugenics education society. Call number: 614.1 G181. Book, 109 p.: tables, diagrs.
*Eugenics, genetics and the family…* scientific papers of the second International congress of eugenics held at American museum of natural history, New York, September, 22-28, 1921. Call number: 575:063 I61 1921. Conference: International congress of eugenics (2nd: 1921: New York). Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins company, 1923. Two volumes: ill., tables. Notes: Title varies: v. 2, Eugenics in race and state.
*The Eugenics review*, London: Eugenics Society, [19??]- Frequency: Quarterly. Serial, Vol. 18, no. 3 (Oct. 1926)-v. 49, no. 4 (Jan. 1958) [Articles available in: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/journals/1186/].
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*Family council law in Europe: a study undertaken at the instance of the Eugenics society, 1927-1929*, Eugenics society. London, 1929. Call number: 347.64 E87. Book, vii, 86 p.
Gates, Reginald Ruggles (1923) *Heredity and eugenics*, London [etc.]: Constable and co., ltd. Call number: 575 G259. Description: Book, xiii, 288 p.: ill.
East, Edward Murray (1923) *Mankind at the crossroads*, New York; London: C. Scribner's sons. Call number: 312 E13. Book, viii p., 1 l., 360 p. : incl. maps, diagrs. 23 cm.
Saleeby, Caleb Williams (1909) *Parenthood and race culture, an outline of eugenics*, London [etc.]: Cassell and company, ltd. Call number: 614.1 S163. Book, xv, 331 p.
Holmes, Samuel Jackson (1921) *The trend of the race: a study of present tendencies in the biological development of civilized mankind*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and company, 1921; London, Constable & Co. ltd. Call number: 910.3 H753. Book, v, 396 p. : 23 cm. «The present volume is the outgrowth of a course of lectures on eugenics… given… in the University of California». - Pref.
Laughlin, Harry Hamilton (1923) *The second international exhibition of eugenics held September 22 to October 22, 1921, in connection with the Second International congress of eugenics in the American museum of natural history*, New York, Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins. Call number: 312 L374. Book, 155 p.
Stoddard, Theodore Lothrop, 1883- (1922) *The revolt against civilization: the menace of the under man*, London: Chapman & Hall, ltd. Call number: 910.3 S869r. Book, vii, 255 p.: 21 cm.

Source: LONA (in http://biblio-archive.unog.ch/detail.aspx?ID=112260)..

While sending its membership list and governing rules for 1929, the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations (IFEO) asked the HS for the nomination of a League representative in the IFEO[8]. «The purpose of the Federation shall be to arrange for international conferences or congresses in Eugenics, to consider matters of international import in Eugenics, to assist research and education activities in the field of Eugenics and to act on any other international Eugenical matters that require action in the interval between congresses»[9]. Leonard Darwin was the honorary president, replacing Francis Galton. It is important to note that Corrado Gini was the IFEO's key-member for Italy. He was both a LON expert and vice-president (1928-1931) of the International Union for the Scientific

Investigation of Population Problems (International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, IUSSIP, from 1947), an organization regularly consulted by the LoN [10]. While the HS did not send any representative to the Federation, the LoN's International Bureaux Section «would be very glad to keep in touch with the [IFEO] and I [W.F. Schubert] should be obliged if you could send me further information on the aims, composition and activity of this Federation»[11].

It is also significant to note that Léon Bernard, member of the Permanent HC indirectly supported eugenic activities, in particular in 1931: «Supported by the Italian Fascist government and by his colleagues from the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations, Gini was able to set up the International Congress for Population Research without the official blessing of the IUSSIP [sic]. [Charles] Davenport, one of the sacrifices to [Raymond] Pearl's angry attacks on the orthodox eugenicists in the United States, in his role as president of the IFEO was very pleased to give international sponsorship to this International Congress for Population Research in Rome. Other leading members of the IUSSIP [sic], such as Eugen Fischer from Berlin, Léon Bernard[12] from Paris, and Severino Aznar[13] from Madrid, were also not intimidated by Pearl's fears and joined Gini in Rome at the presidential table» (Kühl 2013, 87). The League's Economic section collected the information on this congress[14].

Another example that goes beyond simple internal acknowledgement of eugenics practices can be noted. In 1931, in the report of a meeting of the HC, it is stated that «The National Council for mental Hygiene [London] is of the opinion that the protection of society against crime can largely be secured by scientific research into its causes, and believing that progress in this direction can most effectively be achieved by international co-operation, it urges the League of Nations to include the study of mental hygiene in relation to crime and delinquency in the sphere of its activities»[15]. In 1932-1933, there was, in this context, a written interchange on mental hygiene in the already existing HO's program to standardize social hygiene instruction. In its contribution, the official of the National council for mental hygiene underlined that eugenics was already becoming a government concern in Great Britain: «Except for the recent diploma for social work in mental health it is only recently that there has been any attempt to give any public instruction on questions such as mental deficiency, eugenics and child guidance. The mental aspect of criminology, alcoholism, prostitution and other social problems is also just beginning to be studied»[16]. The memo includes a list of the principal voluntary bodies dealing with the various aspects of mental health. One of them is the Eugenic Society which «among other things concerns itself with the problem of sterilization and birth control from the mental hygiene aspect»[17].

*Experts and personnel 'interchanges': a more direct link with eugenics*. The exchange of medical personnel was, among those activities financed by the League, one of the HO's main objectives. This provided opportunities to learn about health policies in different countries. Eugenics was part of these policies. In HC's minutes of a 1927 meeting, we can read that a Japanese doctor, Tsurumi, underlined «the exchange of

health personnel which had taken place in Berlin and at which he had been present». In this context,

> Dr. Tsurumi expressed his deep interest in Professor Neufeld's lecture on the results obtained from animal experiments regarding the intimate relationship existing between certain diseases and predisposition. He not only shared this idea, but had reached the same conclusion in regard to certain infectious diseases. The spread of an epidemic of influenza or other similar disease was more easily explained when the existence of such a relationship between diseases, predisposition and constitution was granted». Dr. Tsurumi «had also heard with keen interest the lecture of Dr. [Otto] Krohne, who stated that race hygiene and heredity were problems for future study in Prussia. The problems were particularly important for Japan, where unhappily the health conditions and physical constitution were not satisfactory. His attention had been drawn to the development of physical culture in Germany; the institutions created there and the evolution of the German nation in this direction were indeed remarkable, and proved that Germany attached great importance to this subject[18].

As already evoked, Otto Krohne was a well-known eugenics activist (Weindling 1993).

An interchange in Great-Britain is reproduced in box 2. Several medical experts' visits to institutes of eugenics were part of the organized program. Besides, in the detailed contents of a course in Paris in 1927, we learn that Lucien March taught statistics to the participants. March founded in 1913 the Société française d'eugenique being quite active in this field, he published twelve papers or studies in *Eugénique* (Armatte 2008)

As also noted by Bashford, with infant health and protection, eugenics came closest to consideration as a field for information and action. As a result of a resolution put forward by the Cuban delegation (Dr. D.F. Ramos, representing the Cuban Ministry of Health and Welfare and member of the IFEO) to the League's Assembly in 1926, the HO was asked to what extent eugenics might shape its work on the protection of infants. The Secretariat's file titled *Protection de l'enfant* became *Eugénisme: Questions générales*. Nevertheless, Bashford (2010, 161-162) thinks that «the Health Organization of the League remained reluctant» as regards eugenics, «avoiding all questions of a purely national character»[19]. The 1927 minutes seems to contradict this «avoidance». The infant mortality by race is considered in scientific exchanges such as that related in the chapter Health Experts on Infant Welfare. These experts met at Vienna on September 1927 where it was agreed that «the detailed discussion should be undertaken on the following lines: I. - Organisation and Difficulties Encountered; II. - Preliminary Results; 1. Social differences. 2. Geographical differences: differences of race, climate, customs; 3. Causes of death: Similarities and differences between the various districts. Special causes of death; 4. 5. Preventive methods: for each individual case. For each separate district»[20].

More explicit were the recommendations (or what today would be called 'best practices') in the memorandum of 1930 on Health training. The HC's sub-committee on this matter wished to suggest some 'directives' on «l'organisation des nouvelles écoles, dont la fondation est envisagée ou en voie d'exécution dans d'autres parties du monde»[21]. A «Programme minimum pour les médecins hygienists» was

Box 2. *Interchange in Great Britain*

> The health officers invited to take part in the interchange in Great Britain met in London on February 21st, 1927. They were ten in number and belonged to the Public Health Administrations of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, China, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and Sweden. The Assistant Director of the Health Bureau of Bucharest and a second health officer from Czechoslovakia also took part in this interchange at the expense of their respective administrations. Thus the total number of participants was twelve.
> The first week of the tour was devoted to a study of the various activities of the British Ministry of Health. Thereafter, a programme of a more practical and more specialised nature was followed […].
> In selecting the districts [Liverpool, Glasgow, Birmingham, Bradford…] for the various participants, attention was paid to the special interests of each. In each of the above centres, all aspects of health work were studied. Attention was paid to school hygiene, industrial hygiene, maternity and child welfare and to tuberculosis work, venereal disease, sanitary engineering work […], health insurance and the general routine of a health office.
> During the last week, participants met once more in London, where attention was paid to meat inspection, the health organisation of the Port of London, and visits were paid to institutes of medical research, of eugenics, of industrial psychology, and of tropical medicine, and to army and navy medical colleges.
> After a final meeting at the Ministry of Health in London, the participants came to Geneva for a final conference which was held on April 4th and 5th, 1927.

Source: League of Nations, Health Committee, *Minutes of the eleventh session held at Geneva from October 28th to November 3rd*, p. 80, C.579.M.205.1927.III.

presented including, among others, the teaching of eugenics[22]. While no detail is given as regards its contents, the teaching in question is included in the German country report, for instance.

Finally, though only indirectly connected to the organized interchanges, the international influence of the Belgian doctor René Sand (Borowy 2009, 21) can be underlined here. He was General Secretary of the League of the Red Cross Societies from 1923 to 1925 and a member of the LoN's Hc from 1934 to 1939. For Zylberman, «Social medicine was trigged with eugenics in French speaking lands»[23] and «René Sand (1877-1953) was one of the more prominent representatives of this social medicine» (Zylberman 2001, 263). In Zylberman's opinion, after the 1930s, when Sand abandoned more explicit references to eugenics, he was nevertheless «still caught» in this approach. «He held that 'a rational eugenics could be based only on genetics, the science of heredity' – 'genetics' was the word he used at that time» (Zylberman 2001, 268). Presenting some eugenics practices in a rather critical way[24], Sand still believed in 1941 that an «eugenicist conscience» should be spread among the population through education:

> l'eugénique éducative recommande qu'un choix judicieux préside au mariage, grâce à l'examen médical prénuptial, portant non seulement sur l'état de santé des futurs conjoints, mais aussi sur leur patrimoine héréditaire. Nous n'avons pas encore acquis le sens de la responsabilité dans la procréation […]. Il faut cultiver la conscience eugénique inséparable de la morale et du sens social (Sand 1941, 69-70).

Sand participated in the establishment of the WHO in 1946 (United Nations 1948).

*The Cancer Committee*. Borowy cites the works presented to the HC on cancer mortality and morbidity in several countries in Europe in 1925-1926[25]. The socio-economic variables failed to explain countries differences in cancer related mortality rates so the experts pointed out regional and racial divergences: «Studies in the USA suggested that women of British background might have a more pronounced pre-disposition towards cancer than women of Italian origin» (Borowy 2009, 263). The Cancer Commission felt uncomfortable with these results; it would simply note that data were not reliable enough. Nevertheless «Health Section encouraged Polish studies on cancer conditions among the Jewish population and Italian studies on the role of constitution»[26]. One year later, in the HC's minutes of 1927 evoked above, the question of «Regional and Racial Divergences» in cancer diseases is recalled. In the report by George Buchanan one can read:

> In [the] face of Italian figures in particular, the Commission had to consider the possibility, at least, that 'racial' influences underlie and furnish the explanation of these differences; influences, that is to say, inherent in race *quâ* race, and resulting in a greater or less[er] liability to any cancer on account of the constitutional elements which determine racial characteristics. Moreover investigations made in the United States from the racial aspect offered some support for the opinion that the mortality from cancer varied with the race of the immigrants, or at least with their country of origin[27].

The topic as such did not seem to be shied away from; but a problem with the accuracy of the death certificates did not allow for clear conclusions.

*The Rockefeller Foundation*. While intensely sponsoring LoN's HS[28], the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) was also directly linked to eugenics activities, as noted by Stefan Kühl: «The Rockefeller Foundation played the central role in establishing and sponsoring major eugenic institutes in Germany, including the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Psychiatry and the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Eugenics, and Human Heredity» (Kühl 1994, 20). Paul Weindling evokes this debate: «Within the United States the RF has been accused […] of using its priorities to promote an elitist […] professional imperialism in medicine consistent with corporate capitalism. Moreover, in backing programmes of human biology the RF has been seen as covertly supporting modernised forms of eugenics» (Weindling 1995b, 136).

It is the already mentioned compatibility between social hygiene and 'positive eugenics' that can also be recognized in the RF's activities. RF's collaboration with the LoN could be seen as the first step of a transnational leveraging for the Foundation's global health goal: «A special relationship developed between the Rockefeller Foundation and the [LNHO]; the foundation saw the latter as a means of advancing its strategy of raising overall health levels throughout the world by enhancing scientific and medical knowledge and the institutional resources of expert elites» (Weindling 1997, 269). In the second step, the implementation of this broad objective indirectly facilitated those eugenics-related activities which were

not directly developed with the LoN (but were certainly known by the League), and this, until the 1940s:

> la Rockefeller a continué d'aider tous les Instituts avec lesquels elle était en relation, y compris ceux qui se consacrent à des recherches sur l'eugénisme. Par exemple elle soutient le projet d'enquête anthropologique sur la population allemande d'Eugen Fischer (Institut d'anthropologie et de génétique humaine) et il faut qu'un chercheur s'avère un nazi convaincu pour qu'un 'Fellowship' lui soit refusé. […] Ce n'est qu'au lendemain du déclenchement de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Europe que la Rockefeller décide de mettre en veilleuse ses subventions à la recherche allemande (Picard 1999, 98).

**5. Quantification: producing eugenicist figures?** The influence of data on our perception of social problems or topics does not have to be rediscussed (Desrosières 2002). Though presented as being technical, measuring instruments have effects on policy, reflecting the doctrines which underlie them. If it is thought that the causes of a disease are strictly social (industrialization, urbanization, etc.), data on mortality will only be essentially complemented by data on income, on place of residence or on access to health services… If data on mortality or morbidity are presented by race or ethnicity, it can implicitly be inferred that these statistics are, at least, compatible with eugenic studies.

From the earliest international congresses on eugenics, comparative national studies and plans for standardization of data appeared important. We can note, for example, the «International Biological Registration: the Norwegian System for Identification and Protection of the Individual» and the «Plan for Obtaining an International Technique in Physical Anthropology» (Mjøen, Bö 1924; Gates 1934).

The LoN's Ho was also interested in data harmonization as the work on the classification of causes of disease illustrates. Other studies and propositions were developed in different health domains. In the report on tuberculosis statistics submitted, by Dr. Rosenfeld, to the Hc in 1925, it can be read that:

> Les taux spécifiques sont indispensables à la comparaison internationale. Leur spécificité doit être recherchée pour le sexe, l'âge et la race. Les statistiques américaines montrent bien l'importance de ce dernier facteur sur la mortalité tuberculeuse. Il faut connaître la composition de la population, la proportion dans laquelle chaque race y est représentée, les différences de taux entre individus de diverses races (blanche et noire) et des diverses origines (Americains autochtones, immigrés de divers pays) étant considérables[29].

Explicitly pointing out the need for data on races to study the correlation of this factor with tuberculosis, this document was published by the League in 1926.

The preparation of common health indices was also one of the objectives of the Ho. Knud Stouman, who was the first member, and later the chief, of the Epidemiological information service (1921-1930), wrote several papers on the health indices:

> It was therefore a logical development of previous activities when the Health Organization decided to inquire into the possibilities of a further extension of public health statistics in the form of health indices. It obtained in this study the valuable collaboration of the Milbank Memorial Fund of New York, which had already accumulated considerable

> experience in collateral field and notably in regard to sickness surveys and the problems of medical care. The Milbank Memorial Fund also generously provided financial support for the technical execution of this enquiry. The study was commenced in Geneva in 1935 under the supervision of the medical Director, Dr. L. Rajchman, but it was decided to transfer it to the United States in order to reap the fullest benefit from the large experience acquired in that country in regard to health surveys (Stouman, Falk 1937a, 7-8).

K. Stouman, with I.S. Falk, presented some of these indices including the demographic and racial characteristics of the population. They refer to part A on «Indices of Vitality and Health […] 4. Nativity and race» (Stouman, Falk 1937b, 366)[30].

In addition, we find in the Stouman and Falk (1937a) report the basis of WHO's definition of health, inspired by the idea of 'capacity of survival' and fitness measurement:

> Measures for physical fitness should, at any rate theoretically, be an important element in a system of health indices. Perfect health does not mean merely the absence of incapacitating illness – which is only the final breakdown of a physic unable to resist general or specific conditions of its environment (Stouman, Falk 1937a, 35).

HO's statistical indices, factors and data were, at least, compatible with eugenicist inquiries. The point 4 of the HO's working plan adopted in November 1922 is a good example of this tendency. Nothing referred to eugenics but eugenics hypothesis were not excluded: «Comparative study of the incidence of particular diseases in different countries and their public health statistics, with a view to determining the nature and practical significance of observed differences between them»[31].

Finally, the medical statistician Emil Eugen Roesle, member, with Otto Krohne, of the Prussian Committee on Racial Hygiene, was charged by the HO to prepare a study on comparative statistics on morbidity, issued in 1928. Founded in 1920, the Committee on Racial Hygiene was incorporated into the Prussian Health Committee in 1921. Roesle officially defended the idea of the creation of an Institute for the study of heredity in Prussia, in a 1923 debate (Weindling 1993, 338-340). In his rapport for the HO, Roesle noted that «Il est evident que la documentation des caisses d'assurance-maladie doit se reveler insuffisante lorsque l'on veut déterminer l'*importance biologique de la morbidité*»[32]. For Roesle, the insurers concentrated on social or external causes, neglecting 'biological morbidity', central to the medical point of view (see box 3). External causes are of interest for medicine, certainly, but especially for prevention oriented entities, insurers or the police.

**6. Conclusion: knowing and exchanging in the context of eugenics.** HO programs and recommendations were not directly related to eugenics but the idea that «the LNHO functioned as a barrier to the international acceptance of eugenics into respectable public health discourse» (Borowy 2009, 458) is debatable. In contrast with the suggestion that «As such, excluding eugenics implied an anti-totalitarian statement» (Borowy 2009, 458), we consider evidence suggesting that the eugenics doctrine, and its (sometimes authoritarian) practice, were tolerated by the League. This attitude, under Rajchman direction of the HS was rather restricted as com-

Box 3. *Nécessité d'une classification plus détaillée des groups de maladies pour la statistique de*

> «La statistique de la morbidité fait ressortir plus nettement encore la nécessité de cette division [between social and biological causes], car cette statistique a, en première ligne, pour objet de déterminer, en ce qui concerne les différentes causes de maladie, la fréquence des *cas de maladie*. Seule une statistique de morbidité ou de mortalité, établie selon ce principe biologique, offre une importance biologique, car, pour une étude méthodologique de ce genre, il est évident que seules les causes naturelles entrent en ligne de compte».

Source: *Essai* (1928, 19).

pared to League's open tolerance of totalitarian policies as regards minorities, such as those of Primo de Rivera and Mussolini (Cussó 2013).

The HO worked as part of a large network of scientists, experts and government representatives that were sometimes connected to eugenic organizations, knew about them, asked for further information in that respect, allowed debates on the topic, and participated in personnel and scientific exchanges. The RF's support of eugenicist institutes could not have been ignored by the HS as well as the nazification of German institutions from 1933. Inclusion of training on eugenics in Health schools and explicit collaboration with known eugenicists before the 1930s can also be noted. That is probably why the HO did not fight against eugenics even when some practices were already criticized. The biological causes of diseases and heredity were the way that some improvements on health conditions of populations could be sought. Today's medical research and practice has clearly adopted the selection of embryos through reproductive health programs.

Furthermore, despite the dominant national-oriented studies on eugenics, this doctrine was (and is) closely related to internationalism (Barrett, Kurzman 2004; Kevles 2004). In Bashford's words, eugenics is also about «the modern history of universalism, internationalism, and cosmopolitanism» (Bashford 2010, 154). She adds «applied science of heredity was widely shared. Eugenic experts from across the globe understood each other, even if they disagreed. Indeed, eugenicists spoke an international language, perhaps more effectively than other internationalists of the period spoke Esperanto».

Circuits of exchange between influential scientific figures developed as the numerous international congresses and meetings on eugenics show. They are quite well analyzed as transnational history develops. Eugenics ideas were also translated into practice in an international manner: «The various migration statutes themselves were remarkably similar across time and national contexts, in their fairly sudden appearance, in their drafting, and in their increasingly eugenic rationales» (Bashford 2010, 155).

Though the HS did not adopt eugenics as an international issue, the transnational exchanges within the organization certainly prepared the leftist and cosmopolitan (Cleminson 2006; Spektorowski 2004) acceptation of eugenics after World War II: «eugenics was explicitly championed and harnessed by key players in the early postwar years of the United Nations» (Bashford 2010, 155). In this

respect, Bashford also considers that «The twentieth-century chronology of the links between eugenics and the formal international organizations is […] surprising, and in many ways counterintuitive» since she thinks that eugenics was «avoided by the League in the 1920s and 1930s» while this doctrine «was taken up by sections of the UN after World War II» (Bashford 2010, 155).

Actually, Bashford invites researchers to reconsider the chronology of eugenics' decline: «many scholars argue that eugenics became publicly indefensible in the post-Holocaust period» while in fact there was a «postwar uptick». But, instead of this 'counterintuitive' uptick, couldn't we also reconsider the notion that LoN avoided eugenics? After an overview of LoN's transnational activity, we rather think that the League was not a barrier to eugenics. More research on personal, societies, organizations and international experts links and networks is certainly needed. As regards governments' representatives, we do not know much about the use that they could make of the League's debates for their eugenicists purposes. We saw that the Cuban Dr. D.F. Ramos, key organizer of the Pan-American Eugenics Committee, was an important figure in the LoN's discussions on eugenics, for example.

If the LoN's tolerance of eugenics is thus acknowledged, the continuity of this doctrine and even its growing strength after the war can be better understood. We can also better understand the international character that eugenics always manifested and still manifests.

Julian Huxley, first director-general of United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), placed eugenics at the core of his 1947 document, *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy*. Huxley wanted to improve «the average quality of human beings […] accomplished by applying the findings of truly scientific eugenics» (Huxley 1947, 37-38). In Bashford's words, «Huxley was not in the least unaware of the race and even class implications of a science that had problematically assumed superiority and inferiority of certain groups, advocating what scholars subsequently called a 'reform eugenics', which rejected racism. […] For Huxley, projects that delineated racial difference and that suggested action on the basis of hierarchized difference were unscientific, politically undesirable, and unconscionable». But «There remains the second type of inequality. This has quite other implications; for, whereas variety is in itself desirable, the existence of weaklings, fools, and moral deficients cannot but be bad». This was a global mission, «a major task for the world» (Bashford 2010, 163)[33].

Another development of the field of eugenics can thus be noted. Part of the interwar 'retreat of scientific racism' and even certain scientists' anti-nationalism and anti-colonialism, lay in a cosmopolitan desire to think about humans as a whole, rather than as racially or nationally divided populations. From the beginning of the twentieth century, some eugenicists had the politico-scientific project of world citizens rather than patriots. As noted by Bashford,

> Once eugenics was accepted as part of a larger evolutionary principle, it would and should be understood to govern humans universally. This line of inquiry was sometimes used as scientific ground on which eugenics would become not just an international, but a cosmopolitan science, applicable to all humans. [C.E.A.] Bedwell (1878-1950) […] approv-

ingly quoted jurist Sir John Macdonell's (1846-1921) 1916 essay in the Eugenics Review, which raised the possibility that a dispassionate eugenic science might show that 'unions between certain races' are possible, even 'desirable and propitious'. He might find that 'certain stocks would be enriched and strengthened', and humans might thus, in his opinion, become 'citizens of a better world' (Bashford 2010, 166).

[1] WHO, *Health Topics*, Reproductive Health [in www.who.int/topics/reproductive_health/en/] .

[2] Existing work on international health organizations pays little attention to the continuity between the WHO and its predecessors such as the HO, with the exception of Borowy (2009).

[3] The HO included the Health Section (HS) (Secretariat's personnel) and the Health Committees (HC) (experts).

[4] Correspondence with the Eugenics Society, London, September 1st 1924 (LONA-3).

[5] League of Nations, Comité d'hygiène, *Minutes of the fourth session, 20-25 April 1925*, C.224.M.80.1925.III, annexe 51 (Dr. Y. Biraud) - (1935), CH/22 d session/P.V.

[6] Letter to Dr. Haskovec, April 14th 1927 in LONA-3.

[7] *Le certificat medical prématrimonial*, Institut International d'anthropologie, Prague, IIe Session, 14-21 septembre 1925, p. 7, in LONA-3.

[8] Letter sent in March 27th 1930, and registered in the HS in April 8th, 1930, in LONA-4.

[9] The International Federation of Eugenic Organizations, *Membership list and governing rules*, September, 1929, p. 5, in LONA-4.

[10] Founded in 1928, the Union was a direct outcome of the World Population Conference held at Geneva in 1927.

[11] Letter from W.F. Schubert, member of Section of International Bureaux to Chass. B. Davenport, April 29th 1930 in LONA-4.

[12] Bernard considered both heredity and contagion «as a cause of pathology and as a matter of public health» (Zylberman 2001, 261-262). Like many other doctors in France, after World War I, he was focused on the rise of population growth and social hygiene though specifically eugenic ideas weren't condemned.

[13] Sociologist, founder of Social People's Party, a member of the National Consultative Assembly during the Primo de Rivera's dictatorship and procurator of the parliament for five terms during the Franco period.

[14] *Population Problems*, International Congress for Studies Regarding Population, Rome, 7-10 September 1931, Economic Section (in LONA-5).

[15] HC's Seventeenth session, May 4th, 1931, p. 2, in LONA-6.

[16] National Council for Mental Hygiene, London, 15th December 1932 from Doris M. Odlum to M.D. Mackenzie, p. 2 (in LONA-6).

[17] *Ibid*., p. 4

[18] League of Nations, Health Committee, *Minutes of the eleventh session held at Geneva from October 28th to November 3rd*, p. 15, C.579.M.205.1927.III.

[19] *Report on the Work of the Health Committee*, 8th Session, October 1926, Health Section, in LONA-2.

[20] League of Nations, Health Committee, *Minutes of the eleventh session held at Geneva from October 28th to November 3rd*, p. 106, C.579.M.205.1927.III.

[21] *Rapport sur les travaux des conférences des directeurs d'écoles d'hygiène tenues à Paris, du 20 au 24 mai 1930 et à Dresde, du 14 au 17 juillet 1930 avec un mémorandum sur l'enseignement de l'hygiène dans certains pays d'Europe présenté à la Conférence de Dresde et une Introduction par Léonard Bernard*, Organisation de l'Hygiène, Société des Nations, Genève, 1930, p. 9.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 15

[23] «Evidence of this [referring to actions concentrated on family life] were the anti-tuberculosis dispensaries and 'positive' eugenic measures, such as early screening for defects and educating mothers about the danger or germs» (Zylberman 2001, 263).

[24] The sterilization «soulève des objections d'ordre moral» (Sand 1941, 69).

[25] She refers to *Annuals reports for 1925 and 1926*; April 1926 A.17.1926.III (C.H.442) and February 1927 A.9.1927.III (C.H.529).

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## Summary

*The League of Nations and eugenics: an overview of transnational activity*

While it is commonly considered that the League of Nations did not develop eugenics programs, transnational activities related to such a doctrine can nevertheless be identified throughout the organization. Several official representatives and experts reported studying links between racial or biological factors on the one hand, and some diseases and behaviors, on the other. Exchange programs for experts, organized by the League, were also an occasion for sharing eugenics knowledge. Thus, though the LoN's main health activities and discourse concerned the social determinants of disease (working conditions, urbanization, etc.), identification and avoidance of the biological sources of illness were not completely set aside. Not only was the latter compatible with social policy but it has nowadays become an implicit part of WHO's definition of health.



## Riassunto

*La Società delle Nazioni e l'eugenetica: una rassegna sull'attività transnazionale*

Nonostante sia comunemente riconosciuto che la Società delle Nazioni non abbia sviluppato programmi eugenetici, è possibile riconoscere alcune attività transnazionali legate alle dottrine eugenetiche nell'attività di questa organizzazione internazionale. Numerosi rappresentati ed esperti ufficiali presentarono rapporti concernenti ricerche sul collegamento tra fattori razziali e biologici, da un lato, e alcune malattie o comportamenti, dall'altro. I programmi di scambio di esperti, organizzati dalla Società delle Nazioni, furono anche un'occasione per diffondere le conoscenze eugenetiche. Di conseguenza, sebbene il linguaggio e le principali attività della Società riguardanti la salute si concentrassero sulle determinanti sociali di malattia (condizioni di lavoro, urbanesimo, ecc.), l'obiettivo dell'identificazione e dell'eliminazione delle sue cause biologiche non fu completamente accantonato. Tale obiettivo non solo era perfettamente compatibile con le politiche sociali, ma è divenuto oggi implicitamente parte della definizione di salute data dall'Organizzazione mondiale della Sanità.



*Keywords*
League of Nations; Eugenics; Transnational; Social hygiene; WHO.

*Parole chiave*
Società delle Nazioni; Eugenetica; Transnazionale; Igiene sociale; Organizzazione mondiale della sanità.

# Latin and Nordic Eugenics in the project of racial improvement set up by Giuseppe Sergi, founder of the Comitato italiano per gli studi di Eugenica

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Giuseppe Sergi was one of the greatest exponents of physical and evolutionist anthropology in Italy at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. He was also rightly regarded as a champion of the positive eugenics, characteristic of the Latin countries, that aimed to identify the biological and environmental factors that could be utilised socially to prevent degenerative pathologies and thus favour the reproduction and perfecting of desirable individuals. But Sergi's proposals concerning degenerative processes that were taking place have not been sufficiently examined in scientific literature about eugenics. These proposals underwent a significant evolution from Sergi's book *Le degenerazioni umane* (*Human Degeneracies*) (1889) to articles published close to and during World War I. We have regarded this evolution as worthy of being studied in depth in this essay.

While Sergi did indeed call for the drastic measures of negative eugenics for degenerates in his treatise at the end of the 19th century, in the course of World War I (a pre-eminently dysgenic event) he became convinced of the impracticability of sterilisation, branded as immoral by public opinion. Thus despite his constant calls for the elimination of degenerates, it is possible to speculate that, for Sergi, segregation remained the only practicable measure of negative eugenics.

**Introduction.** Italian scientific literature has focused on the eugenics movement since the 1980s, acknowledging the prevailing trends that had already taken shape in international scientific output (see for example Pogliano 1984, 1999 and 2005; Israel, Nastasi 1998; Maiocchi 1999 and 2004; Padovan 1999; Mantovani 2004; Cassata 2006 and 2011; Ciceri 2009; Israel 2010). According to the latter, the issue of eugenics, understood at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries as a study of socially-controllable factors determining the rise and fall in the biological quality of generations to come (Galton 1883 and 1904)[1], manifested itself in Latin countries in the adoption of a scheme (in which preventive social medicine, welfare of mothers and infants and, more generally, health and hygiene programmes played a prominent part) that aimed at the creation of an environment favourable to the reproduction and perfecting of desirable individuals (Latin eugenics, positive or preventive; see the articles in Adams 1990 and the very recent Turda, Gillette 2014).

In the Anglo-American, German and Scandinavian world, by contrast, the supporters of eugenics advocated the assumption of measures (such as sterilisation, abortion and segregation) that aimed to avoid the reproduction of 'undesirable' individuals. This was 'Nordic' eugenics or, according to the prevailing acceptation,

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negative eugenics (in this connection, see, for the British case, Mazumdar 1992; for the North American, Black 2003; for the German, Friedländer 1997; and for the Scandinavian, Broberg, Roll-Hansen 1996).

These two conceptions of eugenics had one element in common: the right and duty of the State to guide and manage reproductive processes. They were therefore different from the so-called liberal, new or consumer eugenics that emerged after World War II and refuted any legitimacy for public authorities to interfere in procreative choices: these should be left entirely to the individual (in this connection see Agar 2004).

As for the Italian case, some authors have put forward the hypothesis that the eugenics debate taking shape at the beginning of the last century was intended to be used under Fascism by the supporters of Nazi-inspired biological racism to support their radical proposals of negative eugenics (Padovan 1999, 453). But this was never put into effect by the Fascist regime; instead it embraced a pro-natal line of eugenics, being convinced that the strength of a nation and the racial betterment were closely linked to fertility increase (Quine 2012).

Italian research in the field of eugenics has begun to sketch an initial profile of the anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi. He was one of the founders of the eugenics movement in Italy, yet to date there is no complete scientific biography of him (for information on Sergi the eugenicist see Tedesco 2011 and 2012). After showing very early interest in philosophy and before becoming definitively engaged in physical and evolutionist anthropology, Giuseppe Sergi (Messina, 20 March 1841 - Rome, 17 October 1936) dedicated himself to studies of psychology, criminology and sociology. He helped to widen the knowledge of Herbert Spencer in Italy, editing the Italian version of the British philosopher's *The Study of Sociology* (1881a) and *The Data of Ethics* (1881b).

Sergi lectured at the University of Bologna from 1880 to 1884 and was Professor of Anthropology at the Faculty of Science in Rome from 1884 to 1916. From 1889 he was director of Italy's first laboratory of comparative and experimental psychology, attached to the Istituto di Antropologia (Institute of Anthropology) in Rome that was still run by him. In 1893 he founded the Società romana di Antropologia (Anthropological Society of Rome), transformed in 1937 into the Istituto italiano di Antropologia (Italian Institute of Anthropology). From this organisation emerged the Comitato italiano per gli studi di eugenetica (Italian Committee of Eugenic Studies) in 1913. He was director of the «Atti» della Società romana di Antropologia (Society Proceedings), which became «Rivista di Antropologia» (Journal of Anthropology) in 1911 and «Journal of Anthropological Sciences» in 2004. He co-directed the «Rivista di Filosofia scientifica»[2] (Journal of Scientific Philosophy) – founded by Enrico Morselli, one of the greatest Italian experts in anthropological psychiatry – and the «Rivista Italiana di Sociologia» (Italian Journal of Sociology) founded together with Guido Cavaglieri and Salvatore Cognetti De Martiis. He also founded and directed «Educazione e istruzione: rivista di pedagogia e scienze affini» (Education and Teaching: a Journal of Pedagogy and Related Sciences)[3].

Sergi's prestige in the world of science was assured in 1914, when a committee was founded to honour him on the occasion of his 75th birthday; this committee then published a jubilee volume signed by Italian and foreign scholars (*Volume giubilare in onore di Giuseppe Sergi* 1915-1916). The committee included the palaeoethnologist Luigi Pigorini, director of the Museo preistorico ed etnografico (Prehistoric and Ethnographic Museum) of Rome; the anthropologist Vincenzo Giuffrida-Ruggeri, director of the Istituto di Antropologia (Institute of Anthropology) of the University of Naples and Sante De Sanctis, president of the Società romana di Antropologia.

Sergi was a scholar in a plurality of disciplines in the second half of the 19th century, a time when quite a few scientific specializations were becoming widespread (Bongiorno 1998, 111). He put these specialisations at the service of a rational refounding of a society whose psycho-physical integrity had to be safeguarded by means of a project of racial perfecting and the expunging of any metaphysical or religious element, which was just as threatening to society as the biological degeneration of the race.

Such perfecting in Sergi's opinion had to be pursued by means of physical and moral prophylaxis, preventive social medicine, the welfare of mothers and infants and education, these measures being appropriate for the prevention of degeneration. This approach was shared by Italy's political and medical class, who were inclined for the most part to agree with the 'environmentalist-neo-Lamarckian' model rather than the 'determinist-Mendelian' (Mantovani 2004, 32). But if Sergi believed that it was possible to prevent degeneration, he was nevertheless convinced that there was no remedy for the serious degenerative phenomena that were already taking place. So Sergi questioned the usefulness of the system of negative eugenics for incurable hereditary defects. On this point, his position underwent an evolution between the end of the 19th century and World War I. The purpose of this essay is to study this aspect of Sergi's thinking, since it has not previously been investigated in depth.

**Inferior adaptation, artificial selection and the limits of education in Giuseppe Sergi.** The category of 'degeneration' was brought into being as a diagnostic tool of psychiatry by the French alienist Benedict Augustin Morel (Huertas Garcia-Alejo 1987, Darmon 1989 and Sueur 1994). It moved from its original biomedical terrain to have an impact on sociology and psychology (Bonetta 1990, 37) and was transformed in Europe in the last 30 years of the 19th century «in the most effective representation of the true identity crisis that gripped European society» (Mantovani 2004, 15 and Pick 1993). This phenomenon is easily understood only if one pays attention to the extent to which that category turned out to be extraordinarily useful in accounting for the socially most unwelcome and dramatic outcomes and tensions of socio-economic 19th century modernisation (Gervasoni 1997, 1090; Gilman, Chamberlin 1985; Leps, 1992).

Even in Italy a quick glance at the truly impressive number of writings that have been dedicated to this subject demonstrates very clearly that this theme of degen-

eration was really crucial in the cultural scene at the beginning of the last century (Rossi 1987, 63). Interest in this theme was also fed by concerns about maintaining the fledging unity of the nation. It is only in the light of such a preoccupation that one can understand the anguished questioning about the fate of Latin nations put by a Lombrosian sociologist such as Guglielmo Ferrero, author of *L'Europa giovane* (*The Young Europe*) (1897), and by Sergi himself, who severely chastised the conduct of the Italian ruling class in *La decadenza delle nazioni latine* (*The Decadence of the Latin Nations*) (1900) for dissipating the meagre resources of a State more recently formed than other Latin countries, such as Spain and France, in absurd colonial adventures. That was in fact what Italian governments did in the last 20 years of the 19th century: rather than «rebuilding the nation's forces, generating the strength to produce those riches in what a territory like Italy offered», they were «squandering those few national resources that were there with excessive spending that was supposed to give Italy the appearance of a great nation» (Sergi 1900, 118).

We can plant Sergi's investigation in this fertile cultural ground. He started off from the researches of Cesare Lombroso, as he himself had to acknowledge openly (Sergi 1908, 36). It was in fact Lombroso's researches that relaunched the studies of the potential links between crime and degeneration in the 1880s, not only in Italy but also in France and England (Darmon 1989, 34-37; Nye 1984[4]; Leps 1992). This followed the first expression of interest in the subject in English Spencerian circles in the 1860s (Boon 1985).

But at the end of the 19th century the theme of degeneration was widely discussed in other countries such as Spain and Portugal; it contributed to the success of the social hygiene movement and of disciplines such as sociology and criminology (Turda, Gillette 2014). In 1913 the Portuguese eugenicist António Mendes Correia became with his study *Os Criminosos Portugueses* (*Portuguese Criminals*) one of the first eugenicists in the Latin world to link eugenics with Cesare Lombroso's reflections on the biological origin of degeneration (Henriques 2012, 44-46).

But all the Italian eugenicists, from Enrico Morselli (1879) to the psychiatrist Augusto Tamburini (1875) and Paolo Mantegazza, holder of Italy's first anthropology professorship, were in agreement that degeneration had an organic base (Rossi 1987, 63-65 and Burgio 1999, 24). Yet this viewpoint encountered some opposition outside true eugenics circles. For example the statistician and sociologist Napoleone Colajanni criticised the Lombroso school itself, asserting that the causes of physical degeneration were of a socio-economic nature, not biological (Colajanni 1890).

Even the idea that 'regeneration' ought to be entrusted to artificial selection and thus placed side by side with Darwinian natural selection made its way through the various national eugenics schools of thought, including the Latin ones. Sergi was not the only eugenicist to advocate the urgent need to promote artificial selection: others included the Romanian neurologist Gheorghe Marinescu (Turda, Gillette 2014) and the Spanish surgeon Enrique Diego Madrazo (Cleminson 2000, 82-83).

Lombroso may have taken the view that crime and deviancy had a biological ori-

gin, which the social environment helped to trigger or contain (Gervasoni 1997, 1101), but for Sergi the organic origins of various degenerative processes were still more convincing, as was revealed in 1889 by *Le degenerazioni umane* (Sergi 1889). This work has been aptly described as a substantial compendium of «the mentality, prejudices and fears of an era» (Pogliano 1999, 425). These degenerations, Sergi clarified, «are truly physical» and «for the most part cause disastrous harm to the vital functions; and intellectual and moral degenerations are the grave and fatal consequences of such harm, both for the individual who suffers them and for the entire social organism» (Sergi 1889)[5]. Sergian anthropology thus indicated that any «morphological degeneration» was a more or less serious «*sign or indication of functional degeneration*» (Sergi 1889, 27, in italics in the original).

The link between morphology and degeneration thus indicated a certain distance between Sergi and Lombroso in the identification of the necessary elements for recognising the presence or absence of a degenerative process. Although he shared the Lombrosian determinist and reductionist formulation, Sergi in fact considered that facial and cranial indicators revealed ethnic origin – not degenerative phenomena, as Lombroso believed. To identify the latter it would be essential to carry out a morphological, anatomical and physiological examination of the various organs.

Sergi dedicated a chapter in *Le degenerazioni umane* to each type of degeneration. Thus the reader was confronted with an array of case histories of sufferers from hereditary defects: the insane, suicides, criminals, prostitutes, parasites, slaves and menials, vagrants and beggars. All these subjects, the unhappy 'residue' of bourgeois society, are defined as «degenerates» in that «although they survive in the struggle for existence, they are weak and bear the signs, mostly obvious, of their weakness, both in their physical shape and in their behaviour» (Sergi 1889, 25).

Adaptation of degenerates to the social environment, runs Sergi's theory, could not have happened «in normal conditions as used to happen for the strong, who are already suited to such conditions. Such adaptation must necessarily be in an inferior guise, since the condition of the weak is inferior» (Sergi 1889, 24). This «survival in inferior conditions» was precisely degeneration, a survival that allowed degenerates to reproduce themselves and thus pass on their pathologies (even those acquired during their lifetime) by heredity to their descendants.

There were various types of degenerates: those who presented «signs of subhuman or bestial atavism»; those with congenital morbid conditions, from heredity or from «vices» acquired at conception; those born healthy but damaged by disease or degenerative influences from the external environment or bad usage of vital functions (Sergi 1889, 26). Even the last-named were condemned, according to Sergi, to pass on their degenerative pathologies to their offspring.

«Inferior adaptation» was not presented by Sergi as an antithesis to the Darwinian theory of natural selection (see Volpone 2011 for Sergi's reading of Darwin)[6] but as one of his 'completions' that accounted for the non-definitive extinction of the degenerates. (Inferior adaptation «is not a phenomenon that is absolutely contrary to the theory of selection»; it «does not […] overturn the doctrine of selection»: Sergi 1889, 196-197).

As has been said, according to Sergi there is a close connection between physical and mental degeneration. Anaemia, malaria, cachexia and pellagra, for example, attack not only the physical body but «bring about mental degeneration» (Sergi 1889, 30)[7].

Character, Sergi maintained, that is to say, that *modus operandi*, that «way of explaining individual activity on each occasion, in each event of a life in the social community» (Sergi 1889, 34) was in its organic base «an organism that depended on the physical organism; if all the character-forming elements were mental functions organised as ways of activity, if one of these functions was not normal because of a physical defect, whether the defect had come into being because of congenital morbid deterioration or arrested development *in utero* or later or because of illnesses during the individual's life, then it naturally followed that this defect, large or small, must be present in the individual's character» (Sergi 1889, 39-40).

More precisely, character was made up of two components: the fundamental and the adventitious. The first of these «derives from the slow depositing and continuous accumulation of elements that are formed in a succession of generations from whom the individual is descended; the adventitious is that which is added during the lifespan of the individual» (Sergi 1889, 35). Character formation, in the history of humankind, had happened and still happened by «stratification» from the «primitive» life to the «semi-savage» to the «civilised» (Sergi 1889, 35)[8]. Primitive and 'egoistic' character types in the course of the generations tend to be extinguished at the behavioural level in favour of 'altruistic' forms but «not in the existence of constituent elements» (Sergi 1889, 35). «The primitive strata of character – in fact – are the effect not of a single period of an individual life but of several human generations; they are inherited, in their organic elements, in their physical basis without active or functional form, but capable of returning to mental activity» (Sergi 1889, 36). It was precisely the degenerative process that had the capacity to reactivate such character data;

> the degeneration of physical elements in the psyche, which causes the absence or abnormality of many character features and impedes the organisation of all these psychic elements according to the individual's living conditions, does not destroy that foundation of the atavistic character that has been consolidated over several generations; or rather gives an opportunity, when there lacks a truly normal psychic organism, for such a character to reappear in full (Sergi 1889, 43).

So, Sergi wondered anxiously

> What could the addition of an adventitious element do for a hereditary or congenital character defect? What influence would be effective in eliminating this fundamental vice? There are those who believe in the correction and regeneration of a character that was born bad; there are those who do not believe in the possibility of such effects. Now I believe that we need to distinguish between various gradations of the character that is born degenerate. If the degeneration is partial, confined to some secondary element, then correction is possible but very difficult to achieve because there can be no principles or general directive rules like those in education in general and adopting the usual methods would have no chance of success. Here we need to study each individual case as a morbidity, to see its origin and the type of defect and try to remedy it with the slow and spe-

> cial substitution of efficacious and ordered elements. But when the degeneration is serious and extensive, no regeneration is possible» (Sergi 1889, 42).

Thus for Sergi character degeneration resulting from a congenital defect or one caused by conditioning of the environment was often irremediable (Sergi 1889, 52) and had the same outcome, the disintegration of the character itself; the only significant difference «is in this, that degeneration resulting from a degenerate psychophysical structure usually occurs early on, while the degeneration caused by social influences can occur at all stages of life» (Sergi 1889, 51-52). In each case, «rehabilitation is a delusion of sentimentalism; it is possible only to arrest incipient disintegration, or initial degeneration» (Sergi 1889, 51-52).

So Sergi conceded very little scope for any recovery of degenerates. Indeed whatever the cause of the degeneration might be, «the effect is that character does not exist in the degenerates but remains solely in fragmentary shapes» (Sergi 1889, 58). But Sergi's main concern was that «the unhappy phenomenon of the survival of the weak» was based precisely on the hereditariness of both physical and mental degeneration, including that of character, and that the *corpo sano* of the nation was unaware of the seriousness of this phenomenon. Inferior adaptation was thus increased, lamented Sergi, «by a social factor», «the protection of the weak», «effect of unselfish feelings» characteristic of civil society (Sergi 1889, 197). Such protection culpably encouraged the reproduction of degenerates. It might be expedient for society to support 'normal' people who had suffered an accident, so as to reintegrate them in their productive capacity, but society had no interest in supporting incurable degenerates.

From this position derives Sergi's severe condemnation of private charities and also of public welfare which had done nothing but increase the number of people with hereditary defects. Conversely, «severe repressions, […] often violent measures, through which these dangerous beings have been put to death or imprisoned, have had some effect» (Sergi 1889, 202). Thus the productive classes, and particularly the working class, might deserve the widest possible social protection but the degenerates, «those who have made no attempt to overcome life's problems» (Sergi 1889, 204) should not be the objects of social altruism: not because they were «invariably responsible for their inferior condition and therefore should be punished, but because one should not feed and protect social parasites and, by protecting them, increase them and their progeny through the encouragement of inferior adaptation» (Sergi 1889, 204). Not because they deserve to be punished but because they are a cost to society, Sergi accordingly advocated

> a severe repression of degenerates, such as criminals, vagrants, professional beggars, parasites, in short those who are capable of working but harmful and dangerous to society. They should be forced to work, either freely out of doors or in suitable places like enclosures, forcing them to take a job from which they would obtain their sustenance and clothing; they might be deported to desert islands, where they would be forced to work if they wanted to live; so long as they remained in Italy, they should be prevented from having children, so that their diseases died with them and were not passed to offspring as an unhappy legacy (Sergi 1889, 227-228).

This is «artificial» selection, a salutary and indispensable corollary to natural selection (Volpone, 2008, 165 and Tedesco 2011, 59). In sum, society should not take care of degenerates and their offspring; to do so would simply waste energy and resources that could instead be directed to the support of those, among the healthy, who were at risk of degenerating because of an environment that was unsuitable for mental and physical development. Such development called essentially for three elements: sufficient nourishment; education («the most serious problem of our day»: Sergi 1889, 215), which by itself permitted the acquisition of «knowledge of one's own personal worth» (Sergi 1889, 216) and work, which «morally regenerates every individual» (Sergi 1889, 217).

Education, a truly crucial issue for Italy's entire liberal and bourgeois culture during the growth of the new Italian State, was for Sergi the main tool for assuring and increasing the status, dignity and integrity of character, on which «all individual and social conduct» depended (Sergi 1889, 215). Concerning education Sergi pronounced a true anathema upon classical teaching, which he thought was inadequate to meet the ever greater and more demanding challenges presented by the second industrial revolution: «they have given us chaotic schools» and all that university graduates asked for was «public sector jobs, being incapable of doing any other kind of work» (Sergi 1889, 220). Sergi suggested that there should be many more vocational schools concentrating on the arts, trades and commerce, «because trade and industry are predominant today and rightly so» (Sergi 1889, 220).

The anonymous (and anodyne) review that appeared in «Nuova Antologia» («New Anthology») may have defined Sergi's work as «serious and seriously thought-out» and the author as «not only an anthropologist who was nourished by rigorous studies, but also a conscientious observer» (Anonymous review 1889a, 612) and the anthropologist Vincenzo Giuffrida-Ruggeri may have noted that Sergi's concept of character stratification commendably took account of the «reappearance of the lowest strata of degeneration», understood as the outcome of «the atavism of psychic manifestations» (Giuffrida-Ruggeri 1896-1897, 157); but Paolo Mantegazza described Sergi's book as «useless; it reveals no new facts or new laws; it does not clarify obscure things, nor does it assemble scattered and confused facts in logical order» (Mantegazza 1888, 289)[9]. Sergi's definition of degenerates was «confused» and «wrong» (Mantegazza 1888, 289)[10], their classification «a jumble of deplorable confusion» (Mantegazza 1888, 289)[11] and the mention of slaves among them clearly indicated a moralistic mixture of pathology and bourgeois ethics («a more deplorable confusion of the ethical concept and the pathological element could not be made nor conceived»: Mantegazza 1888, 290)[12].

These last observations were however attacked by the curator of the column *Riassunto di giornali scientifici* (*Résumé of Scientific Journals*) of the «Archivio di Psichiatria» («Archives of Psychiatry») (1889) as being nothing more than «despicable and ignoble insults against Sergi, Lombroso and the New School». But Sergi's work, according to the «Rivista sperimentale di freniatria» («Experimental Journal of Psychiatry»), claimed «the serious attention of statesmen and educators» (Belmondo 1889, 63), who 'wanted to resolve the most difficult social questions,

being scornful or ignorant about the more firmly-fixed facts of the biological sciences' (Belmondo 1889, 64).

Some of Mantegazza's observations did without doubt hit the nail on the head: the «indignation of a follower of Garibaldi who was disappointed by the post-Risorgimento compromises» (Mantovani 2004, 56) and who managed to detect in post-unification obsequiousness the final degeneration of the former slave's psychology, a degeneration that wiped out free will in whole or in part (Sergi 1889, 58) and made those who had been affected by it «unfit for great deeds and in particular […] incapable of initiatives» (Sergi 1889, 57) fell far short of the discipline and rigour to be expected of a scientist.

Sergi's pedagogy, on the other hand, proved to be deeply infused with support for moralistic self-help and the productivist ethic: he called for virtue, self-education and moderation and indignantly rejected idleness and moral laxity (Sergi 1885)[13]. The Scottish self-help promoter Samuel Smiles had considerable success, even in Italy, with this type of teaching (Govoni 2002, 122-125).

Sergi was convinced that remembered «degenerative influences coming from the external environment» could undermine the normal development of the individual's organic functions. It must be emphasised that this conviction persuaded him to ask public authorities constantly, with a force and insistence no less than that shown by the more open socialist and liberal culture of that time (Gervasoni 1997, 1108), to adopt measures aimed at preventing the spread of such degenerative influences: in particular education, conceived as 'social hygiene', which protected the maturing character from the threat of degenerative alterations and was «a uniquely effective weapon against the randomness of environmental assaults» (Rossi 1987, 80). «Arresting moral degeneration as soon as it appears – Sergi affirmed emphatically some years after the publication of *Le degenerazioni umane* – is a salutary and very urgent task and undoubtedly one way of achieving this is education from an early age in ways that are the most suitable for the various social classes» (Sergi 1892, 13).

In subsequent years Sergi focused his attention on elementary, vocational and secondary schooling. Concerning the last of these, the new age of science and technology and of iron and steel compelled Sergi to give absolute priority to science rather than to the classics (Cavallera 1989, 689-691; Sergi 1914a, 7; Sergi 1913, 7). Along with the educational aspect, Sergi constantly had in mind the aspect of coercion; this necessarily derived from his conviction, as we have seen, of the near-impossibility of remedying a degeneration that was already in progress.

**The Comitato Italiano per gli studi di Eugenica and the turning point of World War I.** In *Degenerazioni umane* Sergi was convinced of the hereditariness of acquired characteristics. This conviction was reaffirmed in *Problemi di scienza contemporanea* (*Problems of Contemporary Science*) (Sergi 1904, 155). The picture changes with his report to the first International Eugenics Congress in London in July 1912 (Sergi 1912), an event that marked the discovery of eugenics on the part of a large Italian delegation made up of anthropologists, biologists, demographers,

sociologists and psychiatrists. In his report Sergi was obliged to take into consideration the renewed interest in the laws of Mendel, revealed for the first time in Italy by the botanist Giuseppe Cuboni in 1903 in his studies on hybridism (Volpone 2008, 12). In this forum Sergi suspended judgment concerning the hereditariness of acquired characteristics («Are the variations presented by the living of just one type or of various types? And are all of them transmitted in the same way, whatever their nature, or only some?» in Sergi 1912, 9).

Two years later Sergi did not take a clear position on the applicability to mankind of the genetic heredity laws formulated by Mendel; but he made a distinction between 'normal' and 'morbid' hereditariness (Sergi 1914b, 373)[14]. On this last point, Sergi emphasised, there were no doubts: «We can affirm only one thing as an unquestionable fact and that is the existence of morbid and abnormal heredity, which is multiple and wide-ranging; but we cannot provide definite proof of its origin and causes» (Sergi 1914b, 373)[15]. In London even Morselli, in his report *Persistenza e variazione dei caratteri di razza* (*The Persistence and Variation of Racial Characteristics*) espoused the mixed notion of hereditary transmission of characteristics that attempted to reconcile Mendelian laws and the hereditariness of acquired characteristics (Mantovani 2004, 77). Other anthropologists and eugenicists, for example Mantegazza, refused to alter even «a comma of their own former opinion», totally rejecting the applicability to mankind of Mendel's discoveries (Volpone 2008, 182).

It was precisely his bitter awareness of «morbid and abnormal» hereditariness that drove Sergi, on the occasion of the reunion of the Società romana di Antropologia on 21 March 1913, to propose the establishment of a centre for the study of eugenics, like the ones that had already been created in France and Denmark (*Verbali delle adunanze della Società romana di Antropologia* (*Minutes of the Meetings held by the Roman Society of Anthropology*) 1913, 512). To this end contacts were set up with the Eugenics Education Society in London.

At the suggestion of Sergi himself and the anthropologist Alfredo Niceforo, the assembly discussed the establishment of an Italian Committee for the Study of Eugenics (*Atti del Comitato italiano per gli studi di Eugenica* (*Minutes of the Meetings held by the Italian Committee for the Study of Eugenics*) 1913, 543)[16]. On 7 April the board of directors appointed a temporary Commission, tasked with drawing up the Committee's programme. The members of this temporary Commission, in addition to Sergi and Niceforo, were the statistician Corrado Gini, the psychiatrists Antonio Marro and Giovanni Mingazzini and Sergi's assistant at the Istituto di Antropologia (Institute of Anthropology) at the University of Rome, Umberto Saffiotti.

The Commission elected Sergi as chairman and Saffiotti as secretary. In the Commission's first circular letter of 1 June 1913, we read that the objective of the Committee was to be «the study of factors that could determine the progress or decline of races, whether in their physical or mental aspect, carrying out for example researches on the heredity of normal or pathological characteristics, on the influence of the environment and lifestyle of the parents on the characters of their children, on

the importance of the temporary conditions of the organism for the act of reproduction, on the influence of the lifestyle or environment in which the new organism develops» (*Atti del Comitato italiano per gli studi di Eugenica* 1913, 543-544).

The Commission then announced that the first general assembly of Committee members would take place on 17 November 1913. On that occasion the statute was approved and the board of directors was appointed; Sergi was chairman for the two-year period: 1914-1915. The board members were Sante De Sanctis, the zoologist Cesare Artom, Corrado Gini, the gynaecologist Luigi Mangiagalli, Alfredo Niceforo, Umberto Saffiotti e and Miss L.M. Underwood, a member of the Istituto internazionale di Agricoltura (International Institute of Agriculture) in Rome.

By that time dozens of experts had joined the Committee, including anthropologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, gynaecologists, physiologists, zoologists, anatomists, jurists, statisticians and economists, forensic scientists, professors of clinical medicine and medical officers (for a full list see Mantovani 2004, 80-82).

The Statute stated in its article 2 that the purpose of the Committee ought not to be merely «the study of factors that could improve or worsen the quality of future generations», but also the definition of the «relevant measures». To this end the Committee supported an enquiry into the scientific output of its supporters, aimed at classifying the works within the two sections of the International Catalogue of Eugenics: «general or theoretical eugenics» and «applied eugenics». In the latter we find 'persuasive' proposals («education in families and schools», «propaganda among adults»); 'protective' ones («measures aimed at improving the fecundity of eugenic couples, prizes for prolific couples, polygamy, limiting the fecundity of non-eugenic couples, etc.») but also 'coercive' measures («obligatory schooling, obligatory physical education in schools, hygienic measures, prophylactic measures etc.», «segregation, deportation of the dysgenic, suppression of idiots, of the insane, of those born grossly deformed, etc», «requirement of medical marriage certificates, age limits and limits on the age difference between spouses, prohibition of marriage between the consanguineous, etc,», «sterilisation, vasectomy, ovariectomy») (*Atti del Comitato italiano per gli studi di Eugenica* 1913, 552).

It is unquestionably true that the most radical of such proposals, for example sterilisation, had the support only of a minority in the field of Italian eugenic thinking (Cassata 2006, 114-125). They were not put into effect even by the Fascist regime, that was concerned with 'populationist' eugenics (Mantovani 2004, 285-345). The Catholic Church agreed with a 'quantitative' approach[17]. The Church, in fact, did not agree to direct interference in the reproductive processes except for protecting maternity, rejecting the lawfulness of 'qualitative' eugenic interventions aimed at ensuring the superior biological quality of the community. The encyclical *Casti Connubii* of December 1930 accordingly condemned not only sterilisation and abortion but also more cautious measures such as the pre-marriage certificate.

Sergi, at the time of the initial meeting of the Committee, was circumspect in regard to requests for legislative measures that would limit personal freedom for the purpose of protecting public health; such measures had been advanced by Mingazzini, the jurist Lorenzo Ratto and the economist Achille Loria. Sergi justi-

fied his reluctance not on ideological grounds but because he considered that «[we are] far from being able to profit from what is still being discussed in the field of science» (*Verbali delle adunanze della Società romana di Antropologia* (*Minutes of the Meetings held by the Roman Society of Anthropology*) 1913, 513).

In the following year Sergi stated the need to «eliminate the human beings who bear hereditary pathological and degenerative defects in whatever way such elimination can be carried out» (Sergi 1914b, 378) and reaffirmed the uselessness of education for «defectives», who could beget only «criminals, prostitutes, lunatics, maniacs, vagrants and beggars» (Sergi 1914b, 379).

He specified however that matrimonial prohibitions were ineffective and would merely augment the number of illegitimate children and that sterilisation was probably not supported by «universal opinion» (Sergi 1914b, 375). Among the eugenic remedies propounded by the Anglo-Saxon school of thought, segregation was the only one that did not prompt Sergi to raise moral objections or doubts about effectiveness, provided that such segregation was not «permanent» (Sergi 1914b, 375). It is therefore possible to advance the hypothesis that the 'elimination' referred to above would for Sergi have consisted in the adoption of segregation measures for degenerates during their fertile years.

The Great War acted as a potent catalyst in the eugenics debate, as can easily be understood. A great many Italian eugenicists, Sergi in particular, identified the War as «an irreversible factor in racial decadence» (Cassata 2006, 52) and a dreadful experiment in «wrong eugenics» (Aveta 1915, 4): wrong in that modern warfare indiscriminately eliminated both the less and the more 'suitable', or rather entrusted the reproductive function for the most part to those exempted from military service, who were certainly biologically inferior to the servicemen, and to mothers affected by wartime and post-war economic restrictions and by serious pathologies of the nervous system.

In his *L'eugenica e la decadenza delle nazioni* (*Eugenics and the Decadence of Nations*) (1916a; but see also Sergi 1917), in which he introduced «the fertile chapter of the dysgenic consequences […] of war» (Mantovani 2004, 201; see also Quine 2012, 103), Sergi summarised his position on eugenics in the following terms: eugenics

> has up till now had a dual purpose in human society: to assist the normal development of healthy individuals and to halt morbid heredity. For the first purpose we need to create all the favourable conditions for preserving individuals who do not present pathogenic defects; this would help to combine all society's efforts towards individual and social preservation. The second purpose would be the elimination of the elements whom, to make things clear, let us call degenerate, not in the sense of getting rid of them, but by impeding the inheriting of such elements, which would multiply the number and quality of degenerates if they were allowed to procreate freely (Sergi 1916a, 3)[18].

This last sentence would seem to allude to sterilisation, which Sergi had however rejected two years earlier. Once more, in the absence of an explicit position, we can only speculate on whether Sergi would have consented to a segregationist policy that would prevent degenerates from reproducing.

**Conclusions.** Sergi was a truly radical champion of that «secular and scientific paradigm of the grasp and management of social reality», the fruit «of the extraordinary cultural legitimisation conferred on scientific thinking by unprecedented technological progress» (Mantovani 2004, 356-357). For Sergi the educative momentum was critically important within a project of social engineering that ended with the creation of a society peacefully devoted to the maximisation of levels of production (Mantovani 2004, 61; Tedesco 2011, 55). A secular education, firmly directed by the State, could have turned out to be for Sergi a powerful eugenic tool aimed at preventing degenerative processes in individuals and thus decadence in the entire national system (Tedesco 2012, 55-84). Sergi therefore, along with Morselli, was among the authors most valued by Italian positivistic pedagogy (Rossi 1987, 80). Sergi may have regarded education as an indispensable tool for the perfecting of healthy individuals and the prevention of environmental degenerative pathologies, but its limits were all too clear in dealing with the degenerative phenomena in existence.

Sergi's thinking on the curbing of such phenomena was to undergo a significant evolution, which we have considered to be worthy of investigating in depth in this essay.

In his wide-ranging and much discussed work of 1889, *Le degenerazioni umane*, Sergi called explicitly for segregation and implicitly also for sterilisation to check degenerative processes.

Despite the progressive spread in Italy at the beginning of the 20th century of Mendel's discoveries, Sergi continued to hold the view that degeneration was hereditary.

He went back to studying eugenics in detail during World War I, a pre-eminently dysgenic event, but became convinced of the impracticability of sterilisation, branded as immoral by the greater part of public opinion. Despite his continuous calls for the elimination of degenerates, it is possible to speculate that segregation remained for Sergi the only practicable measure of negative eugenics.

[*] Translated by Jennifer Radice (jennifer @theradices.co.uk). The quotations from the works of Giuseppe Sergi and other Italian authors are translated from the original texts.

[1] Francis Galton, a half-cousin of Charles Darwin, coined the term eugenics (Galton 1883).

[2] This periodical was one of the most representative of Italian evolutional theory and received the endorsement of among others Spencer, Haeckel, Broca, Topinard and De Greef (Marhaba 2003, 105). Salvatore Vasta defines it as a «true organ of Italian Darwinism» (Vasta 2007, 76). Dina Bertoni Jovine describes it as «the most classic document» of naturalistic positivism in philosophy (1973, 694).

[3] For further biographical information see the obituary written by the editors of «Rivista di Antropologia» (*Direzione della Rivista di Antropologia* 1937).

[4] «The first shot fired in the great criminal debates of the 1880s and 1890s was the publication in 1876 of Cesare Lombroso's *L'uomo delinquente*» (Nye 1984, 99).

[5] Mingazzini (1889, 641) gave Sergi the credit for having warned about the serious consequences in the moral sphere of various degenerative processes.

[6] Credit is definitely due to Volpone for hav-

ing recorded that in the evolutionist culture of the late 19th century, and thus also in Sergi, Darwin's theory of natural selection was not regarded as irreconcilable with Lamarck's theory of heritability of acquired characteristics (Volpone 2011, 61-64). Darwin himself conceded that heritability had a role, if only a secondary one, in the modification of species (Gould 2002, 179).

[7] Blame for a large number of the degenerative physico-psychic conditions that alarmed the social hygienists of the era was attributed to the advent of the industrial society. «Anaemia, nervous weakness, frailness, scrofula, deformed bones that led to rickets» (Mosso 1898, 159 e Bonetta 1990, 253-258) were the consequences of poor adaptation by the former peasant to urban conditions.

[7] Sergi's theory of character stratification has been acknowledged as «an anticipation of the foundations of present-day psychoanalysis» (Lambertini 1970, 465).

Sergi (1889, 493-499) stated that the brain was a product of strata formed during various evolutionary stages and believed in the increased capacity for conditioning the individual behavior of the oldest ones, or the 'emotional' ones, in comparison with the more recent, or the 'rational' ones (Ginneken 1991, 53). This seems to anticipate some discoveries in neurophysiology, which placed the area of rationality in the prefrontal cortex, evolutionally more recent than the limbic system, seat of affectivity and emotiveness (see Benini 2009 for a recent overall if somewhat critical view of the acquisitions of neurosciences on these themes).

[8] L'«Archivio per l'Antropologia e la etnologia» («Archives for Anthropology and Ethnology») was the organ of the Società italiana di Antropologia, Etnologia e Psicologia comparata (Italian Society of Anthropology, Ethnology and Comparative Psychology). Mantegazza, together with Sergi, was one of the most influential exponents of Italian evolutionist anthropology (Puccini, 1985, 107). From 1879 Sergi collaborated with Mantegazza's Florentine school, but broke away from it unexpectedly in 1893 to found, as stated, the Società Romana di Antropologia, provoking «a real schism in the Italian ethno-anthropologist community» and the «most sensational scientific rupture» (Puccini 1985, 108 and 107) in the first 40 years of the history of Italian anthropology. The disagreement reached its height, in addition to probably to personality clashes and academic jealousies, concerning «craniological reform» on a polygenetic base drawn up by Sergi, who opposed Mantegazza's monogenism as being «in truth quite other than rigorous» (Puccini 1985, 108) and «above all the criteria for the classification of crania that were diffused and widespread in Italian scientific circles» (Puccini, 1985, 108).

[9] In his review Mantegazza curiously did not supply what for him ought to have been a correct definition of the concept of degeneration.

[10] To add to the insults, Mantegazza specified: «Sergi has a very confused instinct for the truth and in his tireless research, indefaticable with whatever he is pursuing, he nearly always loses sight of it; therefore in his works of philosophical synthesis he wraps himself up in a jumble of confused definitions, labyrinthine reasoning and not infrequently sophisms» (Mantegazza 1888, 289).

[11] «The chapters dealing with slaves and slavery, and parasites» have been described as 'odd', also by the Anonymous review that appeared in «Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica» (1889b, 251).

[12] All these cultural attitudes, according to Bonetta (1990, 23), were 'admirably' expressed in Sergi's works.

[13] This is the text of the inauguration address by the Eugenics Section of the Società Italiana per il Progresso delle Scienze. The Society's meeting, planned to be held in Bari that same year, was delayed to the following year and held in Rome.

[14] Volpone has made a very good reconstruction of Sergi's progressive but partial adhesion to Mendelism (Volpone 2011, 64).

[15] This was the only issue of the Committee's *Atti*, published together with the aforementioned *Verbali* by the «Rivista di Antropologia», the organ of the Committee itself. But the documentation tells us nothing about the preparatory work for the founding meeting of the Committee and the role played by its proponents, Sergi and Niceforo.

[16] But Quine showed that fascist eugenics and the one promoted by the Church did not converge (Quine 2012, 144: where it is explained that «Italian eugenics charted a path that represented a […] 'Thirdy Way' option between hereditarianism and environmentalism»).

[17] «Repressive laws, often cruel but necessary for the social good, have helped to decrease the number of dangerous and antisocial degenerates» (Sergi 1916b, 275).

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## Summary

*Latin and Nordic Eugenics in the project of racial improvement set up by Giuseppe Sergi, founder of the Comitato Italiano per gli Studi di Eugenica (Italian Committee for the Study of Eugenics)*

Giuseppe Sergi was one of the greatest exponents of physical and evolutionist anthropology in Italy at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. He was also rightly regarded as a champion of the positive eugenics, characteristic of the Latin countries, that aimed to identify the biological and environmental factors that could be utilised socially to prevent degenerative pathologies and thus favour the reproduction and perfecting of desirable individuals. But Sergi's proposals concerning degenerative processes that were taking place have not been sufficiently examined in scientific literature about eugenics. These proposals underwent a significant evolution from Sergi's book *Le degenerazioni umane* (*Human Degeneracies*) (1889) to articles published close to and during World War I. We have regarded this evolution as worthy of being studied in depth in this essay.
While Sergi did indeed call for the drastic measures of negative eugenics for degenerates in his treatise at the end of the 19th century, in the course of World War I (a pre-eminently dysgenic event) he became convinced of the impracticability of sterilisation, branded as immoral by public opinion. Thus despite his constant calls for the elimination of degenerates, it is possible to speculate that, for Sergi, segregation remained the only practicable measure of negative eugenics.



## Riassunto

*Eugenetica 'latina' e 'nordica' nel progetto di perfezionamento razziale di Giuseppe Sergi, fondatore del Comitato Italiano per gli Studi di Eugenica*

Giuseppe Sergi, uno dei maggiori esponenti dell'antropologia fisica ed evoluzionista in Italia tra la fine dell'Ottocento e l'inizio del Novecento, è stato a ragione considerato anche un campione di quell'eugenetica positiva, caratteristica dei Paesi latini, volta ad individuare i fattori, sia biologici che ambientali, utilizzabili socialmente per prevenire patologie degenerative e favorire così la riproduzione e il perfezionamento dei soggetti desiderabili. Ciò che invece la letteratura scientifica in tema di eugenetica non ha sufficientemente scandagliato sono le proposte di Sergi nei confronti dei processi degenerativi in corso. Tali proposte avrebbero conosciuto una significativa evoluzione, che abbiamo ritenuto meritevole di approfondire in questo saggio, dalle *Degenerazioni umane* del 1889 agli articoli pubblicati a ridosso e durante la prima guerra mondiale.
Mentre nella sua monografia di fine Ottocento, Sergi avrebbe infatti invocato le misure drastiche dell'eugenetica negativa per i degenerati, nel corso della prima guerra mondiale, evento disgenico per eccellenza, si sarebbe convinto dell'impraticabilità della sterilizzazione, tacciata di immoralità da parte dell'opinione pubblica. Nonostante le continue invocazioni, così, all'eliminazione dei degenerati, è possibile ipotizzare come la segregazione rimanesse per Sergi l'unica misura praticabile di eugenetica negativa.



*Keywords*
Eugenics; Degeneration; Artificial selection; Education; Giuseppe Sergi.

*Parole chiave*
Eugenetica; Degenerazione; Selezione artificiale; Educazione; Giuseppe Sergi.

# A preliminary examination of official statistical surveys on psychic disorders in Italy during the fascist era

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**1. Psychiatry, statistics and eugenics between 19th and 20th century. A complex relationship.** By the end of the 1970s in many European countries the methods of the historiography of psychiatry had been updated. Since then psychiatrists' memoirs as well as histories of asylums became more and more marginal within historiographical production (Guarnieri 1991). Many factors led to this renewal: the development of social history and history of science, the birth of anti-psychiatric movements and finally the appearance of new contributions by psychiatrists who studied the history of their discipline (Peloso 2008; Giacanelli 2009). This historiographical cleavage also involved Italy, but over the last thirty-five years, despite of the increasing interest in the history of Italian psychiatry, the specific issue concerning the contribution of statistical instruments for the measurement and treatment of psychic disorders has been neglected, also with regard to the problem of eugenic control (Guarnieri 1991; Fiorani 2010). This may appear a paradox, considering the close-knit relationship – according to Foucault – between statistical tools, government and biopolitics, as a specifically modern form for exercising power (Foucault 2007; 2008). Also within the historiography on Italian statistics – as a political institution, as a science, as well as an instrument for the identification and resolution of social problems – the specific topics of health statistics and psychiatric statistics were given only a small amount of space (Prévost 2009; Favero 2010). Conversely, outside Italy several studies have analyzed the nexus between medical treatment of insanity, statistics and eugenics, trying to explain the relationship between the history of psychiatry, the history of eugenics and the history of statistics. Let's summarize the main results of this historiography in the following lines, finding the main questions to be explored with reference to the Italian case.

In modern Europe, a growing attention to the insanity and to the hereditary nature of mental illness, from a medical and a statistical point of view, dates back to the 19th century, and was probably a consequence of the growth of the new urban and industrial society. Between the 19th and 20th century many observers stressed the rise in mental illnesses caused by the growth of the new modern ways of life. The interest of psychiatry in the treatment of insanity was often associated with the birth of eugenics as a theory and also as a new field of public intervention. The existence of an eugenic purpose is evident if we consider that in many cases during the 19th century the purpose of the asylums was not only to treat or segregate the patients, but also to prevent insanity, by detaining people and preventing them from reproducing.

SIDeS, «Popolazione e Storia»,
1/2016, pp. ..

As many historians have stressed, statistical measurement has played a crucial role in the development of psychiatry and eugenics. Data collection was a characteristic of medicine even before the 19th century, but only around the middle of this century numerical descriptions extended gradually to psychiatry and to other areas of psychopathology. In the same period psychiatry emerged as a specific field of medicine, as a science independent from moral or religious issues. There is little historical evidence to suggest that before 1850s any serious efforts had been made to measure personality traits (Wallace, Gach 2008, 359). Recent research by Theodore M. Porter (forthcoming)[1] argues, conversely, that during the 19th century, within medical science, psychiatry was probably the most statistically-oriented field of medicine. There was a great move towards quantification in psychiatry: according to Porter, who focused on some western countries of northern Europe and North America, mental asylums produced a great deal of statistical data from the mid-19th century. This aspect became more evident from the end of the century. The reason for this is the development of two different purposes for the asylums: the cure of patients and the prevention of hereditary diseases. According to Porter, heredity theory and eugenics developed first of all within the asylums and schools, where data on the insanity and health conditions of schoolchildren could be collected. Porter's idea is that mental asylums were interested in the inheritance of insanity 80 years before eugenics became a movement. Originally, heredity was not a scientific discipline, but an indigenous practice of asylums and clinics. Mendelism and biometry, in other words, continued the research originating within the asylum institutions[2].

On the international scene eugenics as a science developed between 19th and 20th century from the contributions of Francis Galton, who was also a statistician. According to Galton, eugenics is the science of the biological improvement of humankind. Eugenics was founded on the idea that a wide range of human physical, mental, and moral traits were inherited. Human progress depended on social measures able to select the transmission of the population's hereditary endowments to future generations. Eugenics was an international movement: as Mark B. Adams claimed,

> between 1890 and 1930, eugenics movements developed in more than thirty countries, each adapting the international Galtonian gospel to suit local scientific, cultural, institutional, and political conditions. In some places eugenics was dominated by experimental biologists, in others by animal breeders, physicians, pediatricians, psychiatrists, anthropologists, demographers, or public health officials (Adams 1990, 5).

In many countries, e.g. Italy, eugenics was not an autonomous field, and developed at the crossroads between different disciplines (Mantovani 2004; Cassata 2006). In this issue Angelo M. Caglioti writes about the invisible nature of Italian eugenics, «which have been concealed in texts about public health, demography, anthropology and statistics» (Caglioti 2016).

The fascist period is an interesting case in point, showing the complex relationship between statistics, medical knowledge and eugenics, and the mutual influence

between these fields. During this era many changes emerged in the statistical field, in eugenics, in psychiatry and in health policies. During the interwar period a transition emerged from the charity and assistance conception of hospital institutions to a more modern idea of social and health insurance (Preti 1984; Vicarelli 1997). The increase in the number of mental hospitals, in particular, had a crucial role in the results of the official measurements of insanity. During the period under examination many psychiatrists stressed the importance of a new approach to psychiatric assistance, from a eugenic standpoint. The development of statistical knowledge concerning mental disorders and a new prevention policy were elements of this new perspective. Nevertheless, a gap between scientific and political plans and the actual reality persisted. Despite the intentions and the hopes of statisticians, psychiatrists and scientists, a complete and regular statistical survey on mental diseases was not possible during the fascist period.

In what follows I will focus on the Italian context during the interwar period, reconstructing the role played by official statistics in the measurement of mental illness. My attention will focus in particular on the role played by Istat (Istituto centrale di statistica, the Italian Central Institute of Statistics) and on the interdisciplinary debate between statistics, psychiatry and eugenics. The reconstruction of measurement methods takes into account the history and development of eugenic and demographic thinking, as well as the fascist attitude toward deviance. The sources used are published articles, published official statistics, the minutes of the Consiglio superiore di Statistica (Higher Council of Statistics) and, where possible, the related archival documents produced by Istat from its establishment (1926) up to the moment when Italy joined WWII (1940). No archival sources were found within the Santa Maria della Pietà historical archive in Rome, where I supposed there might be documents on the mental illness statistical service.

**2. Measuring insanity and improving the race. The Italian context between WWI and WWII.** WWI had an important role in the development of sciences, and among them of psychiatry. Violence and shocks produced by the new technological war created new forms of pathology among soldiers, fostering a debate within the scientific community. During and after the war Italian psychiatrists and psychologists – among them Enrico Morselli, Vito Maria Buscaino, Agostino Gemelli – discussed the relationship between body and mind, in order to explain the emergence of new neuroses, thereby enabling a dialogue with psychoanalysis (Babini 2011, 634-636). Simultaneously, important changes also emerged in the field of eugenics. A new kind of eugenic thinking developed in Italy after WWI, as well as in other countries. It was characterized by a coactive State attitude towards individual behavior, in order to favour the collective interest and to improve the population's physical and mental conditions. In this context the psychiatric science made an important contribution to the eugenic debate, as a part of a wholesale renewal of psychiatry: henceforward, its purpose was not merely to act as a mere repressive containment of brainsick people, but a general preventive attitude towards the mental disorders prevailed (Mantovani 2004, 172-187).

Many scholars have highlighted the existence of a specific 'Latin' approach to eugenics. Latin eugenics was a scientific, cultural and political program for the biological empowerment of the modern European and American nations described as 'Latin', sharing genealogical, linguistic, religious, and cultural origins. As a program for achieving the social and political goals of modern welfare systems, Latin eugenics strongly influenced the complex relationship of the State with the individual. By the early decades of the 20th century, 'Nordic' eugenics (essentially Anglo-American and German-Scandinavian), as characterized by the introduction of sterilization laws and compulsory premarital certificates, was opposed to a 'Latin' eugenics, present in some countries like Italy, France, Belgium and Latin America, whose precepts generally regarded maternal assistance, preventive social medicine, demographic natalism, and biotypological and endocrinological control (Turda, Gillette 2014). During fascism one of the central figures of Italian eugenics was in fact the endocrinologist Nicola Pende, founder of the Biotypological Orthogenetical Institute, that was established in 1926 (Cassata 2011).

How did eugenics issues intersect the treatment of mental illness? In Italy, at the beginning of 1920s, a debate emerged about the utility of mental hospitals in offsetting mental diseases. The mental hospital system, governed by the law passed in 1904, during the Giolittian age, was simply regarded as an instrument for public security, and not as a tool for actually preventing mental diseases. Many important psychiatrists highlighted the importance of a new approach to psychiatric assistance, from a eugenic perspective. In 1920 Enrico Morselli, an influential psychiatrist and anthropologist, affirmed that a social defense from mental diseases depended on sanitary, hygienic and socio-political concerns, and not only on the activity of the mental hospitals. In 1922 the neurologist Leonardo Bianchi highlighted the need for eugenic legislation, as well as for an amendment to the old 1904 law and for further actions to help prevent mental disorders starting from school. The reform of the asylums was required to guarantee a social defense from insanity, avoiding the reproduction of the so-termed feeble-minded people. Many influential psychiatrists supported an increase in admissions to the asylums, because the damage to the community was not measured only in terms of social disorder, but also in terms of racial contamination (Cassata 2005; Moraglio 2006). A result of this debate was the establishment of the Lega italiana di igiene e profilassi mentale (Italian League of Hygiene and Mental Prophylaxis) in 1924, with the purpose of studying the hereditary diseases and of supporting new eugenic legislation. A central purpose of the League was to gather information on mental disorders:

> Ricercare, raccogliere e vagliare informazioni, documenti, ecc.; condurre o provocare inchieste, indagini, ricerche, ecc. sulle cause delle malattie mentali, sui danni morali ed economici che da esse derivano all'individuo ed alla comunità, sulle provvidenze legislative e di medicina preventiva, atte a correggere tali cause e ad evitare tali danni. (*Costituzione della Lega italiana di igiene e profilassi mentale. Resoconto ufficiale della seduta inaugurale*, quoted in Cassata 2005, 23).

Psychiatry had shown a certain amount of interest in the statistical measurement of mental diseases since the second half of 19th century, focusing mainly on noso-

logical classification problems (Salomone, Arnone 2009). Nevertheless, the interwar debate for the first time connected the problem of measurement to the new eugenic program. From this point of view a complete statistical knowledge of mental disorders was also required to study hereditary characters, selecting the best therapeutic procedures and finally improving the racial quality of society (Cassata 2006). Also in this case we can observe the use of statistical data collected by asylums for the validation of heredity theory, along the lines highlighted by Porter. Porter found a relationship between asylum management and heredity research from the mid-19th century, referring to some western countries of northern Europe and North America. At present, it is not possible to verify Porter's hypothesis for 19th century Italy, as further archival evidence would be required. We can however observe the relationship between the treatment of insanity, data collection and eugenics in a subsequent context, i.e. the interwar period.

The interest of psychiatry for the statistical measurement of insanity grew during the fascist period. During the 1920s, many psychiatrists stressed the lack of a statistical centre for gathering data on mental disorders. In this regard some innovation was possible only in 1925, when the Società italiana di Psichiatria (Italian Psychiatric Society) – on the grounds of a project passed in 1923 – created a statistical office with the collaboration of the Mental Hospital of Ancona, headed by Gustavo Modena[3]. At the end of the 1930s, the establishment of a National Genetic Centre looked like a real possibility, although a heated debate within the Italian League of Hygiene and Mental Prophylaxis showed the existence of many different stances. According to the young psychiatrist Giuseppe Pintus, the Centro nazionale di Genetica (National Genetics Centre) was supposed to cooperate with the Ufficio statistico (Statistical Office) directed by Gustavo Modena in Ancona. Actually, the complete statistical survey on mental disorders did not materialize. First of all, the opposition of the General Health Management (Consiglio superior di Sanità) put a stop to this project (Cassata 2006, 262-274). Moreover, as I am going to show, many other difficulties – including financial problems – made a regular and complete statistical survey by the Statistical Office of Ancona and by Istat impossible.

The interwar period was also crucial for the development of the Italian statistical 'field'. Jean-Guy Prévost analyzed the emergence of the field, which is defined in accordance with Bourdieu, as a structured and multidimensional set of positions governed by specific criteria of legitimacy. According to Prévost this concept

> constitutes an appropriate framework for taking into account the scientific as well as political activities of a given group, the system of norms, incentives, and constraints within which these activities are deployed, and the relations of such a system with others (Prévost 2009, 11).

Between WWI and WWII statistics emerged in Italy as a technical field far different from 19th century statistics. The new Italian statistics became more and more of an esoteric science, requiring a high degree of technical knowledge. During the 1920s and 1930s the Italian statistical field was mainly built upon two different axes: the world of academia and pure science, and the world of government statis-

tics. In those years the general purpose of the regime was to improve the official statistical service, by the establishment of the new Istituto centrale di Statistica (Istat, Central Institute of Statistics) in 1926 (Ipsen 1994). Italian statisticians, moreover, tried to improve their influence on different domains of social and economic inquiry, including sociology, eugenics, genetics, and so on. Marcello Boldrini, for instance, intended to give a statistical basis to the correlations between anthropometric characteristics and psychological tendencies (Boldrini 1934). Alfredo Niceforo, whose scientific profile was essentially interdisciplinary, had also a scientific interest in measuring human characters, producing a quantification of physical, biological and psychological features in order to determine the characteristics of 'normality', in so doing establishing superiority and inferiority among individuals and groups. Niceforo's view was coherent with Nicola Pende's approach to eugenics. As a matter of fact they cooperated in the publication of a *Dictionary of Criminology* (*Dizionario di criminologia*) in 1943[4]. The very contribution of Corrado Gini, at same time first president both of the Istat (1926-1932) and of the Società italiana di genetica ed eugenetica (Sige, Italian Society of Genetics and Eugenics) (1924-1931) showed a new possible relationship between the eugenic programs, statistical inquiry and health policy (Cassata 2006, 144). Leading the Istat, Sige and Cisp (Comitato italiano per lo studio dei problemi della popolazione, Italian Centre for the Study of Population), Gini tried to give empirical validation to his 'Latin' eugenic approach (Cassata 2011, 139).

According to the general overview of the history of psychiatry during fascism proposed by the psychiatrist-historian Paolo F. Peloso (2008), the Italian interwar debate on mental health problems and asylum management was influenced by the advent of fascism. Fascist ideology and its socio-political theories produced a consolidation of the authoritarian aspects in the field of social control and in psychiatric intervention. The use of internment in asylums as a tool for political repression explains, at least in part, the growth in the number of people interned (Petracci 2014). Most of them were poor people, and according to Massimo Tornabene the hypothesis that during fascism asylums were also a 'container' for poverty needs to be explored (Tornabene 2009, 46). During fascism the number of mental hospitals rose, unlike other hospitals as a whole, whose capacity actually fell (Preti 1984, 382-383). Moreover the concept of 'social perilousness' grew, resulting in a rapid increase in the internments in asylums. Between 1926 and 1941 the number of hospitalized patients grew from 60.000 to 96.000 (see tab. 4). In the following pages we will analyze the origins of this statistical result.

Generally speaking, during fascism Italian psychiatric culture underwent a depletion, due also to the exclusion of psychology and psychoanalysis from the academic world, enhanced by the Gentile reform, in 1924. Most psychiatrists supported the fascist regime, starting with the leading Italian psychiatrist, Enrico Morselli, who underwrote the *Manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti (Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals*), together with Giovanni Gentile, Luigi Pirandello and Giuseppe Ungaretti. Only a few doctors actually expressed an anti-fascist stance (Peloso 2008). In 1925, during the 27th Congress of the Italian Psychiatric Society (Società freniatrica italiana), the

Italian psychiatric establishment confirmed its rejection of Freudism. In this context the only innovations were the development of the 'neoconstitutionalism', a field of study connected to endocrinology that developed between WWI and WWII with the contributions of the doctor and criminologist Nicola Pende, and the Italian invention of the electroshock. Within the scope of the Italian eugenic debate, the specific contribution of psychiatry during the 1930s was its strong support for the statistical and genealogical monitoring of mental disorders. The latter characteristic was part of rejection of the German 'negative' version of eugenics, favorable to the sterilization of the brainsick people. Italian psychiatry supported first of all a national statistical survey on mental disorders, to prevent the reproduction of insane people and also to test the hereditary nature of psychiatric diseases.

**3. The Statistical Office of Mental Diseases of Ancona and the Istat.** In 1926, the year when the Istat was founded, the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini stated that «statistics has expanded its jurisdiction over all phenomena of life». In fact, the birth of the Istat and the reorganization of the Consiglio superiore di Statistica (CsS, Higher Council of Statistics)[5] represented a turning point in the history of official Italian statistics, because it made possible a reorganization and an improvement of the statistical surveys. According to Jean-Guy Prévost, the Istat was a part of the Italian 'statistical field', using the term 'field' in accordance with Bourdieu. With the birth of the Istat, official statistics moved from the status of a General Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce (and subsequent definitions) to that of an autonomous State institute under the Prime Minister's direct control. This last positioning of the Istat should have fostered the coordination and centralization of statistical activities under its authority. During the following years this process remained far from being completed, due to the resistance of many departments that opposed to the broadening of the Istat's authority. Nevertheless, as compared with the past, the birth of the Istat represented a true 'renaissance' of the Italian official statistics. There was a rapid and significant growth in staff, and there was also a growth in printed output. New periodicals were published, with an extension of the domains that were surveyed (Prévost 2009, 120-123).

In this context, however, despite the great interest of the fascist government in demographic problems (Ipsen 1994), from the birth of the Istat up to WWII, health statistics were characterized by a limited development. The official journal «Annali di Statistica» seldom dealt with health problems, and only as specific issues were concerned (i.e. children mortality, infectious diseases, etc.) (Geddes de Filicaia 2000, 181-182). Except for statistics on causes of death[6], only a few special studies were dedicated to health statistics. A hospital census was carried out in 1932, and it was the only such example (Preti 1984). As I will show, the statistics on mental disorders proved to be an exception (Leti 1996, 213).

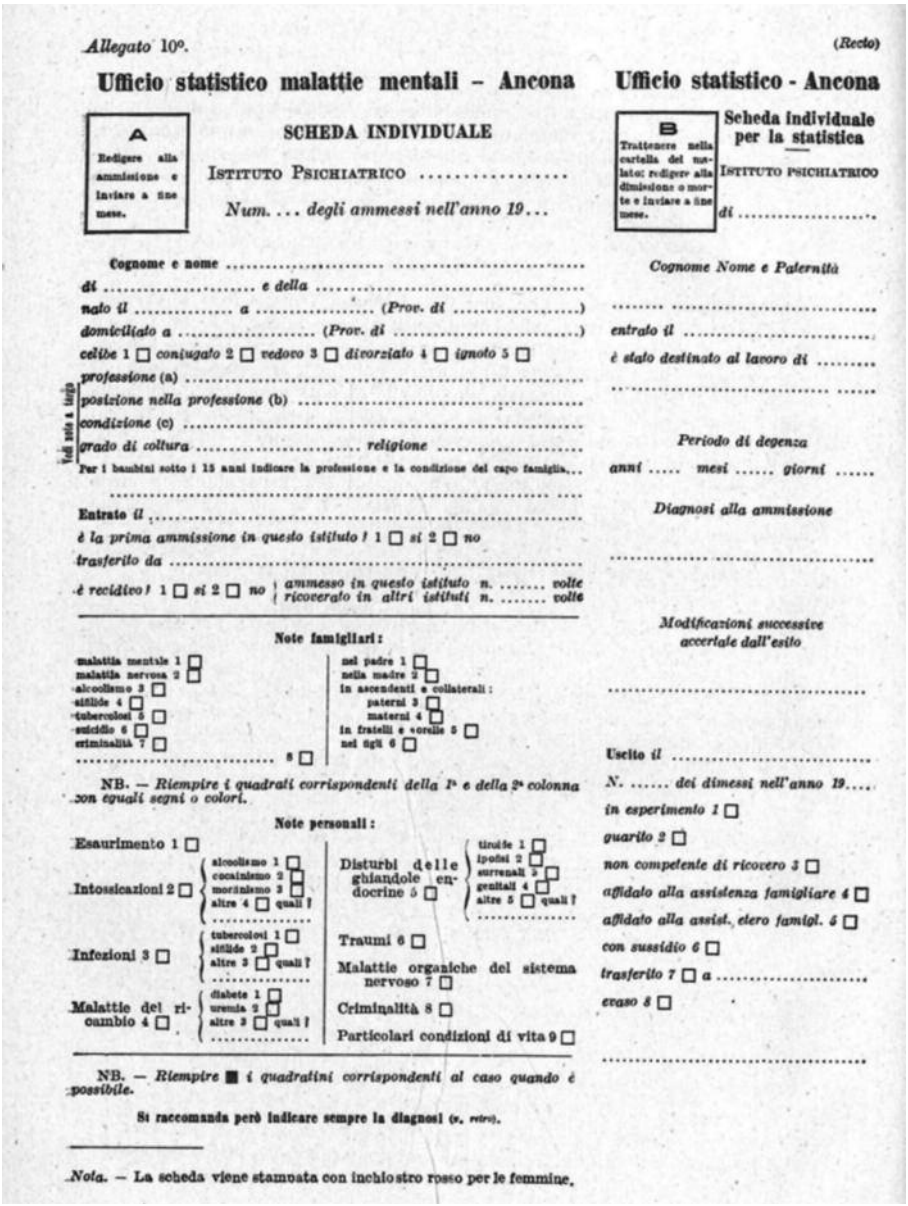
Since its establishment, the Istat focused on the measurement of mental disorders. In 1926 Corrado Gini advised cooperation with the new Statistical Office of Ancona (Istituto di Statistica delle malattie mentali), which was soon to become a

correspondent of the Istat. This purpose was in line with the process of centralization of the statistical surveys, the Istat's true mission. It is important to stress, however, that within the Superior Council of Statistics two discussions on health statistics out of three focused on psychiatric disorders. Both were authored by Alfredo Niceforo. In 1933 Niceforo reported on the use of schoolchildren's biological and psychic files; in 1936, moreover, he reported on the statistics of psychic diseases. In the first case, Niceforo explained the importance of the use of biological and anthropological inquiries on schoolchildren, performed by municipalities since the turn of the century. He highlighted that this material was completely neglected, and he hoped it would be processed by means of uniform criteria. Niceforo suggested also a proper use of the files collected by the Opera Nazionale Balilla, concerning the physical and mental conditions of schoolchildren (Leti 1996, 448-449). His view was coherent with the eugenics theorized and practiced by Nicola Pende, through the Biotipological Ortogenetical Institute (Cassata 2011, 146). Then, in 1936, Niceforo urged another discussion on the cooperation between the Istat and the Mental Hospital of Ancona, highlighting the limits of this cooperation. I will focus on the latter discussion in the last paragraph.

Two questions call for an answer. How was the new Statistical Office of Ancona organized? And what were its relations with the Istat? To answer this question, I will take into account both archival sources from the Istat – in this case very limited – and the official publications published by the Istat in cooperation with Ancona Hospital. Unfortunately, the archive of the Statistical Office of Ancona does not exist, and within the Santa Maria della Pietà historical archive, where the statistical service was moved in 1939, there is no additional archival document regarding the statistical service. Statistical material was probably destroyed during WWII (Modena 1948, 124)[7].

The Statistical Office of Ancona, created in 1925 by the Italian Psychiatric Society and by the Institute of Hygiene (Istituto di Igiene), operated as a centralized data collector, harvesting information from the Italian psychiatric institutes. It received financial contributions from the General Direction of Public Health (Direzione generale della Sanità pubblica), the Minister of the Interior (Ministero dell'Interno), provincial administrations and charity associations, and it established relationships with similar foreign agencies (Modena 1926). Compared to the beginning of 20th century, when there was a large gap between Italy and the other countries in terms of psychiatric statistics (Levi-Bianchini 1915, 165), the activity of the new Statistical Office seemed to put Italy at forefront on a world level, at least in the opinion of Gustavo Modena (Istat 1928, *7). According to Gustavo Modena's project, the office adopted a straightforward organization. Data collection was performed by psychiatric institutes filling in a simple individual form, based on an eclectic nosological classification (fig. 1). The publication of summary tables – according to Modena – was supposed to respect people's privacy. The choice of an individual form, plain in its structure, was finalized to curb mistakes and subjective interpretations. This kind of statistical information was to be processed by the Istat using a mechanical system for counting data.

Fig. 1. *The individual form (recto) used by the Statistical Office of Ancona*



*Allegato* 10°. (*Recto*)

**Ufficio statistico malattie mentali – Ancona**

**A** Redigere alla ammissione e inviare a fine mese.

**SCHEDA INDIVIDUALE**

ISTITUTO PSICHIATRICO .....

*Num. ... degli ammessi nell'anno 19...*

**Cognome e nome** ..... .....
*di* ..... *e della* .....
*nato il* ..... *a* ..... (*Prov. di* .....)
*domiciliato a* ..... (*Prov. di* .....)
*celibe* 1 ☐ *coniugato* 2 ☐ *vedovo* 3 ☐ *divorziato* 4 ☐ *ignoto* 5 ☐
*professione* (a) ..... .....
*posizione nella professione* (b) .....
*condizione* (c) .....
*grado di coltura* ..... *religione* .....
Per i bambini sotto i 15 anni indicare la professione e la condizione del capo famiglia...
.....
*Entrato il* .....
*è la prima ammissione in questo istituto?* 1 ☐ *si* 2 ☐ *no*
*trasferito da* .....
*è recidivo?* 1 ☐ *si* 2 ☐ *no* | *ammesso in questo istituto* n. ..... *volte* | *ricoverato in altri istituti* n. ..... *volte*

Vedi retro a tergo

**Note famigliari:**

malattia mentale 1 ☐
malattia nervosa 2 ☐
alcoolismo 3 ☐
sifilide 4 ☐
tubercolosi 5 ☐
suicidio 6 ☐
criminalità 7 ☐
..... 8 ☐

nel padre 1 ☐
nella madre 2 ☐
in ascendenti e collaterali:
paterni 3 ☐
materni 4 ☐
in fratelli e sorelle 5 ☐
nei figli 6 ☐

NB. — *Riempire i quadrati corrispondenti della 1ª e della 2ª colonna con eguali segni o colori.*

**Note personali:**

Esaurimento 1 ☐
Intossicazioni 2 ☐ — alcoolismo 1 ☐, cocainismo 2 ☐, morfinismo 3 ☐, altre 4 ☐ quali? .....
Infezioni 3 ☐ — tubercolosi 1 ☐, sifilide 2 ☐, altre 3 ☐ quali? .....
Malattie del ricambio 4 ☐ — diabete 1 ☐, uremia 2 ☐, altre 3 ☐ quali? .....

Disturbi delle ghiandole endocrine 5 ☐ — tiroide 1 ☐, ipofisi 2 ☐, surrenali 3 ☐, genitali 4 ☐, altre 5 ☐ quali? .....
Traumi 6 ☐
Malattie organiche del sistema nervoso 7 ☐
Criminalità 8 ☐
Particolari condizioni di vita 9 ☐

NB. — *Riempire* ■ *i quadratini corrispondenti al caso quando è possibile.*

**Si raccomanda però indicare sempre la diagnosi** (v. *retro*).

*Nota.* — La scheda viene stampata con inchiostro rosso per le femmine.

**Ufficio statistico - Ancona**

**B** Trattenere nella cartella del malato: redigere alla dimissione o morte e inviare a fine mese.

**Scheda individuale per la statistica**

ISTITUTO PSICHIATRICO

*di* .....

*Cognome Nome e Paternità*

..... .....
*entrato il* .....
*è stato destinato al lavoro di* .....
..... .....

*Periodo di degenza*

*anni* ..... *mesi* ..... *giorni* .....

*Diagnosi alla ammissione*

..... .....

*Modificazioni successive accertate dall'esito*

.....

**Uscito il** .....
*N.* ..... *dei dimessi nell'anno 19....*
*in esperimento* 1 ☐
*guarito* 2 ☐
*non competente di ricovero* 3 ☐
*affidato alla assistenza famigliare* 4 ☐
*affidato alla assist. clero famigl.* 5 ☐
*con sussidio* 6 ☐
*trasferito* 7 ☐ *a* .....
*evaso* 8 ☐

.....

Source: Atti del Consiglio superiore di Statistica (1930, 176).

The individual form, black for males, red for women, was divided into two parts. The first one (part A) had to be filled upon patient admission, the second one (part B) after discharge from hospital or after the patient's death (fig. 1). The first

part of the form was made up of 5 sections:
1. general information: name, date and place of birth, marital status, profession, education, religion, etc.;
2. mental disorders: nosological classification, based on eclectic criteria;
3. family background: data on the presence of mental disorders in the family, in order to study the hereditary nature of diseases;
4. other personal information: other details about the patient's general health status;
5. miscellaneous remarks.

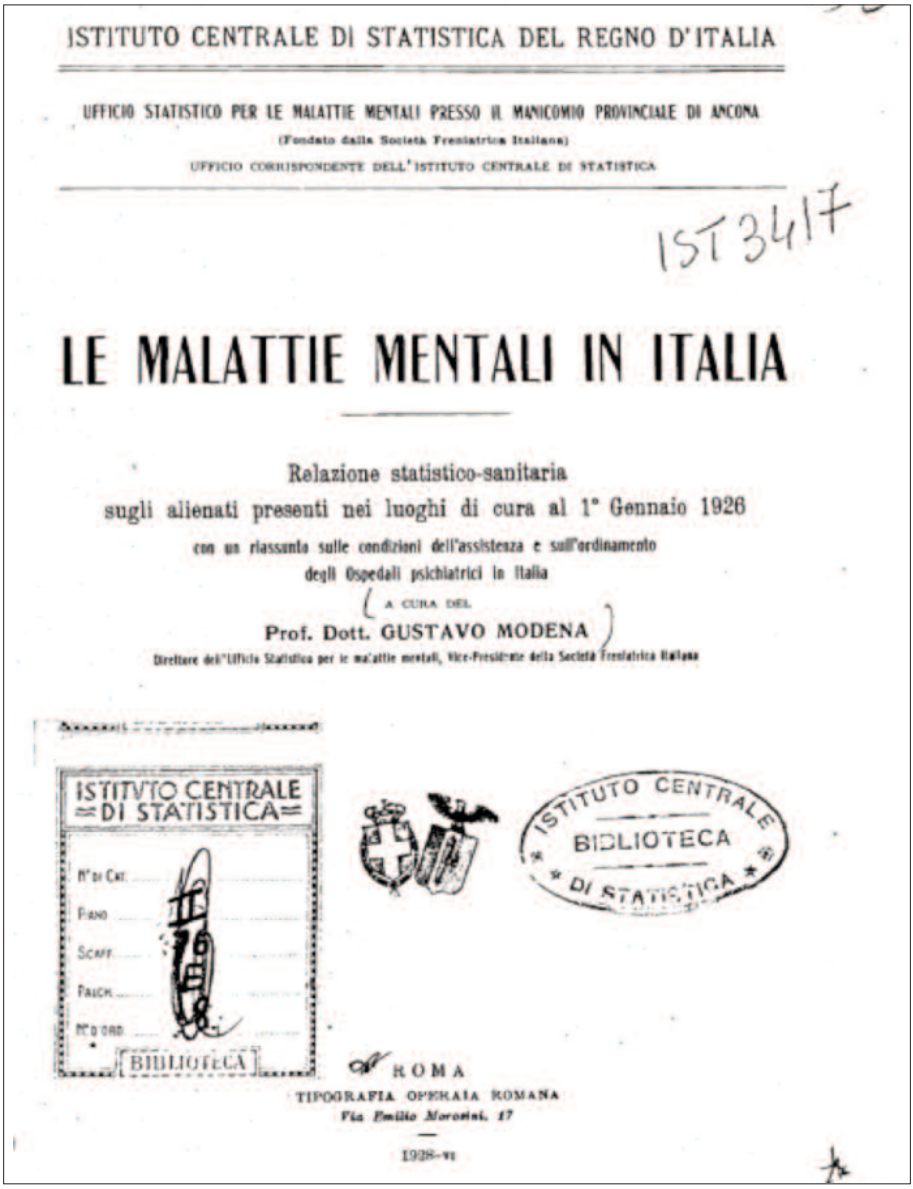
The nosological classification of mental disorders was organized into 11 macro-categories (see tab. 3), introducing some innovations as compared with the previous classification, dating back to 1907. The choice of an eclectic classification criterion was related to the attempt to recognize diverse psychiatric traditions (Modena 1926)[8].

In order to improve the use of data, the cooperation between the Istat and the Statistical Office of Ancona was defined as follows: the Istat had to provide financial and technical support, computing and processing the individual forms collected by Gustavo Modena, thereby making possible a complete use of the data. From 1927 – and until 1935 with a financial contribution – the Istat prepared and printed also the forms for the inquiry, sending them off to the Italian mental hospitals. From then onwards, and during the following years, the Istat took care of processing these data. They were published in the journal «Rivista sperimentale di Freniatria», with the title *Movimento dei malati di mente negli Istituti di cura*. These data were quoted also in the Istat periodical «Annuario statistico italiano»[9]. Moreover, the Istat gave an institutional support, asking the Prefectures to supply all the information the Statistical Office needed (Istat 1928, *5)[10].

At first, cooperation between the Istat and the Statistical Office of Ancona also allowed for the publication of two special issues, edited by Gustavo Modena. A first volume, published in 1928, referred to the brainsick people present in psychiatric hospitals in 1926; a second volume, published in 1933, referred to the period 1926-1928, showing changes over time. The first volume (Istat 1928) was indeed a census regarding hospitalized patients in 1926 (fig. 2); the second one referred to the period 1926-1928, limiting the analysis to the patients admitted for the first time. The latter issue thus allowed for a study on the morbidity of mental disorders over time (Istat 1933). The importance of this last issue was also highlighted by foreign journals.

The two issues published by the Istat displayed and analyzed data according to the different parameters of the inquiry: gender, age, marital status, education, profession, relapse, as well as other personal and familiar elements. Both of the issues also included a chapter on health assistance in Italy. The Istat computed and processed thousands of individuals forms collected by the Statistical Office of Ancona, taking care of the exposition and illustration of the data. The elaboration was very difficult, also due to duplications of the information. The two issues – the first one published at the expense of the Istat[11] – filled a real gap, because the last similar publication dated back to 1909. Both books are very interesting for the historian, as for this period they were the only organic publications on the topic.

Fig. 2. *The cover of the first special issue on mental diseases published by the Istat (1928)*


ISTITUTO CENTRALE DI STATISTICA DEL REGNO D'ITALIA

UFFICIO STATISTICO PER LE MALATTIE MENTALI PRESSO IL MANICOMIO PROVINCIALE DI ANCONA

(Fondato dalla Società Freniatrica Italiana)

UFFICIO CORRISPONDENTE DELL'ISTITUTO CENTRALE DI STATISTICA

IST 3417

# LE MALATTIE MENTALI IN ITALIA

Relazione statistico-sanitaria
sugli alienati presenti nei luoghi di cura al 1° Gennaio 1926
con un riassunto sulle condizioni dell'assistenza e sull'ordinamento
degli Ospedali psichiatrici in Italia

A CURA DEL

Prof. Dott. GUSTAVO MODENA

Direttore dell'Ufficio Statistico per le malattie mentali, Vice-Presidente della Società Freniatrica Italiana

ISTITUTO CENTRALE DI STATISTICA

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N° d'ord.

BIBLIOTECA

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ROMA
TIPOGRAFIA OPERAIA ROMANA
Via Emilio Morosini, 17

1928-VI

Source: ISTAT (1928).

Introducing the first volume, Corrado Gini highlighted the fact that the Istat limited its contribution to a technical support to the inquiry: all the comments and evaluations about numbers, he said, were under the responsibility of Gustavo Modena, and did not involve the Istat (ISTAT 1928, *6). Gini merely noticed the

Tab. 1. *Hospitals that filled in the individual forms (comparison 1926-1928)*

| Hospitals | 1926 | 1928 |
|---|---|---|
| Public hospitals (Ospedali psichiatrici pubblici) | 60 | 61 |
| Psychiatric prisons (Manicomi giudiziari) | 5 | 5 |
| Branch hospitals (Succursali staccate) | 37 | 36 |
| Institutes for retarded persons (Istituti per deficienti) | 6 | 6 |
| Private care hospitals (Case di salute per abbienti) | 34 | 36 |
| Total | 142 | 144 |

Source: ISTAT (1928, 11*); ISTAT (1933, 14*).

Tab. 2. *Counted psychiatric institutes. Regional distribution (1928)*

| Regions (Compartimenti) | Number of psychiatric institutes |
|---|---|
| Piemonte | 12 |
| Liguria | 7 |
| Lombardia | 22 |
| Venezia Tridentina | 1 |
| Veneto | 27 |
| Venezia Giulia e Zara | 4 |
| Emilia | 14 |
| Toscana | 10 |
| Marche | 7 |
| Umbria | 4 |
| Lazio | 11 |
| Abruzzi and Molise | 2 |
| Campania | 12 |
| Puglie | 3 |
| Lucania | 0 |
| Calabrie | 1 |
| Sicilia | 5 |
| Sardegna | 2 |
| Kingdom | 144 |

Source: ISTAT (1933, 14*).

increase of mental diseases, linking this fact to the process of urbanization. He also highlighted the lack of proper assistance for the mentally ill in Italy (*ivi*). In the original project, the 1926 census was organized as a starting point, a framework on which a regular survey on mental diseases could be built upon. The collection of individual forms allowed for the updating of information via a straightforward notification of the relapses as well as the transfers. According to Modena, the data collection would not only have been an instrument for studying mental diseases, their regional distribution and the impact of heredity factors, but also for testing the output of each psychiatric hospital, including its welfare instruments.

Tab. 3. . *Number of brainsick people admitted for the first time during the years 1926-1928 every 100,000 inhabitants (calculated on the grounds of the 1931 census)*

| Disease | M | F | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Frenastenia* (Phrenasthenia) | 4,0 | 2,4 | 3,2 |
| *Psicodegenerazioni* (Psycho-degeneration) | 1,7 | 1,8 | 1,8 |
| *Psicosi epilettiche* (Epileptic psychoses) | 3,2 | 1,6 | 2,4 |
| *Psicosi affettive* (Affective psychoses) | 7,5 | 10,2 | 8,9 |
| *Demenza precoce* (Early dementia) | 8,3 | 6,1 | 7,2 |
| *Psicosi tossiche endogene* (Endogenous toxic psychoses) | 0,3 | 0,6 | 0,5 |
| *Psicosi tossiche esogene* (Exogenous toxic psychoses) | 6,3 | 1,0 | 3,6 |
| *Psicosi infettive* (Infective psychoses) | 6,4 | 3,0 | 4,7 |
| *Psicosi senili* (Senile psychoses) | 5,3 | 5,8 | 5,5 |
| *Psicosi da encefalopatie organiche* (Psychoses due to organic encephalopathy) | 0,4 | 0,2 | 0,3 |
| *Psicosi non indicate* (Non-specified psychoses) | 0,3 | 0,2 | 0,2 |
| *Malati non competenti di ricovero* (Sick persons not admitted to hospital) | 3,2 | 1,2 | 2,1 |
| *Malati in osservazion*e (Patients under observation) | 0,4 | 0,3 | 0,3 |
| Total | 47,3 | 34,4 | 40,7 |

Source: ISTAT (1933, 24*).

Both the issues included a list of all Italian psychiatric institutes that had filled in the individual forms, excluding clinics. This information was obtained with the cooperation of local governments. During the three years 1926-1928 there were no important variations (see tab. 1). Most part of the psychiatric institutes that cooperated with the Statistical Office of Ancona were located in northern Italy (tab. 2). The two issues limited the data collection only to hospitalized patients, who were identified following the definition given by the 1904 law (Legge sui manicomi e alienati). As Gustavo Modena stated in his introduction, it was too difficult to collect other data (e.g. about brainsick people assisted at home). So the information published by the Istat in 1928 and 1933 refer only to a part of the mental patients.

In giving his final comment to the data, Gustavo Modena stated that from 1926 to 1929 the hospitalized patients gradually grew, yet this was not due to a growth in morbidity as much as to an increase of hospitalization. As a matter of fact, the number of patients admitted for the first time was constant. The morbidity of mental disorders resulted higher among males and in northern Italy. The most frequent pathology was «psicosi affettiva» (see tab. 3), and the mortality rate was 16,9% among patients admitted for the first time in the same period (ISTAT 1933, 50*).

**4. A discussion within the Higher Council of Statistics.** In the post-1929 period, some general data continued to be published in the «Rivista sperimentale di Freniatria» and in the «Annuario statistico italiano». Nevertheless, compared with the first publications made by the Istat in 1928 and 1933, these data are very limit-

Tab. 4. *Mental patients hospitalized in Italy, 1926-1940 (summary data)*

| Year | Hospitalized patients | % inhabitants |
|---|---|---|
| 1926 | 60,306 | 0,15 |
| 1927 | 62,127 | 0,15 |
| 1928 | 64,268 | 0,16 |
| 1929 | 66,439 | 0,16 |
| 1930 | 68,777 | 0,16 |
| 1931 | 72,269 | 0,17 |
| 1932 | 74,780 | 0,18 |
| 1933 | 77,724 | 0,18 |
| 1934 | 81,009 | 0,19 |
| 1935 | 83,541 | 0,19 |
| 1936 | 86,449 | 0,20 |
| 1937 | 89,393 | 0,20 |
| 1938 | 93,019 | 0,21 |
| 1939 | 94,946 | 0,21 |
| 1940 | 95,984 | 0,21 |
| 1941 | 96,499 | 0,21 |
| 1942 | 94,677 | 0,20 |
| 1943 | 86,069 | 0,19 |

Source: Moraglio (2006, 17).

ed and of a cursory nature (see tab. 4). More details about the number of patients for each mental hospital were published only in the «Rivista sperimentale di Freniatria». After 1933 the Istat continued to cooperate with the Statistical Office of Ancona to sort out and process data, but many reasons made a complete publication.

Why did this change happen? The problem was discussed within the Higher Council of Statistics in 1936, following the initiative of Alfredo Niceforo. As he himself stated, the statistical inquiry into mental disorders carried out by Gustavo Modena and the Istat represented a true innovation, compared with the first censuses of the late 19th century, as the new statistical inquiries, based on individual forms, ensured a continuous survey. Nevertheless, from 1933 on some financial problems emerged, making it impossible to continue with the publication of data, although from 1929 up to 1934 they were still regularly collected. In 1935 the General Direction of Public Health halved the budget for the Statistical Office of Ancona (from 5.000 lire to 2.500 lire), and the Istat was unable to provide the budget for the publication of data referring to the period 1929-1933[12]. Niceforo suggested involving the General Direction of Public Health, but the other members of CsS argued that in other countries statistics on mental disorders were funded by provinces, municipalities and the mental hospitals themselves (Atti del Consiglio superiore di Statistica 1937, 13*).

Apart from financial problems, the debate within the CsS also referred to the mental health statistics themselves. Marcello Boldrini, in particular, introduced

some doubts concerning the utility of the last censuses on mental disorders published by the Istat. Statistics of hospitalized patients, he argued, have a limited significance: as a matter of fact, the number of patients first of all depends on the number of vacant beds in the hospitals. This kind of inquiry, in his opinion, was not reliable in studying the temporal and geographical variations of mental disorders. They were important, instead, in studying the composition of the brainsick population (by gender, age, etc.) (Atti del Consiglio superiore di Statistica 1937, 13*-14*).

The President of the Istat Franco R. Savorgnan (who succeeded Gini in 1932) also argued that this kind of census only concerns mental patients hospitalized, who are just a few of brainsick persons. Most of them were living with their families[13], and it would have been useful to introduce new kinds of statistical measurement, involving also municipalities (Atti del Consiglio superiore di Statistica 1937, 14*). At the end the Higher Council of Statistics approved an item, a rather general one, demanding the cooperation of the General Direction of Public Health and provinces in order to give a financial contribution for the publication of the data collected by the Mental Hospital of Ancona (Atti del Consiglio superiore di Statistica 1937, 15*).

In order to continue the office's statistical activity, in 1937 the General Direction of Public Health and Gustavo Modena started fundraising activities, contacting provincial administrations, universities and mental hospitals. At the end of 1937 a part of the budget was collected, and the Istat received from Ancona the statistical materials to be processed[14]. Although the material was almost ready by the end of 1939, nevertheless a new special issue on mental disorders for the period 1929-1933 was not published. The Istat stressed also that the individual forms collected by the Statistical Office of Ancona were not always well-ordered and ready for use, and we can suppose that financial and staff problems prevented the processing of the data[15]. The outbreak of WWII and Italy's entry in the conflict produced a general reorganization of official statistics, making it impossible to have a complete publication of the data on mental diseases (Atti del Consiglio superiore di Statistica 1940, 75). The many problems created by the war made the collection and processing of data impossible. As Gustavo Modena stated after the war, the statistical material regarding the period 1929-1933 was destroyed during the war (Modena 1948, 124).

**5. Conclusion.** The history of psychiatric assistance in Italy during fascism and the role played by quantitative inquiry within the scientific fields of psychiatry and eugenics still need to be explored. In this article I have examined the main characteristics of statistical sources on mental illness produced by the Istat from its foundation, in cooperation with the Statistical Office of Ancona mental hospital. In Italy the first attempt to start a regular survey on mental disorders dates back to the fascist period. With the birth of the Statistical Office of Ancona and the establishment of the Istat for the first time it became possible to coordinate and centralize the measurements of the number of brainsick people. During fascism a special attention to insanity and the increase of asylum institutions also matched the development of mental illness statistics. Within the fascist statistical scenario, health statis-

tics were little developed, whereas statistics on mental disorders grew significantly, as compared with health statistics as a whole. This circumstance might also have depended on the special attention paid by fascism to asylum assistance, as an instrument for political repression and the curbing of poverty.

The statistical measurement of mental illness developed also thanks to the advent of a eugenic purpose within the scientific community of psychiatrists. The cultural and political background of this type of health statistics was the so-called 'Latin' version of the eugenic politics, mainly based on selective therapeutic procedures, selective assistance and subsidies, maternal assistance, preventive social medicine, demographic natalism, and biotypological and endocrinological control. The development of statistical knowledge on mental disorders and a new policy of prevention were part of this approach. According to the new Italian League of Hygiene and Mental Prophylaxis, established in 1924, a study of the hereditary diseases, supporting a new protective eugenic legislation, was crucial. As a matter of fact, a key aim of the League was to harvest information on mental disorders.

Despite of all the efforts made, during fascism a complete and regular statistical survey could not be done. Gustavo Modena, who headed the Statistical Office of the Ancona Mental Hospital, edited two important publications realized with the financial and technical support of the Istat. The two special issues collected and analyzed a great deal of statistical information about brainsick people admitted to the Italian mental hospitals between 1926 and 1928. Data collected for the following years were processed and published only in part, due to the financial problems affecting the Statistical Office of Ancona. In 1935 the budget of the Statistical Office of Ancona was halved, and the Istat could not fully provide the processing and publication of data. Thus, a blend of financial and staff problems prevented a thorough processing of the data by the Istat.

We must remember also the transformations in the general political context. At the end of the 1930s, after the introduction of the racial laws, Italian psychiatry underwent a phase of particular crisis. The scientific community was split in two sides. On the one hand, Arturo Donaggio, president of the Italian Psychiatric Society, signed the famous *Manifesto degli scienziati razzisti*, published in 1938, together with the president of the Istat Franco R. Savorgnan and many other scientists. On the other, many important Jewish psychiatrists were forced to leave the country (Babini 2011, 636-642). Among them, the same Gustavo Modena was directly affected by the racial laws, and was forced to abandon the Ancona hospital (Guarnieri 2011). Finally, the outbreak of WWII and Italy's entry in the conflict made it impossible to reorganize the statistical measurement of mental diseases.

As I have shown, statistical data on insanity published during fascism are limited for other reasons as well. As many observers have pointed out, the surveys realized by the Istat and the Statistical Office of Ancona concerned only the hospitalized patients, who were only a part of all the brainsick persons. Most of them lived with their families, and it would have been useful to introduce other forms of statistical measurement, involving also the municipalities. This problem was discussed within the Higher Council of Statistics in 1936, but no solution was found in the

years that followed. Another problem warranting further study is the influence of the fascist mindset vis-à-vis political opponents and social marginality. One of the reasons for the great growth of asylums and hospitalized patients was probably the use of internment in asylum as a tool for political repression. Similarly, some elements, partly studied by historiography and to be verified, suggest that during fascism asylums could also have served as a 'container' for poverty.

[1] A previous Porter's contribution stressed the crucial role played by quantification in the foundation of the scientific idea of objectivity (Porter 1995).
[2] I refer to a draft version of a new Porter's book, provisionally titled *The Unknown History of Human Heredity*.
[3] At first Gustavo Modena, psychiatrist of the Kraepelian school, was a pioneer in the diffusion of Freud's thinking (in 1908 he published the essay *Psicopatologia ed etiologia dei fenomeni psiconevrotici: contributo alla dottrina di Freud*, (Modena 1908-1909). However, in 1923 he refused some Freudian concepts because they were considered to be 'non-scientific'. See Babini (2011) and Guarnieri (2011).
[4] See Caglioti's article in this issue (Caglioti 2016).
[5] The CsS was an advisory body founded in 1882. After the 1929 reform, it comprised ministerial representatives, statistical experts, and the president of the Istat. The CsS tried to reorganize official statistics and resolve the problem of centralized coordination of the statistical data collection (Marucco 1996; Prévost 2009).
[6] Generally speaking, before the mid-20th century health statistics were based on data concerning causes of death. This circumstance depended on the fact that mortality statistics were a good index for the spread of diseases, owing to the high mortality rate and the prevalence of infectious diseases (Geddes de Filicaia 2000, 179).
[7] I wish to thank Giacomo Gabbuti who gave me many suggestions and supported me in the archival research at the historical archive of Santa Maria della Pietà in Rome.
[8] After a first classification by Andrea Verga, dating back to the late 19th century, a new classification was developed in 1907, with the purpose of accepting the criteria of Kraepelin's School of Psychiatry.
[9] From 1926 up to 1956 the Statistical Office of Ancona published data yearly in the journal «Rivista sperimentale di Freniatria» (from 1947 on «Il Lavoro neuropsichiatrico», edited by the mental hospital Santa Maria della Pietà), using uniform data collection criteria; data concerning the period 1926-1956, therefore, are comparable (Moraglio 2006, 31). See also Modena (1948).
[10] See also AsIstat-1, Luigi De Berardinis, Promemoria per il sig. Direttore generale, s.d.
[11] *Ivi*.
[12] AsIstat-1, Luigi De Berardinis, Promemoria per il sig. Direttore generale, s.d.
[13] Recent historiography confirms this fact, especially with reference to liberal Italy. Up to now the historiography has mostly focused on asylum hospitalization, neglecting the crucial role played by familiar assistance (Guarnieri 2005; 2007).
[14] AsIstat-1, Luigi De Berardinis, Promemoria per il sig. Direttore generale, 25 November 1937; Promemoria per il sig. Direttore generale, 30 November 1937.
[15] Moreover, in 1939 the Statistical Office of Ancona was transferred to Rome, within the psychiatric hospital Santa Maria della Pietà (Guarnieri 2011).

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## Summary

*A preliminary examination of official statistical surveys on psychic disorders in Italy during the fascist era*

This article examines the main characteristics of statistical sources on mental illness produced by the Central institute of statistics from its foundation (1926) to WW2, in cooperation with the Statistical Office of the Ancona mental hospital. During fascism a special attention to insanity and the increase of asylum institutions matched the development of mental illness statistics. Within the fascist statistical scenario, health statistics were little developed, whereas statistics on mental disorders grew, as compared with health statistics as a whole. This circumstance might also have depended on the special attention paid by fascism to asylum assistance, as an instrument for political repression and the control of poverty. The statistical measurement of mental illness developed also thanks to the advent of an eugenic purpose within the scientific community of psychiatrists, under the form of the so-called 'Latin' eugenics, mainly based on selective therapeutic procedures, selective assistance and subsidies, maternal assistance, preventive social medicine, demographic natalism, and biotypological and endocrinological control.

## Riassunto

*Esame preliminare delle indagini statistiche ufficiali sui disturbi psichici in Italia in epoca fascista*

L'articolo esamina le principali caratteristiche delle fonti statistiche sulle malattie mentali pubblicate dall'Istituto centrale di Statistica sin dalle sue origini (1926), in collaborazione con l'Ufficio statistico del Manicomio di Ancona. Durante il fascismo lo sviluppo delle statistiche sulle malattie mentali si associò a una particolare attenzione alle patologie psichiatriche e alla crescita numerica degli istituti manicomiali. Se nel panorama delle statistiche ufficiali del periodo fascista le statistiche sanitarie conobbero uno scarso sviluppo, le indagini sulle malattie mentali, invece, ebbero una fortuna relativamente maggiore. Ciò potrebbe essere dipeso non solo dalla speciale attenzione che il fascismo pose sugli istituti manicomiali, come strumento di repressione politica e contenimento della povertà, ma anche dall'avvento di una prospettiva eugenetica all'interno della comunità scientifica degli psichiatri, nella forma della cosiddetta 'eugenetica latina', basata principalmente su procedure terapeutiche selettive, strumenti selettivi di assistenza e sussidio, tutela della maternità, medicina sociale preventiva, natalismo demografico e controllo biotipologico ed endocrinologico.



*Keywords*
History of Statistics; Central Institute of Statistics; History of Psychiatry; Asylums; Eugenics.

*Parole chiave*
Storia della statistica; Istituto centrale di Statistica; Storia della psichiatria; Manicomi; Eugenetica.

# Eugenics as Social Observation:
## Anthropology, Statistics and the Pursuit of 'Objectivity' in Alfredo Niceforo's Thought (1876-1960)*

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**1. Introduction.** In a letter to the president of the Accademia dei Lincei on January 11, 1955 Alfredo Niceforo – a member of the prestigious institution since 1948 – was deeply 'embarrassed' as he was requested which works, among his writings, he considered his own most successful (AAL-1). It was not the first time that Niceforo had the opportunity to portray his scientific *persona*[2]. When he retired just two years before, Niceforo had been publicly honored at the University of Rome 'La Sapienza' by the President of the Republic Luigi Einaudi, the president of the Accademia dei Lincei, the Minister of Education, and the President of the Istat. Yet they all had troubles describing Niceforo's multifaceted activity within a single academic discipline (Niceforo, Papi 1956). Their uncertainty was due to the wide range of topics that Niceforo had written about for over half a century, from racial anthropology to statistics, demography, eugenics and criminology.

In this paper, I use Alfredo Niceforo's figure to highlight a specific character of Italian eugenics. In particular, I explore from a biographical perspective the role of anthropology and statistics in Niceforo's eugenics, which I analyze here as a project of social scientific observation. As Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck have shown (2011), scientific observation has its own history, only loosely tied to the history of single scientific disciplines. This point is crucial because Italian eugenics was never established as an independent scientific discipline. Rather, eugenic plans and ideas were developed among demographers, statisticians, anthropologists, and sociologists amid far less rigid disciplinary boundaries. The blending of different approaches and Niceforo's ensuing mixture of several disciplines in his work were not accidental features of Italian eugenics. Rather, they are central to understand the social scientific appeal of eugenics and Niceforo's pursuit of 'objectivity'.

Niceforo's intellectual path allows an investigation of the cultural history of Italian eugenics within the broader context of the birth of the Italian social sciences. In particular, I am going to stress two aspects: the visualization of data to produce 'objectivity' in the social sciences and the intellectual identity that Niceforo managed to forge for himself as a criminologist, physical anthropologist, statisticians and demographer. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have highlighted the power of images for the production of 'objectivity', whereas Theodor Porter has analyzed the process of quantification as a crucial means to build scientific authority (Daston, Galison 2007; Porter 1995). In this respect, I use Niceforo's 'biographical illusion' (Bourdieu 1986; Terrall 2006) to illustrate for the Italian case a crucial knot in the history of eugenics: the pursuit of scientific objectivity and eugenicists' self-

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fashioning as objective social scientists. The broader framework of Niceforo's activity was the 'totalitarian character' of Italian statistics and demography as fields that were able to encompass other disciplines, such as sociology and eugenics. As Carl Ipsen and Jean-Guy Prévost have shown, such 'totalitarian' feature of Italian statistics was due to the belief in the universal versatility of the statistical method, but also to demographers' embedded role within the administrative apparatus of the fascist regime (Ipsen 1996; Prévost 2009). This factor contributed to the 'invisible nature' of Italian eugenics, which have been concealed in texts about public health, demography, anthropology and statistics. Niceforo's eclectic figure is a clear example of the 'multipositional' nature of Nineteenth century savants well into the Twentieth century, especially in the domain of eugenics and scientific racism (Berlivet 2008).

Because it would be impossible to account here for Niceforo's entire trajectory, this contribution focuses on three crucial moments of his activity as statistician, demographer and eugenicist: the role of statistics in the racial studies of his youth, his activity at the Direzione Generale di Statistica (DirStat, General Direction of Statistics) in the liberal period, and his 'invention' of the method of the *graphic profile*, namely Niceforo's contribution to Nicola Pende's Latin eugenics in the fascist period. Niceforo's quest for objectivity used statistics as a solution to the methodological issues that had troubled the positivist school at the turn of the century. Finally, I use Corrado Gini's critique of the *graphic profile* to highlight how Niceforo's goal of achieving social scientific objectivity derived from his broader concerns in criminal anthropology but remained a contested and ultimately unsuccessful effort.

**2. Statistics, Crime and Race.** Niceforo belonged to the third generation of Cesare Lombroso's school of criminal anthropology and his direct teacher was the lawyer and socialist MP Enrico Ferri, Lombroso's main collaborator (Gibson 2002; Villa 2011). Even if Lombroso taught in Turin, Niceforo's activity in Rome benefited of the positivist culture of the capital at the intersection between Enrico Ferri's criminal sociology and Giuseppe Sergi's physical anthropology developed at the Anthropological Society of Rome (Società romana di Antropologia) (Gillette 2002; De Donno 2006). Ferri provided Niceforo with the initial framework for his analysis of criminality and Sergi with the anthropological background for his racial theory.

In his early works, Niceforo argued that the differences in crime, economy and culture between northern and southern Italy were due to the racial difference between the Mediterranean race coming from Africa in the South and a Celtic-Aryan of the North. While the racial argument of Niceforo's texts has attracted a great deal of interest, very little attention has been paid to his methodology. In *Criminality in Sardinia* (*La delinquenza in Sardegna*), Niceforo's use of statistics was rather simple. He gathered official criminal figures and the numbers provided by Luigi Bodio, director of the board of statistics and member of the geographic society (Niceforo 1897a). Therefore he identified a «criminal area» (*zona delinquente*) in Sardinia thanks to the correspondence between statistical rates of crime and the

anthropometric measurements of 120 skulls and 121 individuals that he took personally in comparison to those that Sergi had at the University of Rome (Niceforo 1896). Maps and statistical charts were used to boost his evidence.

*La mala vita a Roma* was considered a non-scientific text because of its lack of anthropometric measures (Niceforo, Sighele 1898). Fieldwork without statistical quantification was not enough. The modern and scientific part of Niceforo's argument in *L'Italia barbara contemporanea* was the use of statistics and anthropological measurements. Sociology, anthropology, and statistics were allied to detect figures of civilization: «Statistics as well as sociology will be the indexes that will reveal the striking difference of civil life between the two Italies and the scholar's eye will discern a sharp difference of civilization, in sociological observation as well as in statistical figures» (Niceforo 1898, 16).

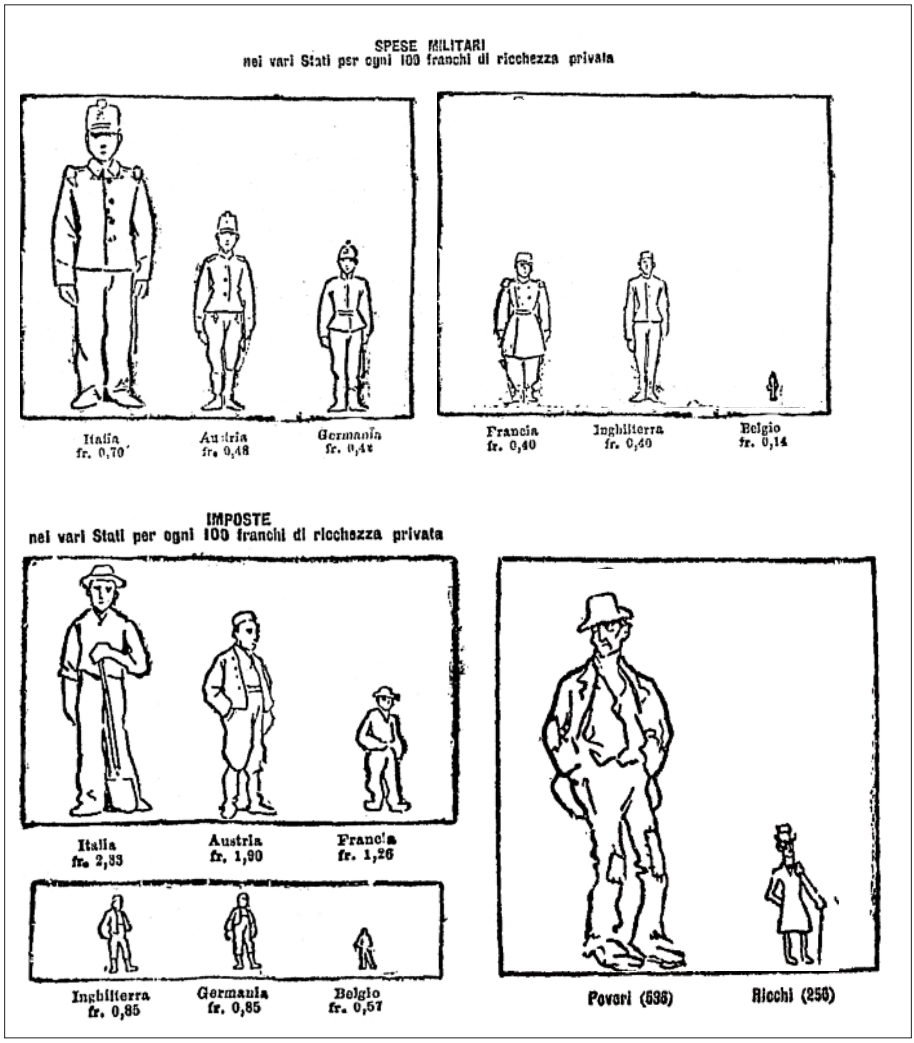
*Italiani del Nord e italiani del Sud* described the dichotomy between North and Southern Italy even more starkly (Niceforo 1901). In addition to differences in race and psychology, Niceforo illustrated through statistics differences in nutrition, educational infrastructures, criminality, economy and demography. Probably under the influence of Francesco Saverio Nitti's *Nord e Sud* (Nitti 1900), Niceforo dealt not just with physical anthropology, but also with a mixture of economic and demographic data.

Despite Niceforo's work on the Southern Question, it would have been difficult to forecast his future as statistician or as eugenicist. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth he published extensively on criminology, following Ferri and Sighele's examples of criminological studies in literature[3]. He could have followed the legal criminological tradition – a point that has been developed by Mary Gibson (2002). Instead, he left the country as correspondent of several newspapers and in particular the socialist «Avanti!», at the time when Enrico Ferri was leader of the socialist party (Nani 2006)[4].

It is possible that the negative reaction to Niceforo's racial thesis had a role in his long period abroad. Yet, the rejection of his thesis in the Italian academic community should be de-emphasized. Following the debate about the cursed race, Niceforo entertained a long correspondence with his most vocal critic, Napoleone Colajanni, which culminated with their collaboration in statistics[5]. Niceforo's theory of the two races did not disqualify him forever from the Italian intellectual community.

Niceforo maintained a vivid interest in the representation of statistical data even during his activity as reporter for the socialist newspaper «Avanti!» (Niceforo 1903). He started a regular section called «hisses and applause» in May 1903 that stood out for its antimilitarism and anticlericalism. One of his favorite targets was the German emperor, the embodiment of militarism. But popular costumes, politics and general curiosities tended to turn the column into a haphazard collection of impressions and irreverent judgments. A peculiarity of this intervention was the representation of official statistics through little sketches, drawings and graphics to popularize information against taxation and military expenses, or to highlight differences of mortality between upper and lower classes (fig. 1).

Fig. 1. *Pictures for the popularization of comparative statistical data*




Source: «Avanti», May 18 (a and b) and 21 (c), 1903.

Where did Niceforo find these data? His interests in criminology and statistics sustained each other, as Niceforo relied largely on the statistics published in the «Annuaire statistique de la ville de Paris» by the Jacques and Luis-Adolphe Bertillon, the father and brother of Alphonse Bertillon (Porter 1986). Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914) was the director of the police department in Paris and is a fundamental figure for the history of identification (Kaluszynski 2001). Inspired by Bertillon, Niceforo proposed a «cadaster of identities» for the entire population or at least for some professional groups (Niceforo 1908). Later he presented this pro-

ject also at the first Italian Congress of Ethnography on October 19-24, 1911 but his proposal was not accepted because he lacked institutional support.

Niceforo gathered published data from all over Europe and in particular Rodolfo Livi's military anthropometrical research, as he was not yet working personally on the production of statistical data (Farolfi 1984), but his interest in statistics did not lead him to abandon anthropological research. For example, he analyzed one hundred skulls of southern Italian peasants borrowed from the anthropological laboratory in Naples of Angelo Zuccarelli, the only Italian supporter of negative eugenics, namely compulsory sterilization (Niceforo 1907, 14)[6]. As Niceforo wrote to Robert Michels, the skulls came from several mass graves around Sepino, a village in the South[7]. The major challenge for the analysis of the degeneration of the lower classes, their work and their psychological differences from the upper classes was to turn into figures and numbers their actions and their psychology.

Like most Italian eugenicists except Zuccarelli, Niceforo was strongly in favor of positive eugenics. Only in a book on sexual crimes such as homosexuality and prostitution that he published in his very early youth he mentioned the need of locking up «incurable criminals» in order to prevent them from reproducing and spreading their criminal heredity (Niceforo 1897b, 164). However, the overwhelming majority of that essay dealt with 'criminals' that had acquired those characteristics. Niceforo was more interested in labor conditions, racial health, and environmental impact on human intellectual and psychological development. His eugenics matured out of his concerns in criminology, race and statistics.

**3. Measuring 'Intelligence': Niceforo at the *Direzione generale di Statistica*.** Lombroso died on 19 October, 1909. His death is usually considered the symbolic end of Italian positivism and of his school at the same time. Intellectual historians and sociologist have considered Lombroso's school and Italian positivism alike as doomed at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century under the attacks of Italian idealist philosophers Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile. However, while Lombroso's legacy seem to disappear from Italy's intellectual history, it survived in the practices of younger positivists.

In Niceforo's case, the positivist tradition migrated to an apparently new and different field: the production of statistics. Less than one year after Lombroso's death, Niceforo took office at the Direzione generale di Statistica (DirStat), which at that time was part of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce (Ipsen 1996, 37-40). Since then, Niceforo became a professional statistician and started using statistics in a more sophisticated fashion than in his early studies about Southern Italy. Statistics became the crucial method to defend his ideas about criminology and anthropology on more solid scientific bases.

When and where did Niceforo learn statistics? How did his conversion from criminology to statistics take place? At that time, rudimentary statistics were taught in Italy within law departments but the field was not institutionalized yet. The contemporary methodological and epistemological crisis in criminal anthropology motivated Niceforo's interest in statistics. In an article crucial for the development

of his career, *Qualche questione di metodo nelle ricerche di antropologia criminale* (*Some Methodological Issues in Criminal Anthropological Research*), Niceforo argued that the use of statistics was fundamental in order to establish correlations between criminal behavior and anthropological characters (Niceforo 1911a; 1912a). He applied for the first time in his writings variable calculus to anthropometric measures in order to attack empirical uses of figures and the simplistic use of the averages (Niceforo 1911b).

In the same years of the beginning of his activity at DirStat and in coincidence with the preparation for the first Eugenics Congress in London in 1912, Niceforo started a process of mathematization of his figures and internationalization of his work. For example, he began quoting famous eugenicists such as Karl Pearson, Charles Davenport and Francis Galton. However, Niceforo's inability to read and speak English would always hamper his contacts with American and British eugenicists.

While working at the DirStat after the first eugenic congress, Niceforo published articles on statistics that could especially be relevant in the perspective of Italian eugenics, for example on the variability of the weight of babies depending on the working conditions of their mothers (Niceforo 1913a). Such studies were in line with Niceforo's concern about the role of fatigue in the environmental deterioration of the 'race', especially for the lower classes. Niceforo used Quetelet's bell curve to highlight how men were different in their physical and psychological characteristics[8]. «The presence of an amount of men bearing inferior characters in physical and psychical degrees is a constant fact … and we flatter ourselves that we bring in these views the precision of measurement and figures», he argued[9]. The inevitability of the distribution of population in superior and inferior groups through segregation entailed the constant formation of hierarchies (Niceforo 1922; 1923). Thus, Niceforo's approach to demography and eugenics was deeply indebted to Quetelet.

The study of intelligence was a major concern in eugenics since Francis Galton's research about the hereditability of genius (Galton 1869; 1892). In another paper, Niceforo argued that intellectual characteristics followed the same statistical distribution of physical and biological characters and complained that statistical figures gathered by the DirStat previously did not register the data on the proficiency of students in college quantitatively but qualitatively (1913b). Therefore, when he was appointed for the reorganization of the DirStat by the Minister of Agriculture Raineri and confirmed in that role by Francesco Saverio Nitti, he proposed a reform of the collection of data on higher education, press and libraries in the country in order to calculate «the most important index to measure the civilization of a people, namely its intellectual life» (Niceforo 1912c, 13; 1912b).

Two main characteristics of his program should be emphasized. First, Niceforo insisted on the centralization of the collection of data that the DirStat had to accomplish. The institute would have issued a set of cards designed by Niceforo in order to track every student and calculate his academic performances in standard and quantifiable terms, while also receiving information on his familiar background and

his intellectual inclination. Such information, filled in all the universities of the country, would have been shipped back to the DirStat at the end of every year. Results in the exams would have been useful to calculate the index of intelligence among the students. Secondly, he proposed the making of a «register of the population in school» that would have organized the huge amount of cards shipped and received back by the DirStat with a similar technic to Bertillon's anthropometric archive in Paris to control recidivists. Niceforo borrowed criminological practices to contribute to the making of statistics – whose data, in return, would have been useful for surveys of population on a wide scale. Thanks to statistics, Niceforo had a new method to investigate his concerns about the characters of groups of population.

The inefficiency of the Italian liberal state frustrated Niceforo's efforts. The DirStat was far from its peak of efficiency after the death of its founder Luigi Bodio and the office was in urgent need of reform (Favero 2011). Niceforo complained in a letter to the Minister of Agriculture and later Prime Minister, Francesco Saverio Nitti, about the absolute lack of funding and personnel of the DirStat:

> Rome, February 24 [1911]
> Dear Professor,
> I cannot see you and talk to you, so I am writing you. Here the General Board of Statistics is doomed. There is no general director. One of the two chiefs of section is missing and the other one, Raseri, is ill and is not going to come back to the office (he is in bed). There are two censuses on our shoulders. Nobody talks about reorganizations. The law on the reorganization is immediately necessary, if we do not want to kill the Board, which is likely. Would you please talk about it with Luzzatti, along with Colajanni and Ferri, in order to show him not only the necessity, but also the urgency of the matter? Everything for the sake of statistics… and a bit of mine. My position here, if it is not clear and neat, is unsustainable and in June my mission is over. I am writing to Colajanni[10].

His own career and the general «interest of statistics» were inextricably linked in Niceforo's mind. Despite Nitti's attempts of reform, the limited means of the liberal state for the DirStat allowed Niceforo to work only on the data he could gather on education and those he found published elsewhere, even in newspapers and news from athletic events (Niceforo 1913c; 1916a). Thus, Niceforo left the DirStat in 1913 and started teaching statistics in Naples in 1921 thanks to his new academic patron, Francesco Saverio Nitti, who was repeatedly asked support by Niceforo for this prestigious nomination later (ASFE-2, 15 September, 10 and 15 October 1921). The relationship between Nitti and Niceforo had continued during and after the Great War, during Niceforo's activity in France as a sanitary statistician and at the Italian delegation at the Peace Conference of Versailles in 1919, when Nitti was Prime Minister (Niceforo 1916b)[11]. Niceforo's politics hid behind his statistics, such as when he supported Italy's claims at the Peace Conference in Versailles with statistical data (Niceforo 1919b).

Niceforo had started his career clearly within Ferri's and Sergi's Socialist galaxy at the turn of the century as a critic of the liberal establishment. Yet he gained his academic position thanks to political negotiations and personal relationships typical of the liberal period. This position, after the debates and critiques of the polemical writings

of his youth, led him to relinquish any open participation in politics. As a petit bourgeois nurtured in academia and in the bureaucracy, Niceforo used the apparently impenetrable and neutral work of statistics to portray himself as a neutral and scientific *persona*, weather political uncertainties and survive the advent of Fascism in 1922.

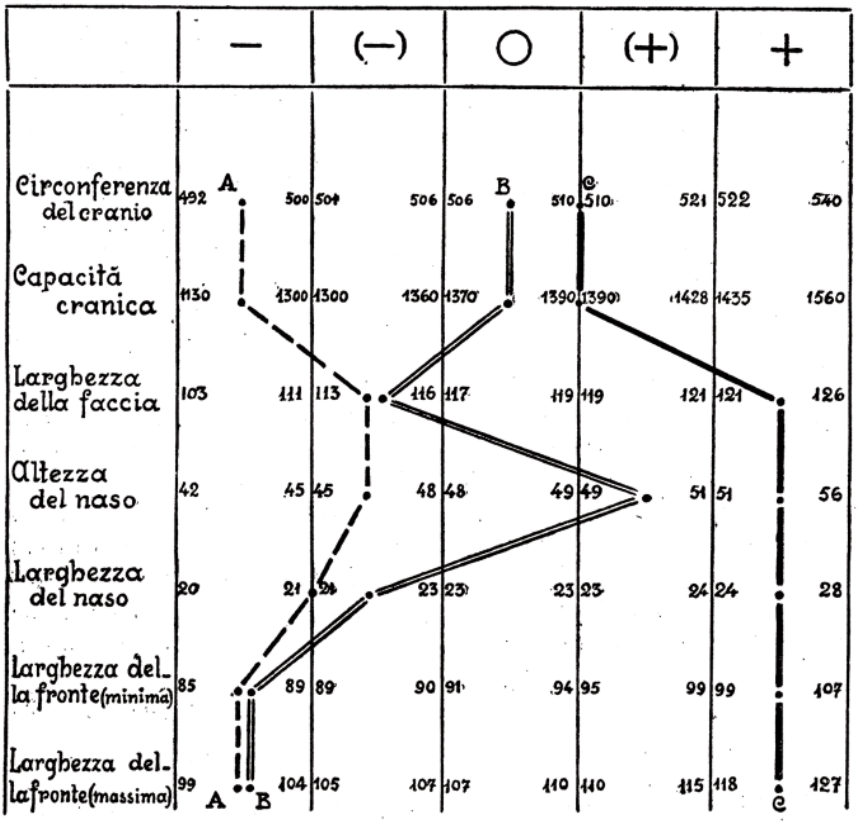
**4. The Method of the *Graphic Profile*: Disciplinary Boundaries and Eugenics.** While Nitti had to leave the country after Mussolini's takeover of power, Niceforo remained for the entire fascist dictatorship a member of the Consiglio Superiore di Statistica, the highest statistical institution supervising the Istat, and in 1929 he was even advanced to a position at the University of Rome (Leti 1996). The Istat – the reformed Italian Institute of Statistics – became under Corrado Gini the main means of totalitarian oversight for the fascist regime[12]. Gini was the most important reformer of Italian statistics, the controller of the Istat, Italy's leading statistician and the ideologue of fascist demographic, eugenic and imperialistic policies. As Carl Ipsen, Jean-Guy Prévost, and Francesco Cassata have highlighted, statistics became under the regime a totalitarian science at the service of the state (Ipsen 1996; Prévost 2009; Cassata 2006; 2011).

Niceforo remained quite distant from Gini in the decade 1922-1932. In the map of statistics' 'multipolar field' in Italy, he was far closer to Gini's major critic, Livio Livi (Prévost 2009, 137). They collaborated to the editorial board of the same journal, «Il Barometro economico italiano», starting in 1929, and Niceforo was among the founders of Livi's Ccsp, the Consulting Committee for the Study of Population (Prévost 81, 87). In this context, Niceforo took Gini's place at the 1938 International Congress of Population in Paris – a crucial turning point even for the organization of eugenics in France – in order to allow the Ccsp to replace Gini's organization, the Cisp, on the international scene of the Iussp (International Union for the Scientific Study of Population) (Treves 2001, 222-223; Rosental 2003).

At the conference, Niceforo presented his major contribution to Italian fascist eugenics: the *graphic profile* (profilo grafico), which he had been elaborating since the beginning of the 1930s and was inspired by the German anthropologists Rudolf Martin and Theodor Mollison (Niceforo 1931; 1936; 1938a; 1938b)[13]. The *graphic profile* was not simply a means for the representation of data, but a technique whose aim was «to define the degree of normality or abnormality of several characters of a certain individual, without using the arithmetic average (like Martin and Mollison), without using subjective evaluations and with reference to the group of individuals to which he belongs» (Florian, Niceforo, Pende 1943, 725). What did 'normality' mean then according to Niceforo? Replacing Quetelet's 'average man' with a 'normal man', as Niceforo made clear in *Che cosa è l'uomo "normale"?* (*What is the "normal" man?*), the 'normal' man he designed was characterized by the psychology of the conformist within his racial group (Niceforo 1938c).

The structure of the *graphic profile* was constituted by the grid of the characters taken into account on the right and their measures in series of five classes on the top (fig. 2). The conjunction of the values for each individual (represented by a line) would produce automatically a 'profile' of the normality or abnormality of his char-

Fig. 2. *'Graphic profile' of three skulls on the grid of series of measurements of 50 skulls*




*Esempio di profili grafici.*

I numeri del reticolato sono le misure ricavate dall'esame antropometrico di 50 crani maschili, omogenei, dolicomorfi. I crani sono stati disposti, volta a volta, per ognuno dei caratteri indicati nella fiancata, in ordine di intensità crescente; il primo numero di ogni linea orizzontale rappresenta la misura più bassa; il secondo numero, la misura del decimo cranio sui 50 (corrispondente cioè alla fine del primo 20 % della fila); il quarto numero rappresenta la misura del ventesimo cranio; la sesta cifra quella del trentesimo; l'ottava quella del quarantesimo; e l'ultima, quella del cinquantesimo cranio, e cioè la misura massima. Sul reticolato così fatto (per altri modi di comporre il reticolato, si veda nel testo), si iscrivono le spezzate riferentisi al cranio di cui si vuol tracciare il profilo. Il profilo *AA*, rappresenta uno dei cinquanta crani, e mostra come per tutte le sue misure quel cranio si presenti nelle zone del meno. Il profilo *CC*, rappresenta un altro cranio, che per alcune misure si trova sul limite tra la « normalità » (zona dello zero) e il più tra parentesi, mentre per altri caratteri si tiene tutto nella zona della eccezionalità in più. Il cranio *BB*, infine, si mantiene per molti caratteri nella zona centrale, o quasi, mentre per l'apertura nasale, e i diametri frontali, cade in quelle del meno.

Source: «Avanti», May 18 (a and b) and 21 (c), 1903.

acters, depending on the centrality of the line. The grid of series would eliminate the subjective judgment of the physician-criminologist and turned Lombroso's abstract intuitions into a mechanic, 'objective', neutral and standardized practice.

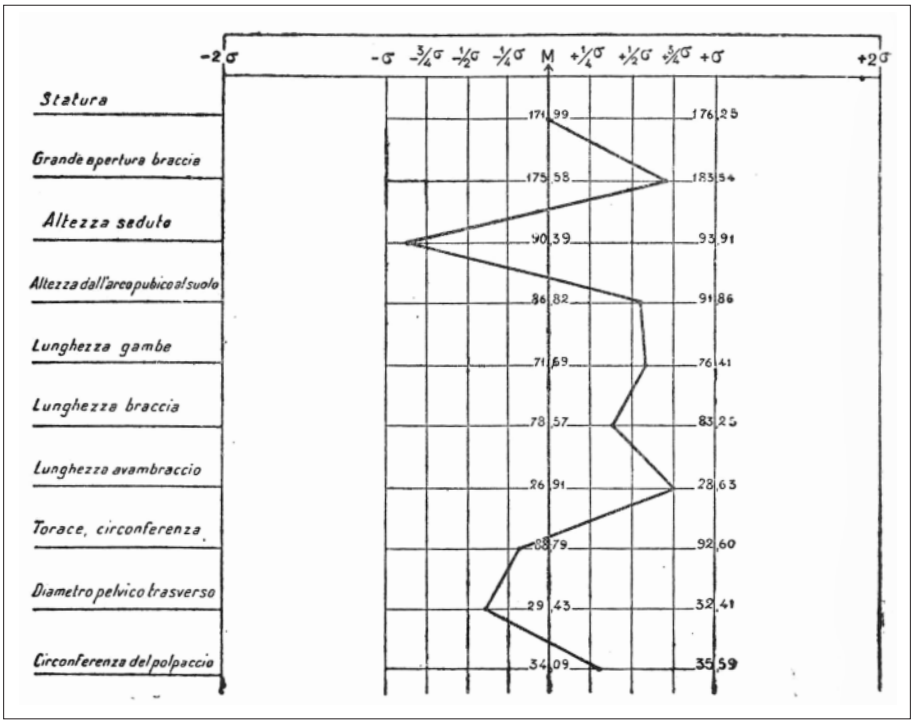
More interestingly, the *graphic profile* could find any kind of application: criminals, madmen, workers in factories, even whole groups. The line on the grid could 'reveal objectively' abnormalities of any kind. In fact, the graphic profile was actually *producing* abnormality. A clear example of the racial underpinnings of Niceforo's 'neutral method' was in the second edition of his textbook, *Il metodo statistico* (1931), where he compared the physical characters of white and black American soldiers. He borrowed the figures from the American eugenicist Charles Davenport (fig. 3). The line represented the irregularities of African-American soldiers on a normative grid representing the measures of white soldiers. Not just the topic of the example, but its very *design* took for granted the 'normality' of white people and the abnormality of people of color. In other words, the *graphic profile* intended to produce a mechanical distinction of physical and psychological characters from the organization of anthropometric measures and their statistical treatment, but it had selection biases built within its own model.

Niceforo's idea of the graphic profile sprang from his identity as a scholar at the intersection between criminology, racial anthropology and statistics. For decades, Niceforo had envisioned statistics as a scientific, neutral, and standardized method that was useful to distinguish normal and pathological characters. In his view, the *graphic profile* could empirically help in the quantification of physical, biological and psychological data in order to easily determine superiorities and inferiorities of individuals and groups. Its statistics turned into visible figures differences in qualitative characteristics, such as intelligence, strength and health. In 1938, Niceforo claimed that the *graphic profile* was the best way to visualize the bio-constitutional types of «brevilinei» (short-statured) and «longilinei» (long-limbed) studied by the most important Italian eugenicist at that time: the endocrinologist Nicola Pende.

Pende was the major Italian scientist that contributed actively to the making of Italian eugenics for the fascist regime and was later involved in the racial debate ensuing the publication of the *Manifesto of Racial Scientists* (*Manifesto degli scienziati razzisti*) (Israel, Nastasi 1998; Maiocchi 1999). His constitutional bio-typology revealed individual internal development and racial psychology by studying the physical constitution of a subject. Rather than focusing on external racial markers as physical anthropologists and racial theorists of the previous century had done, he advocated for an analysis of internal and physiological characters, such as blood and 'constitution' that were affected by the environment and could explain human behavior as well. Niceforo was aware of Pende's work at least since 1926, when he mentioned him for the first time, but they collaborated to produce together the *Dictionary of Criminology* (*Dizionario di criminologia*) in 1943 (Florian, Niceforo, Pende 1943)[14]. Niceforo found that Pende's theory was useful for a statistical and biometrical analysis of individuals and their behavior.

Corrado Gini's reaction for Niceforo's replacement of his position at the 1938 International Conference of Population was furious. He tried to destroy Niceforo's

Fig. 3. *'Graphic profile' of the proportions of black men's body (North American soldiers demobilized in 1919) compared with corresponding measures (on the grid) of white men (North American soldiers)*




Source: Niceforo (1931, 333).

*graphic profile* on the international scene with two articles on the «Revue international de Statistique», journal of the International Statistical Institute (Gini 1939). First, he argued that it was «impossible to understand how the author [Niceforo] can talk so often about the profile as if it was a method he had introduced» because the same methodology had already been employed in anthropology and psychology (Gini 1939, 16). Similarly, he attacked Niceforo's students for talking about «profils nicéforiens», an unjustified name except for the fact that Niceforo was the only professor in statistics using such a method borrowed from anthropology and psychology. The *profile* – Gini remarked – had an absolutely arbitrary character, because the arrangement of the data demonstrated only the relationship between contiguous characters and not between all of them. In other words, «the defenders of the method of the profile […] request from it not what it necessarily provides, but quite the contrary what it cannot offer» (Gini 1939, 24). Gini shattered Niceforo's claim of the mechanical objectivity of the profile by showing how the same data, arranged with the method of the profile and with other methods, would produce completely different results.

Gini made clear that the origins of the *graphic profile* were in anthropology, where the list of physical characters followed human physiognomy. He also exposed the absurdity of using the same methodology for psychological, economic and social characters as Niceforo and his school tried to do (Gini 1939, 237). Gini's vitriolic and destructive critique should not be interpreted just as a sign of personal antipathy or another additional episode of Gini's bad temper, but rather as a symptom of the tensions in the community of statisticians and demographers between 1937 and 1939. In addition to the opposition between Gini's Comitato italiano per lo studio dei problemi della popolazione (Cisp, Italian Committee for the Study of Population Problems) and Livi's Ccsp, Italian statisticians were splitting between the Società italiana di Demografia e Statistica (Sids) and Gini's Società di Statistica (Sis), the former closer to the demographic policies of the regime and the latter more abstract and formal (Prévost 2009, 89). Gini and Niceforo were clearly rivals at this time. It is quite an irony that Corrado Gini, the architect of Italy's demographic policies under fascism, became the foremost critic of Niceforo's approach to eugenics as contact zone between statistics, demography, anthropology and criminology. Such a mixture displayed its dangerous outcomes in the very same years with the making of the Italian racial laws and the *Manifesto of Racial Scientists* in 1938, when the regime tried to exploit the names of 'experts' from a wide range of disciplines in order to legitimize its change of racial policy. Gini's goal of further professionalizing the discipline exposed the controversial nature of Niceforo's quest for a statistical objectivity grounded in anthropological and criminological concerns.

**5. Conclusions.** Just a year before his death in 1960, Niceforo's name was praised publicly in New York City at the conference on the History of Quantification in the Sciences that took place on 20-21 November 1959. Among the major names gathered in that venue were Thomas Kuhn, Alexandre Koyré, Robert Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld. Lazarsfeld, Austrian émigré and prestigious sociologist at Columbia University, presented the paper *Notes on the History of Quantification in Sociology* (Lazarsfeld 1961). While describing the legacies of Quetelet's moral statistics, Lazarsfeld praised Niceforo, for his «most creative effort to give structure to the ever-increasing mass of data» from the end of the 19th century on, and for his role as «the earliest sociologist I found who used correlation coefficients explicitly» (Lazarsfeld 1961, 311 and 332). Of course Lazarsfeld ignored that Niceforo had been not just a sociologist, but a founding father of Italian eugenics with a specific interest in statistics and criminal anthropology.

Niceforo's vision of eugenics connected Lombroso's criminal anthropology, Quetelet's demographic distribution of physical and intellectual characters in the bell curve, Pende's endocrinology and his Latin eugenics. Eventually, Niceforo designed his own methodology of the *graphic profile* leaning on physical anthropology and criminology. Niceforo definitely deserved Lazarsfeld's comment for his lifelong effort of quantifying a wide range of data from the most disparate realms of the natural and social world. Yet the eugenic motivations of his activity reveal the problematic features of his pursuit of 'objectivity' through a program of totalitarian quantification.

Throughout his intellectual trajectory, Niceforo presented statistics as a neutral, 'objective' and mechanic science. Yet, at a closer look his statistics tried to neutralize the controversial topic of race and the even more dubious connection between physical characters, intellectual capacities and criminal behavior. Niceforo's interest in race structured his approach to statistics from his earliest studies about the Italian South to his attempt of measuring the psychology of different groups. The evaluation of physical, intellectual, and psychological characteristics was just a step toward the bigger goal of establishing degrees of 'normality' and 'abnormality'. The visualization and quantification of data were crucial strategies to ascertain the reliability of anthropometric data and ground Niceforo's racial, criminological and demographic research on scientific bases.

Gini's intervention against Niceforo reveals that the professionalization of Italian statistics with the creation of the Sids and the Sis in the late 1930s was closing the intellectual space of Italian 19th century positivist eugenics, which had been fostered by the interaction between anthropology, criminology, statistics and sociology. As disciplinary barriers strengthened in the post-war period, Niceforo's activity was parceled into a number of different fields. Moreover, Gini's rejection of the *graphic profile* shows that Italian statisticians and demographers could share the same belief in eugenics and at the same time disagreed on their methods. Yet, by tracing the entire trajectory of his project of social observation, Niceforo's case reveals the composite and invisible nature of Italian positive eugenics, disguised in statistical textbooks, anthropological observations and demographic data.…µ

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[1] For the concept of scientific *persona*, see Steven Shapin (2008).

[2] See Niceforo (1897a and 1898b). These works were deeply shaped by Ferri and Sighele, in particular see Ferri (1896) and Sighele (1896).

[3] Niceforo wrote articles on the «Avanti!» with the pseudonym «Nix». I would like to thank Michele Nani for this piece of information.

[4] Jean-Yves Frétigné (Frétigné 2002, 717, n. 446) reports that Niceforo called him «dear master» («caro maestro»). The collaboration between Colajanni and Niceforo culminated in Niceforo's *Breve esposizione di qualche metodo per la elaborazione dei dati di una seriazione*, appendix to Colajanni (1914, 531-551).

[5] Concerning Zuccarelli, see Mantovani (2004, 52-53).

[6] As opposed to what Niceforo wrote in the *Ricerche sui contadini* (1907), in a letter to Robert Michels concerning the German translation of the volume Niceforo wrote that the skulls did not come just from the village, but from several graves in the area around it. See fragment of letter in ASFE-1. I thank the personnel of the Fondazione Einaudi for providing the materials.

[7] On Quetelet and the bell curve, see Gould (1981), Porter (1985; 1986).

[8] In a lecture about inequality among people at La Sorbonne a few years later, Niceforo argued: «la présence d'une quantité d'hommes porteurs de caractères inférieurs dans la graduation physique et psychique est aussi un fait constant. …

nous nous flattons d'apporter dans toutes ces vues la précision de la mesure et des chiffres» (Niceforo 1919a, 170).
[9] Letter from Alfredo Niceforo to Francesco Saverio Nitti in AcS-1, s.d. The underlined words are in the original. Enrico Raseri was director of DirStat until July 1911, when he died. Luigi Luzzatti was Prime Minister between 1910 and 1911. Napoleone Colajanni was a sociologist and statistician from the University of Naples. Enrico Ferri was teaching at that time at the University of Rome.
[10] See Niceforo 1916b, where he wrote that he had the chance of studying very closely sanitary statistics of war in France. For his work in the peace delegation, see Niceforo (1919).
[11] Gini reformed the Istat in 1926, while Niceforo was part of the Consiglio superiore di Statistica since 1924.
[12] Mollison had been the supervisor of Mengele's thesis.
[13] To my knowledge, Niceforo mentioned Pende's school for the first time in his inquiry for the League of Nations (Niceforo, Pittard 1926).

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| Asfe | Fondazione Einaudi, Archivio storico, Torino |
| Aal-1 | Aal, *Corrispondenza soci*, b. 2. |
| AcS-1 | AcS, *Corrispondenza Nitti*, b. 92, f. 744. |
| Asfe-1 | Asfe, *Fondo Michels*, s.d., b. 2. |
| Asfe-2 | Asfe, *Fondo Nitti*, Corrispondenza. |

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## Summary

*Eugenics as Social Observation: Anthropology, Statistics and the Pursuit of 'Objectivity' in Alfredo Niceforo's Thought (1876-1960)*

In this article, I explore two crucial aspects in the history of Italian eugenics: the blending of disparate methodologies in the study of population and their essential contribution to the pursuit of scientific 'objectivity' at a time when disciplinary boundaries were far less rigid than today. In particular, I reflect on the role of the quantification and visualization of data in the making of eugenics as a neutral and 'objective' social science through the work of the statistician and demographer Alfredo Niceforo (1876-1960). I analyze three moments in Niceforo's intellectual biography: his studies about race and crime in Southern Italy at the end of the nineteenth century, his adoption of statistics at the beginning of the twentieth century, and his invention of the method of the "graphic profile" in the late 1930s. I interpret Niceforo's eugenics as a form of social scientific observation motivated by the transformation of Cesare Lombroso's school of criminology. Finally, I use Corrado Gini's critique of Niceforo's *graphic profile* to show that the blending of anthropology, criminology and statistics was crucial in Niceforo's multifaceted intellectual identity and a contested attempt to ground eugenics on a scientific basis.



## Riassunto

*L'eugenetica come scienza sociale: antropologia, statistica e la ricerca di 'oggettività' nel pensiero di Alfredo Niceforo (1876-1960)*

Questo articolo esplora due aspetti cruciali nella storia dell'eugenetica italiana: la fusione di approcci diversi nello studio della popolazione e il loro contributo essenziale alla ricerca di 'oggettività' scientifica in un periodo in cui i confini disciplinari erano molto meno rigidi di oggi. In particolare, rifletto sul ruolo della quantificazione e visualizzazione di dati nel fare l'eugenetica come una scienza sociale neutra e 'oggettiva' attraverso il lavoro dello statistico e demografo Alfredo Niceforo (1876-1960). Analizzo tre momenti nella biografia intellettuale di Niceforo: i suoi studi su razza e crimine nell'Italia meridionale alla fine dell'Ottocento, il suo passaggio alla statistica all'inizio del Novecento e la sua invenzione del metodo del 'profilo grafico' alla fine degli anni Trenta. Interpreto l'eugenetica di Niceforo come una forma di scienza sociale le cui motivazioni originavano dalla trasformazione della scuola di criminologia di Cesare Lombroso. Infine, uso la critica di Corrado Gini al *profilo grafico* di Niceforo per mostrare che la fusione di antropologia, criminologia e statistica era cruciale nella sfaccettata identità intellettuale di Niceforo ed un tentativo contestato di fondare l'eugenetica su basi scientifiche.



*Keywords*
Niceforo; Statistics; Objectivity; Lombroso; Gini.

*Parole chiave*
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