

**ESCAPES FROM MODERNITY. 7<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL WINTER  
SCHOOL – BIOPOWER AND SEMIOTICS OF THE BODY,  
KÄÄRIKU, VALGA COUNTY, ESTONIA,  
19-25 FEBRUARY 2017 A REPORT**

Considering biopolitics today is not a simple task. It requires strictly defining what biopolitics is, or at least referring to existing understandings; even then, identifying biopolitical practices may not always be fully possible. This is because, in general, biopolitics is presented as something beyond any other usual policy. It may concern governing populations on the macro scale, as well as regulating individual bioethical decisions. But then one can ask, for instance, what is the biopolitical governance of populations when put in practice? What methods or techniques are used for this purpose? Answering these and similar questions was the aim of 7<sup>th</sup> International Winter School entitled “Biopower and Semiotics of the Body” held in Kääriku, Estonia, on 19-25 February 2017. The school was a part of the bigger HSE project “Escapes from Modernity” attended by dozens of young scholars from all countries of the world, including USA, Russia, Taiwan, Sweden, Germany, France, Estonia and Poland among many others.

The school lasted one week, during which the participants attended thematic lectures given by PhD candidates and professors, discussions after the lectures, group workshops requiring them to solve given problems and prepare presentations explaining proposed solutions, and nightly group discussions usually preceded by the collective watching of previously chosen movies, provoking a debate.

The school opening lecture was given by Andrey Makarychev who outlined the main “classic” approaches to biopolitics in the body of literature. Although he focused mainly on Foucault and Agamben, he did not simply refer to them, but extended their ideas by presenting the meaning of biopolitics beyond them. That way, Makarychev systematically taught the participants what kinds of practices may or may be not perceived as biopolitical. Based on various studies and observations, he distinguished the following biopolitical agenda: the concept of family, reproductive behaviour, legitimation of sexual practices, juvenile justice, pastoral power, immigration debates and medicine and health care. For these kinds of issues, biopolitics means establishing power relations through regulations based on normative rationality, and producing collective identities connected with corporeal practices.

Makarychev’s ideas about the theoretical outline of biopolitics were completed by the next lecturers, among which we noted Olga Gurova. Her keynote speech, titled “Patriotism in Russian Fashion” referred to corporeal practices, but their central point was fashion. Through various examples Gurova showed ways in which fashion may be used as a mode of governance. This role is not confined to people who use their bodies as transmitters of specific information, hence becoming political zones. The constructing of these information is important. To illustrate that concept, Gurova used a number of examples including Putin’s body elevated to the posture size of culturist, or the Russian president riding on a bear; all of which aimed to present him as a strong and reliable leader. If Had not Gurova conducted such a research, I doubt anyone would come up with the idea that biopolitics may be present even in such a minor but close area of life like fashion.

Another voice was Maxim Waldstein who covered the topic of “‘Sexual Democracy’ and the New Cold War: Recent Trends in Nationalism and Biopower”. His presentation, however, surprised the participants; besides explaining his first intuitions about the concept of ‘sexual democracy’, he prepared a workshop in which the school attendants could have a biopolitical reading of literature. Under Waldstein’s guidance the participants had the possibility of deciphering the meaning of

texts from which they could find out how different authors personify the state, and what features they assign to it. Is it a motherland or a fatherland? What are the differences between them? Can we associate some ideologies with them? Eventually, Waldstein's lecture and workshop convinced all listeners that it is worth to follow studies on sexual democracy or conduct their own research.

An outstanding lecture, "Biopolitical Art of Pyotr Pavlensky", was given by Sergei Medvedev. For him, the crucial category here was the sovereignty of body, and the whole study was based on the simple but very biopolitical question: who owns the body? We or the state? Following changes in Russian law, Medvedev observed that there is an increasing number of life areas controlled by the state. Gay propaganda laws, bans on smoking, insulting the feelings, pro-life antiabortion moves in health care are just few examples. For all these areas the central point is a human body. The effect of applying the abovementioned regulations is that our bodies are in decreasing extent ours. We cease to be the sovereigns of our lives. But, if the body may be the area of political influence, it can also be the area of political resistance. Exactly such a logic was followed by a Russian performer, Pyotr Pavlensky, who used his body for several anti-state performances. He cut off his ear and sat naked on the prison walls. He wrapped himself into barbed wire and lay in the street. He sewed up his mouth. Surprisingly, his actions were not punished and sooner or later he was released because the state apparatus simply did not know what to do with him. Medvedev humoristically commented that "there are only two truly sovereign men in Russia: Putin and Pavlensky".

Another, very practical lecture was given by Abel Polese, who presented his empirical study "The Loci of Biopower: National Identity and Biopolitics in Former Soviet Spaces". He focused specifically on the techniques of nation-identity building and strengthening. He tried to demonstrate in how many areas of life these techniques are present. Do you have a pen drive? Check if it has a flag of your country on it. Do you buy butter? Maybe there are some slogans on it such as "good because Estonian" or "tasty because Polish". Beside presenting some obvious examples like history lessons, Polese showed through the previous examples how minor the signals of national identity building may be, but how stubbornly they can build our conviction about the greatness of our homeland.

The next three lectures were very theoretical and concerned the contingencies of biopolitics. That part was started by Tatiana Romashko, who in her speech "Hegemony and Exclusion in Post-Soviet Biopolitics: Discursive Practices of Cultural Policy" focused on the reconstruction of the model of intercepting discourses. If a hegemony is a dominant discourse in a given country, it is beneficial for it not to compete with other minor or hegemonic discourses but to include them into the original one. Surprisingly, it does not dismantle it from the inside but often makes it more universal and commonly recognized. Another lecturer was Jakko Turunen, who theoretically proved Romashko's reasoning by using the example of contemporary populism. He based his study on the case of the Polish debate about migration, and more specifically on the attitude of far-right parties. Their hegemonic nationalist discourse incorporates other discourses by using populist rhetoric. For example, a neutral word, "migrant", included into that discourse in a populist manner does not have its original meaning anymore but means "terrorist" or "dissenter". The theoretical part of the lecture was closed by Bartosz Plotka. I introduced my authorial understanding of the concept of biopolitical ideologies. I defined two major opposing trends: bioliberalism and bioconservatism, and demonstrated how we can analytically investigate bioethical practices by applying these concepts. Eventually, I distinguished five key elements to which one has to pay attention when conducting such a research: 1) an accepted political truth (it determines political interests; values), 2) the concept of ruling institution or any other decisive subject (who makes decisions in bioethical/political/biopolitical cases?), 3) the concept of ruled subject (e.g. who and when is a citizen?), 4) a model of justice (it is a relation between ruling or ruled subjects and public good, put in the following question: when and by who the use of a given public good or resource is just and justified?), and 5) the approach of any social movement or political group towards changing reality.

The school ended with roundtable discussion at the University of Tartu. The topic was "The State and The Body: The Refugee Crisis and The Immigration Debate in Europe". The first part consisted of three keynotes by Stefano Braghiroli, Leonardo Pataccini, and Vassilis Petsinis, who

proposed three completely different approaches to the problem: from the perspective of political economy, international relations and ideological focus, with its main emphasis on the discourse of far-right parties and their political capitalization of the problem. The second part was a discussion in itself, ending with some general conclusions, systematically presented by Andrey Makarychev. The participants agreed that biopolitical practices and events are major challenges to the traditional political vocabulary and ways of thinking. They also came to conclusion that perceptions of these problems do matter, and we need to study them; that political landscapes are changing dramatically, especially because of the growth of populism; that the European Union itself becomes increasingly dependent on these events, and more vulnerable. The last, intellectually stimulating conclusion, was that biopolitics and geopolitics stimulate each other – an idea which inspired the participants so much, that the school of 2018 covered exactly that idea.

Personally, I am very glad that I had the possibility to participate in the “7<sup>th</sup> International Winter School – Biopower and Semiotics of the Body”, and because of that stimulating experience I strongly recommend to everyone to follow the “Escapes from Modernity” project as well as HSE’s other initiatives on biopolitics.

*Bartosz Płotka*

***IDEAS IN THE AGORA: EUGENICS, BIOPOLITICS  
AND THE ETHNIC STATE IN ROMANIA,  
MARIUS TURDA AND SORIN ANTOHI,  
A PUBLIC DEBATE AT CASA FILIPESCU CESIANU,  
23 NOVEMBER 2017***

Drawing on Marius Turda’s research in *Modernism and Eugenics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and *Latin Eugenics in Comparative Perspective* (Bloomsbury, 2014), Marius Turda and Sorin Antohi offer a historical perspective on biopolitics and eugenics in Romania, starting in 1848 and extending to the communist period in the 1970s. They choose 1848 as the starting point because this is the time when the idea of the identity between the nation, the state and its members, an idea which arose in France with Abbé Sieyès at the time of the French Revolution, began to emerge as a significant element in Romanian thinking about the nation.

At the end of the First World War, Romania came into being in something like its modern form, but it was not an ethnically or politically homogenous state. A key political aim was the building of a healthy nation, whose members were healthy, as they were the embodiment of the nation, and where the nation and the state were one and the same. So, what Turda identifies as the triadic relationship between nation, state and people became of immense importance, and biopolitics, as the biological regulation of this triadic relationship, became increasingly important as an ideological framework for the new state.

Turda and Antohi’s analysis incorporates a theoretical structure which derives from Foucault, and fill in the details with a careful empirical study, which emphasizes the historical particularities of Romania.

Their central thesis is that eugenics needs to be seen in a dual light, as a modernist project of national regeneration, and as having strong associations with doctrines of race, racial superiority and racial contamination. The racial elements were never as significant in Romania as they were in countries like Nazi Germany. However, Nazism has coloured our perceptions of interwar eugenics, and the modernist elements have tended to be neglected and ignored, as eugenics in Central Europe between the wars is associated racial science and the forced expulsion from the body politic of allogens – elements genetically incompatible with a healthy body politic – a form of thinking which led ultimately to the Holocaust. Turda and Antohi argue that Romanian eugenics and the Romanian biopolitical state need to be seen in the particular light of Romanian circumstances as modernist attempts at national rejuvenation, rather than through the prism of Nazism as attempts to ensure racial purity and racial homogeneity.

In 1918 Romania faced the task of creating a nation out of the disparate elements which composed it. The task was seen as creating a unified healthy nation, made up of healthy people. By 1940, biopolitics provided the organizing principle of the state, with Carol II presiding over what Turda and Antohi describe as a biopolitical state with a well-articulated conception of eugenics as key factor in building a healthy nation with a healthy population.

In the 1920s, the medical situation of the countryside was disastrous. In Bucharest, two significant figures in the field of public health, Marinescu and Parhon, the eminent endocrinologist who succeeded Marinescu as President of the Society of Eugenics, focused on the medical approach to building a healthy country by way of a healthy population. While literary intellectuals and philosophers operated with an idealized conception of the peasantry, and engaged in the attempt to create a new spiritual, cultural and religious foundation for the new nation based on their idealized conception of village life, medical eugenicists like Marinescu and Parhon engaged with village life and the health of the peasantry in more practical ways, addressing those problems that were genuinely detrimental to their physical health. They succeeded in improving sanitation and the water supply, in addressing diseases like typhoid and the iodine deficiency that caused goitre, and helped to improve the diet and breast-feeding practices of the peasantry. Films were shown in villages explaining these ideas in understandable ways to the peasants, and pamphlets distributed explaining how their health could be improved. This is the modernist strand that Turda and Antohi identify as a distinct strand in the Romanian biopolitical state. It is distinct in that it is largely separate from the racial strand of eugenics. Though some of the individuals involved in medical eugenics were sympathetic to the Legionnaires, their focus was medical rather than racial, and Parhon had no sympathy whatsoever for fascism or the Legionnaires.

In Romania then, the biopolitical state was not concerned with the elimination of “allogens”, genetically alien material, the preoccupation of the Nazi state and which resulted in the murder of the physically and mentally handicapped and the mentally ill, and ultimately in the Holocaust. Romania, unlike many states in America, never introduced a forced sterilization law to prevent the reproduction of what were seen as lesser national stock. Romanian eugenics was focused primarily on improving the health and quality of the existing population, the biopolitical in Foucault’s sense, rather than eliminating the unfit or ensuring racial purity by eliminating those seen as alien or damaging to the health of the nation. The killings of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu regime occurred much later in the day and were related more to Romania’s involvement on the side of the Axis power during the Second World War than to any domestic pressure to implement racial eugenics of a Nazi kind.

Eugenics disappeared after 1945, and it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that it resurfaced, now renamed genetics. But the preoccupations of the communist regime were very little changed from those of the 1920s and 1930s – improving the health and quality of the nation through biological means, in order to produce a “new man”.

Turda and Antohi argue convincingly that eugenics in Romania was a modernist phenomenon, in which medicine had a significant role to play, and was based on the idea of national regeneration and national improvement, rather than a racial phenomenon founded on racial science. The biopolitical state of Carol II arose out of the particularities of Romanian experience, particularly the perceived need after 1918 to create a healthy expanded nation state composed of healthy subjects. Turda and Antohi combine a theoretical perspective derived from Foucault with an historical and empirical approach which traces the history of biopolitics in Romania and the personalities involved, and stresses its differences from eugenic movements elsewhere, particularly the eugenics policies of Germany and the USA which were motivated by very different impulses and led to a very different form of implementation. Marius Turda has in his many books and articles done a tremendous service to the study of eugenics and the biopolitical state in Romania.

*Ian Browne*

**PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS AND RELIGION: ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES  
AND CONFLICTUAL VALUES  
23 APRIL 2018,  
INSTITUTE OF POLITICAL SCIENCES AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
“ION I. C. BRĂȚIANU”, BUCHAREST**

Establishing an efficient intercultural communication beyond the inherent barriers of language is a task of great importance for modern societies. The present statement, profoundly built by Academician Alexandru Boboc in his opening speech, laid the foundation for a passionate and fruitful workshop held at and by the Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations “Ion I. C. Brătianu” of the Romanian Academy on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2018. Bringing together “alternative perspectives and conflictual values” in an international academic environment was the fundamental objective of this event, which sparked new research paths and also deepened the ongoing inter-academic project between Romania and Bulgaria. To emphasize the productive academic cooperation between these two neighbours, both Senior Researcher Henrieta Șerban and Prof. Bogdana Todorova have acknowledged the necessity of developing a deeper image concerning religious identity in the process of democratization and European integration.

The workshop was divided into two sections, *Philosophy and Religion: Alternative Visions* and *Philosophy, Politics and Religion: Conflictual Values*. Both panels offered various presentations on specific topics, thus inspiring a number of debates between the participants, such as discussing the actual semantics and interpretation of nihilism and also the future of Turkey’s foreign policy narrative.

The first part of the event, concerning *Alternative Visions*, debuted with a presentation by Henrieta Șerban, called “The Role of the State in the Relationship with Church in Romania”. She tackled issues such as identifying the actual role of the media when stressing the transparency of both the State and the Church and also the problem of God as a reasonable unit of interpretation for the individual. Shortly following up was Viorella Manolache, Scientific Researcher III at the “Ion I. C. Brătianu” Institute, who investigated the problem of “Postmodern Theology or Faith Explained for Postmodernists. Intellectual Debates in the Double: Interpretation and Visual Anecdotal Experiment”. Nihilism as the devaluation of traditional belief systems was an essential theme for understanding this issue, alongside the concept of fundamentalism, which can be defined as the incapacity to develop changes in a given system of values. The workshop continued with “Faith and Religion. Individual Engagement and Public Expressions”, a presentation held by Lorena Stuparu. Right before advancing on to the second panel, Prof. Bogdana Todorova introduced us to the world of geopolitical narratives by displaying a theory called “The Neo-Ottoman Strategy of Turkey in Bulgaria and the Balkans – An Alternative Vision”. She stressed out Erdogan’s role in the process of enlargement of economic diplomacy in the Western Balkans and also contextualized the Islamic nature of this strategic dilemma.

The second part of the event, regarding *Conflictual Values*, started off with a thought-provoking essay-presentation concerning the (lack of) intersection points between liberalism and religious communitarianism. One of the main goals of philosopher and writer Ian Browne, its author, was to determine philosophers to get involved in current political issues, especially after observing the rise of civic initiatives, such as that for modifying the term “family” in the Romanian Constitution. Another paper by Gabriela Tănăsescu, stated that implication in religious community activities is compatible with sustainable civic engagement and participative democracy. Her paper aimed to analyse social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness characteristic for the faith-based organizations in the Central and Eastern European countries. “The Islamic Waves that have altered Europe in the last couple of years cannot be seen as a monistic phenomenon”, says Ana-Maria Negoită. During her display of “The Silent Battlefield. New Islamic Waves in Europe. Challenge and Response”, she offered us a comprehensive view on how to deal with variations of the Islamic migration and what are the social, demographical, economic and even architectural

consequences of this complex reality. The panel extended on to the presentation of Alexandru Gheorghiu, a student at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, who articulated a historical and theoretical perspective on the role of the Catholic Church from the Middle Ages to the present day. The complete title of his work was “The Romano-Catholic Church in the Middle Ages and Its Influence in the Socio-Political Spectrum vs. its Actual Deficit of Institutional Influence Today”. Marius Augustin Drăghici went one step forward by tackling an issue that may stir the academic spectrum in future times – what kind of framework should we use to interpret the dichotomy between secularism and religion throughout this ever-expanding technological boom. In “How Scientific are the Approaches on Religion Nowadays and Which Are the Perspectives?”, he extracted the implications of Big Data in recent times and also the importance of acknowledging its role in the current interconnected world.

The second panel was quickly followed by a roundtable debate, a time when the audience had the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the submitted papers. The workshop saw its end not before the project coordinators emphasized one more time the need for academic studies and pluralism of ideas in current societies. Completing the successful event was a homonymous book launch – a product of the fruitful collaboration established during the common project “Democratization, Religious Identity and Fundamentalism in Romania and Bulgaria” by the Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations “Ion I. C. Brătianu” of the Romanian Academy and the Institute for Study of Societies and Knowledge of the Bulgarian Academy.

*Cosmin Sipoș*