Identity Boundaries and the National Order:
Eugenic Social Policies and the Regulation of Sexuality
in the Swiss 'Gardening State'

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- WORKING DRAFT -
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Introduction

This paper explores connections between the eugenicist regulation of reproductive sexuality and the construction of national identity, focusing on the case of Switzerland. The science of eugenics emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century, with the aim to assist nation-states in formulating social policies which would improve the ‘quality’ of the population. The growth of health and social policies implemented by national states from the turn of the twentieth century provided the institutional conditions for translating the eugenic rhetoric into a policy programme. The Swiss case is interesting in that it pioneered a number of eugenic ideas and policies in Europe, some of which continued until well into the post-War period. Swiss eugenic policies were mostly articulated from within a social-democratic perspective. They were closely bound up with the emerging welfare system and shaped by the specific Swiss political institutions, especially, federalism.

The modern Swiss federal state was founded a little over 150 years ago. Recent commemorations of this anniversary have given rise to political accounts celebrating the emergence of feelings of national unity and common national identity, despite the linguistic and religious diversity that characterises the Swiss nation. Within these narratives, the political institutions of direct democracy and federalism are emphasised as mechanisms of national integration which allow for the expression of cultural ‘difference’. In this paper, I propose an alternative account of the construction of Swiss national identity. While not denying the importance of political institutions for the construction of Swiss national identity, I argue that the narrative focus on the institutionalised expression of ‘difference’ leaves aside other important historical discourses and practices, which have been concerned not with respect for diversity, but with the (relative) eradication of some ‘differences’: those deemed ‘degenerate’ or ‘un-Swiss’.

Focusing on eugenics and the regulation of sexuality, I explore the intersections between the construction of national identity and narratives of sexuality, race, and gender in pre-War Switzerland. It will be argued that these narratives are important, not only as symbolic constructions of Swiss nationhood but also as the foundation of social policies which aimed to eradicate the ‘weeds’ from the Swiss garden. The first sections of the paper use a discourse-analytical framework to explore the identity boundaries around the national order that were produced within eugenic ideologies. The second part of the paper shows how eugenicist ideas shaped a number of social policies in pre- and post-War Switzerland.

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2 Switzerland has four national languages, and two main religions.

3 A longer version of this part of the paper can be found in Mottier (2000).
Discourse Theory and Identity

This paper conceptualises national identity, sexuality, gender and race from a discourse analytic perspective. In other words, I assume these concepts to be social constructions whose social and political meanings are contextually bound. Consequently, the nation is not seen as a ‘given’ natural entity but as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) which is constructed through ‘narration’ (Bhabha, 1990), ‘foundational fictions’ (Sommer, 1990) and ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm, 1983). The constructed nature of the national community normally remains unrecognised by its members, who tend to understand their ties to the nation as ‘natural’ (Anderson, 1991, 143). Other identity markers such as gender, race, or sexuality are similarly naturalised in everyday routine interactions. This naturalisation is a central mechanism of the discursive construction of identity, concealing the discursive practices which produce meanings around national identity, sexuality, gender or race (Hall, 1980).

Nations are modern entities whose emergence is the result of particular historical conditions in Europe, as authors such as Gellner (1983), Anderson (1983), Giddens (1985), Hobsbawm (1990) and Smith (1991) argue in different ways. According to these authors, the constitution of national identity is not a premodern phenomenon, but closely bound up with modernity. Their explanations contrast with the primordialist accounts promoted by Geertz (1963) or Shils (1957) who view nations as natural, universal entities modelled on kinship relations (see Yuval-Davis, 1997, 1). However, primordiality, as Calhoun points out, “may be constructed and relatively new without losing its force or significance” (Calhoun, 1997, 8). Ethnic attributes are articulated and mobilised politically within current discourses of identity. Language and linguistic diversity, for example, are discursively constructed as crucial elements of national identity in the Swiss multilingual context, while religious differences – the cause of civil war in past Swiss history – have lost their importance as identity markers (see Widmer, forthcoming).

My adoption of a discursive approach to identity construction does not imply that only symbolic constructions are deemed relevant. Identities - ethnic, national or other – are produced, reproduced and transformed through institutional practices (including state policies) and everyday interactions. The term discourse will therefore be used not in the narrow sense of ‘texts’ but rather in its Foucauldian sense, as “systems of meaning, including all types of social and political practice, as well as institutions and organisations” (Howarth, 1995). However, as discourse theory emphasises, identity is not only constructed in the context of relations of meaning but also within institutionalised relations of power. Discourses around national identity, sexuality, gender or race are not autonomous systems but operate in the context of the institutional supports and practices that they rely upon. In contrast to Derridien deconstruction, Foucauldian discourse analysis does not aim to reveal how specific discursive constructions result from the mere play of free-floating signifiers. Instead, it seeks to explore how specific discourses reproduce or transform relations of power as well as relations of meaning. Consequently, I use the term ‘discourses’ to refer to the

4 While recognising the existence of nations without states (see Guibernau, 1999), the concepts of nations or nation-states are used as loose synonyms in this article, and taken to refer to “a political apparatus, recognised to have sovereign rights within the borders of a demarcated territorial area, able to back its claims to sovereignty by control of military power, many of whose citizens have positive feelings of commitment to its national identity” (Giddens, 1989, 303).

5 Understood not as a philosophical concept but rather in the sociological sense of “modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less world-wide in their influence” (Giddens, 1990, 1).
‘macro-level’ of structural orders of discourse (Foucault, 1971): broad historical systems of meaning which are relatively stable over considerable periods of time (As opposed to the ‘micro-level’ of communicative interactions, focused on by authors such as Van Dijk (1993) or Potter and Wetherell (1987)).

Discourses are reproduced (as well as transformed) by specific individual and collective narratives. Narratives are variously defined as “a story with a beginning, middle and end that reveals someone’s experiences” (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1998); “an original state of affairs, an action, or an event, and the consequent state of events” (Czarniawska, 1998); “any form of communication” (Barthes, 1974); or “the main mode of human knowledge” (Bruner, 1986). Whereas some uses of the term narrative, such as Barthes’s or Bruner’s, suggest no difference between narrative and discourse, I will consider narratives in the more limited sense of stories. As such, narratives are possible forms of discourse, while discourses include (but are not reduced to) narratives. Specific narratives of the nation are construed as important component parts of broader discourses of national identity. Historical accounts, myths, and metaphors are examples of different narrative forms that contribute to discourses of national identity.

Much narrative analysis is concerned with the formal properties of narratives or ‘stories’, such as “act, scene, agent, agency and purpose” (Burke, 1945); “building the ‘and, and, and’ connections between action and events” (Czarniawska, 1998); or “temporal sequence” (Propp, 1928). However, following Plummer (1995, 19), my concern here is not with the structural aspects of narratives, but with their social and political role.

The narrative conceptualisation of identity emphasises the importance of stories and storytelling for processes of identity construction. Giddens (1991), for example, argues that identity is constituted through the continuous formulation and re-formulation of narratives of the self: the stories whereby self-identity is reflexively understood by the individual concerned as well as by others. While Giddens’s therapy-influenced model of self-identity refers to processes of personal identity construction, a similar argument applies to collective identities. Collective identities are continuously reconstituted in both individual and collective narratives. Borrowing both from Austin’s speech act theory and Goffman’s theatrical model of identity, I want to emphasise the performative nature of collective identity narratives (Austin, 1962; Goffman, 1959). Narratives do not simply express a pre-given national identity but function as performatives: speech acts which bring into being that which they name. Narratives both enact and perform the nation. Historical accounts, myths of origin (which may or may not be based on historical ‘fact’) or policy texts can all be read as examples of narrative enactment and performance of national identity.

Individual and collective identities are specific forms of narrative which constitute commonalities and differences between self and others (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 43). As Plummer (1995, 19) puts it, “stories mark out identities; identities mark out differences; differences define ‘the other’; and ‘the other’ helps structure the moral life of culture, group, and individual”. Indeed, national identities are narratives which are concerned with the drawing of boundaries between members of the nation and non-members, between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Mechanisms of othering, of constructing specific groups of people as other, as fundamentally ‘different’, are politically important aspects of identity narratives. At times of war, mechanisms of othering of the enemy become particularly intense, often taking the form of presenting the other as non-human or subhuman.

War has played a central role in the making of the modern nation (Tilly, 1975; Giddens, 1985; Smith, 1991). It has been particularly important to the construction of Swiss national identity. The
The Swiss nation is founded on the struggle against successive forms of foreign domination. The liberation from foreign oppressors is correspondingly central to Swiss founding myths such as the Wilhelm Tell legend. Though comparatively few actual wars took place on Swiss territory, the notion of 'Kriegsfähigkeit' ('being prepared for war') is an important element of the collective imaginary of the Swiss nation. The combination of the centrality of war to the making of the Swiss nation and Switzerland’s linguistic and religious diversity has resulted in a national identity that is founded on (real or perceived) external threats, rather than on (real or ‘invented’) common cultural heritage.

Identity Boundaries and the Nation

As Zygmunt Bauman argues in his influential texts Modernity and the Holocaust (1989) and Modernity and Ambivalence (1991), the modern nation-state has emerged through a ‘quest for order’: its aim was to create an orderly society through the twin reigns of Science and Reason. Hobbes’s discovery that order was not natural led to the idea that the social and political order needs to be constructed through the design, engineering and management of existence, combined with the mastery and subordination of nature (Bauman, 1991, 7). Under conditions of modernity, old certainties and identities disappeared in the context of rapid social and political change. As a consequence, the concern with boundary-drawing and boundary-maintenance as mechanisms for reducing ambivalence and constructing the social and political order became intense. “Whatever remained of old boundaries needed desperate defence”, Bauman (1991, 40) writes, “and new boundaries had to be built around new identities”. Othering mechanisms are therefore particularly crucial in modernity. They allow for the self-affirmation of inherently fragile modern identities, including national identities. As Connolly points out: “Identity requires difference in order to be, and it conveys difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty” (Connolly 1991: 64).

Derrida and his followers, in particular, have conceptualised the identity boundaries through which order is constructed in terms of binary categorisations such as us/them, inside/outside, man/woman, white/black, or Carl Schmitt’s friends/enemies. The negative (second) term of the binary opposition is seen to give a content to its positive half, as its ‘constitutive outside’, to borrow Derrida’s terminology (see also Mouffe, 1993, 141). However, I would argue that processes of identity formation are not neatly binary in nature. Identity narratives are embedded in complex gendered and de-gendered hierarchies of power (Carver, 1998). The processes of inclusion/exclusion of members and non-members which construct the order of the nation partly overlap with and crosscut other discursive mechanisms such as classification and hierarchisation. As Nagel (1998, 88) states, the nation “not only is built on the back of ethnicity, it also represents a particular gendered, sexualised vision of social and political reality”.

Political science analyses of Swiss national identity tend to focus on specific mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion: those concerned with the boundaries of the national community which are coterminous with the nation’s borders. These studies include analyses of Swiss foreign policies, naturalisation procedures, asylum policies, etc. Such studies analyse the regulation and policing of access to national borders and related citizenship rights. However, identity boundaries do not coincide with borders. As Nagel (1998) points out, within national borders are ethnic boundaries, gender boundaries, and sexual boundaries. The racial and ethnic nature of the boundaries of the nation has been extensively discussed in the literature on national identity. In contrast, the
gendered basis of national identity has, to date, been little researched. The same is true for the sexual boundaries of the nation.

As a result of these mobile and permeable crisscrossing boundaries (Nagel, 1998, 85) the construction of order is a never-ending process. The mechanisms of classification, inclusion and exclusion that construct identity can never fully eliminate ambivalence, understood as “the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category” (Bauman, 1991, 1). Discursive orderings and permanence of identity are threatened by “polysemy, cognitive dissonance, polyvalent definitions, contingency; the overlapping meanings in the world of tidy classifications and filing cabinets” (Bauman, 1991, 9). Ambivalence is the unintended consequence of classification efforts and calls for yet more classification. Modernity’s “bitter and intense war against ambivalence” is therefore “both self-destructive and self-propelling” (Bauman, 1991, 3). As Bauman (1991, 4) writes: “Among the multitude of impossible tasks that modernity set itself and that made modernity into what it is, the task of order (more precisely and most importantly, of order as a task) stands out – as the least possible among the impossible and the least disposable among the indispensable”.

I now move on to focus on the discursive mechanisms of boundary-drawing, boundary-maintenance, ordering and othering within specific narratives that enact and perform Swiss national identity.

**Sexuality and the National Order**

Yuval-Davis (1997, 21ff) distinguishes three major dimensions in the making of the nation: constructions based on origin; those based on culture; and those based on citizenship. Borrowing and reformulating Yuval-Davis’s distinctions, I propose to delineate three major types of narratives of national identity: Kulturnation narratives which construct language, religion, traditions or customs as the essential ‘stuff’ of the nation; Staatnation narratives which privilege political institutions, citizenship rights and access to State territory; and Volksnation narratives which centre on notions of the origin of the people or race.

Though all three dimensions have contributed to the making of the Swiss nation, the focus of this text is on the Volksnation dimension of national identity. While I do not claim that the Volksnation narrative has been the only or even the most important basis for Swiss national identity, I suggest that it has nevertheless formed a crucial dimension of the construction of the national order. Staatnation-centred analyses, as we have seen above, claim that the exclusionary aspects of Swissness centre on the ‘othering’ of foreign people and nations, conflating identity boundaries with national borders. My argument is that the boundaries drawn within Volksnation narratives have also structured the order of the nation within the national borders, through specific mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, ordering and othering.

Volksnation narratives, as explained earlier, are concerned with the origins of the people or the race. Given this concern, reproductive sexuality is central to Volksnation narratives. Genealogical stories about the ‘purity’ of the race are crucially intertwined with the regulation of sexuality. Given that female identity has been traditionally tied up with women’s reproductive roles as the biological producers of the members of the nation, women’s contributions to the biological reproduction of the nation become a particular focus of concern within Volksnation narratives. Women and ‘respectable’ female sexuality become the ‘gate-keepers’ of the moral as well as biological boundaries of the national community (Yuval-Davis, 1989, 106).
Yuval-Davis distinguishes three major discourses concerned with the regulation of sexuality that underlie specific Volksnation narratives: the ‘People as Power’ discourse, which constructs the continuous growth of the population as vital for the nation’s interests; the Malthusian discourse, which is concerned with preventing the implosion of the nation through overpopulation; and the eugenicist discourse, which is concerned not with the size but with the ‘quality’ of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 26ff.). In the Swiss context, Volksnation narratives have mostly taken the form of the latter. Eugenicist discourses were highly influential in Switzerland from the end of the 19th century up to the end of the Second World War, concomitant with the construction of national identity. Eugenics has therefore made an important contribution to the construction of the Volksnation dimension of Swiss national identity.

The term ‘eugenics’ was coined by Sir Francis Galton in 1883, to refer to the genetic improvement of the national ‘stock’ on the basis of the scientific study of “all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had” (Galton, 1883, 25). Galton regarded the evolutionary processes described by his cousin Charles Darwin, in particular natural selection and the idea of the survival of the fittest, as too slow and uncertain for modern needs. The complexities of modern scientific and cultural developments, he argued, put particularly high demands on political and other elites, whose intellectual capacities he deemed insufficiently evolved. Galton perceived an urgent need for the management of the consequences of modernity. The dominance of the West’s nation-states over others seemed in danger; his theories were formulated in response to this threat.

The new science of eugenics should assist governments in implementing social policies which would improve the national ‘breed’. Hostile to the laissez-faire of political liberalism, eugenics advocated active social engineering. The individual had a patriotic duty to contribute to the improvement of the national community through “conscious race-culture”, as Galton’s student and successor Karl Pearson (1909, 170) put it. The eugenicist concern with the improvement of the population through the regulation of reproductive sexuality fitted in well with the emerging wider preoccupation of Western industrialising nation-states with the health and size of their population. In the context of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation processes, the rapidly growing urban population appeared as potentially destabilising to the public order while an orderly, healthy and prolific population came to be seen as a source of wealth for the expanding nation-states (see Nye 1999).

Eugenics was thus from its origins deeply intertwined with social and political aims. It emerged as both a science and a social movement. The term caught on rapidly, and numerous eugenics societies were established in Great Britain as well as in other countries to be followed by the creation of International and World Leagues (see Kühl, 1997). Through such social reform societies, as well as various scientific disciplines such as psychiatry, anthropology, biology and sexology, eugenicist ideas acquired institutional supports.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, eugenics remained mostly a rhetoric with political implications. But the growth of social policies implemented by national states around the turn of the twentieth century provided opportunities for translating the rhetoric into practice. Switzerland was at the forefront on both levels. Swiss scientists made a significant contribution to the international discourse of eugenics, while eugenicist practices and policies were pioneered and implemented in Switzerland, as will be shown below.

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6 Darwin adopted the latter idea from Herbert Spencer in 1868.
The Swiss ‘degeneracy experts’

Nowadays, eugenics has become associated with the politics of the extreme right, especially with the large-scale social experiments of forced sterilisation and ‘euthanasia’ of ‘unfit’ persons by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. However, eugenic concerns were in fact found across the political spectrum and included socialist and anarchist thinkers. Feminists were found on opposite sides - supporting and opposing eugenics, while most opposition came from liberal parties, which rejected state intervention in private life, and Churches - especially, the catholic Church. This was also the case in Switzerland. In other words, eugenicist versions of Volksnation narratives sprang up in various forms and from multiple sites and were articulated from within opposite political projects.

They initially emerged as scientific narratives. In the Swiss context, the terms racial hygiene and eugenics were used interchangeably, the first concept being the most widely used (see Schwank, 1996). The most important sites of racial hygiene discourse in Switzerland were the emerging disciplines of psychiatry and sexology. In the course of the nineteenth century, psychiatry and sexology emerged from the field of medical science as autonomous disciplines with a specific focus on sexuality. The three most important Swiss ‘degeneracy experts’ (Aeschbacher, 1998, 291) were the psychiatrist and sexologist Auguste Forel (1848-1931), and the psychiatrists Eugen Bleuler (1857-1939) and Ernst Rüdin.

The psychiatrist Auguste Forel was amongst the leading sexologists of his time. At the Sex Reform Congress in London in 1929, Forel was cited as one of the founding fathers of sexology, along with the British sexologist Havelock Ellis and the German doctor Iwan Bloch (see Bland, 1998, 13). He was a particularly influential pioneer of eugenics both nationally and internationally. His most important book, La Question Sexuelle (1906), was translated into numerous languages. He was elected Member of the Advisory Board of the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations (see Keller, 1995) and Honorary President of the World League of Sexual Reform in 1930. His enduring prestige within Switzerland is reflected by the place of honour accorded to his portrait, which graces current 1000 francs bills.

Forel promoted eugenics from a socialist perspective. In addition to his psychiatric and sexologist activities, he was a social reformer (and member of the Swiss social-democrat Party since 1916). Forel campaigned for sexual education at schools, women’s voting rights, abstinence from alcoholic drinks and other ‘poisons’, pacifism, etc. The science of eugenics would provide the impetus for social, moral and racial purification, he argued. Rejecting the ‘false patriotism’ of militaristic capitalist nationalism (Forel, 1925, 15), Forel promoted the construction of a social order based on the scientific management of reproduction as a moral duty to the future of the national community. “The regulation of procreation through appropriated means is a moral task. It is necessary to the hygiene of our race. Only this, combined with the elimination of narcotic poisons, will be able to block the increasing degenerescence of our race, and bring us a better future. We owe this to the progress, happiness and health of the future generations, for whose quality we are responsible” (Forel, 1916, 12; my transl.).

The hereditary degenerescence of the race, Forel argued, was not only physical but also moral. However, it was unfair to hold people responsible for having flawed hereditary dispositions, Forel thought. The construction of the social order should therefore not centre on the management of deviants, but rather on the eugenic prevention of degeneracy, Forel argued in ‘The True Socialism
of the Future’ (Forel, 1925, 23). Consequently, the worst enemies of eugenics were war (which selects the best to be killed) and alcoholic drinks and other ‘narcotic poisons’ which damage the mind as well as the body (Forel, 1925).

The bases of the social order were hereditary dispositions on the one hand, education on the other (Forel, 1910). While ‘only a healthy selection of the race’ could improve the former, this sexual selection should be combined with active education campaigns based on Science and Reason. ‘Let Science enlighten our sexual life freely and openly; then, the hypocrisy of normal people will cease, and that of abnormal people can be recognised on time and damage be prevented’ (Forel 19xx; my transl.). Given the importance of sexual selection for the regulation of procreation, sexual education was strongly promoted by Forel. It was crucial, he thought, to teach young people about the consequences of having sexual relations with ‘inferior’ partners, and about the corresponding necessity to gather information on the hereditary background of the potential spouse. “Each fiancee has the right and, in the interest of the future children, the holy duty, to know the sexual antecedents of their future spouse” (Forel, 1916, 12; my transl.).

Women were a site of narrative ambivalence in Forel’s writings. On the one hand, he discursively constructed women as political subjects, promoting political equality between the genders and especially women’s voting rights. On the other hand, the reproductive role of women was a particular source of narrative anxiety. Given their reproductive responsibilities to the nation, women were seen as particularly important targets for the eugenic education and regulation of sexuality that he called for. “Well-informed and superior women will be the ones, I expect, who will participate most energetically and most successfully in human selection” (Forel, 1906, 575; my transl.). Women’s “instincts of procreation”, which he considered “much stronger in woman than in man”, were combined with the will to “give herself passively”, to be “conquered, mastered and subjugated” (Forel [1906]1998, 29). In Forel’s narratives, female identity is thus ambivalently performed. Women are both political subjects, and sexual objects.

Within Forel’s eugenic narrative, the mechanisms of othering centre on different categories that are seen to form hereditary ‘threats’ to the nation: criminals, prostitutes, alcoholics, immoral people, the mentally ill, haemophiliacs, people with tuberculosis, drug addicts, gypsies, vagrants. Strong boundaries are drawn between the national, white race and the ‘inferior’ ‘races’ such as Jews, ‘Negroes’, the Chinese. “How is our Aryan race and its civilisation to guard against the danger of being passively invaded and exterminated by the alarming fecundity of other human races?” Forel wrote. “One must be blind not to recognise this danger. (…) Up to what point can the Mongolian, and even the Jewish race, become mixed with our Aryan or Indo-Germanic races without gradually supplanting them and causing them to disappear? (…) The connection of this with the sexual question is not difficult to understand” (Forel, 1906, 222ff.). Indeed, in accordance with conventional views amongst sexologists at the time, Forel considered sexual ‘drives’ of other ‘races’ as less constrained by civilisation and therefore as more intense than the white race. For example, according to Forel, the “mental inferiority” of “Negroes”, was combined with “intense, unbridled sexual passion”.

Different categories of sexual ‘perversion’ such as sadism or masochism (considered hereditarily transmissible) were similarly othered. Homosexuality was a particular preoccupation to sexologists at the time. Most considered homosexuality as a pathology, although some sexologists such as Magnus Hirschfeld considered homosexuals as ‘a variant of normal human beings’. In contrast to other eugenicists, however, Forel was little worried by the sexually ‘inverted’ or ‘urnings’ (homosexuals). He considered them to be “abnormal”, “psychopaths” and “neurotics”, whose sexual drive, similar to that of other ‘races’, “is not only abnormal but also, in
general, higher”. But, they would not reproduce anyway and therefore posed not much of a threat towards the national ‘breed’, even though sexual perversions were considered to be hereditarily transmissible. “As long as homosexual love does not implicate minors, or the feeble-minded, it remains rather innocent, because it does not produce any offspring and will therefore become extinguished automatically through the process of selection. When two individuals are adult and consenting, it is certainly less harmful than prostitution, which is legally protected” (Forel, 1906, 270; my transl.).

The sharpest identity boundaries were drawn through sterilisation discourses and practices. Sterilisation practices constitute radical mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of the national community. On the level of discourse, Forel constantly called for the sterilisation of the above mentioned ‘degenerate’ categories of the population, as a rational measure to prevent their reproduction - a task which was all the more urgent as he considered these sexualised 'others' such as other 'races' and sexual 'perverts' (as well as women in general) as 'more sexual', as we have seen. Having become the director of the world-renowned psychiatric clinic Burghölzli in Zurich since 1879, he put his ideas into practice by pioneering the very first sterilisations without consent within German-speaking nations in 1892 (Aeschbacher, 1998, 286).

Forel's successor as director of the Burghölzli Llinic from 1898 to 1927 was his student Eugen Bleuler. In contrast to Forel, the psychiatrist Bleuler was politically rather conservative though also less politically active than Forel. His main concern was with the degeneration of the nation through mental illness, which he interpreted as a symptom of the diseased modern society and considered to be hereditarily transmissible. The concept of schizophrenia - illness of civilisation *par excellence* - was invented at the Burghölzli, and Bleuler developed a highly influential theory of schizophrenia in his widely used classic textbook on psychiatry, published in 1916. Bleuler emphasised the threat of “Volksdegeneration” (degeneration of the population) through hereditarily transmissible mental illness, especially in Jews, whom he deemed “particularly predisposed to mental illnesses: manic depression and psycho-neuroses” in his book *Geborene Verbrecher* ('Born Criminals') (see Wottreng 1999).

Both Bleuler and Forel agreed that the threat of degeneracy was brought about by modern civilisation. “In the past, in the good old days”, Forel wrote, “incapable and inadequate persons were treated differently from today. Enormous numbers of pathological brains, which damaged society, were simply executed, hanged or beheaded; the process was short and insofar successful, as these people could no longer reproduce or spoil society with their degenerate germs”. In the absence of natural selection through fighting and execution of degenerate individuals, Forel argued for “artificial sterilisation” to “decrease the numbers of inferior individuals”.

In stark contrast to Forel, Ernst Rüdin, who had dual Swiss and German nationality, promoted eugenic ideas from an extreme-right political position. Rüdin played a central role as a consultant expert in the formulation of the notorious 1934 German Law to Prevent Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, which became the legal basis for hundreds of thousands of forced sterilisations within Germany. He also became an enthusiastic member of the NSDAP in 1937. In the post-War era, Swiss narratives of eugenics and racial hygiene have routinely been claimed to reflect German influence. Shortly after the end of the War, the Swiss state thus deprived Rüdin of his Swiss citizenship for having damaged the international reputation of Switzerland through his scientific ideas, which were termed “fundamentally foreign” to the Swiss (Weber, 1993, 284). However, the claim that Rüdin’s racial hygiene views were ‘un-Swiss’ is, as Aeschbacher (1998) puts it, “absurd”. Such ideas were scientific orthodoxy in pre-War Switzerland and their respectability

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7 The textbook is still influential today, though it has since been purged of its eugenic passages by Bleuler's son.
was not called into question at the time. This respectability was also recognised internationally, as Rüdin was elected president of the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations in 1934 (Aeschbacher, 1998, 281). It is useful to remember that the US, Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries were in fact the first pioneers of eugenicist theories and policies.

**Eugenics and Social Policies**

Eugenic narratives of degeneracy and racial hygiene provided an important framework for the specific mechanisms of boundary-drawing, boundary-maintenance, ordering and othering that characterised the construction of Swiss national identity. Eugenic narratives express the nation in sharply exclusionary terms. They construct a national order based on sexual, racial and gendered boundaries. Through the exclusion of ‘degenerate’ categories both outside and within the national borders, they narratively perform a racially, morally and socially regenerated Volk. As Yuval-Davis points out, “the myth of common origin or shared blood/genes tends to construct the most exclusionary/homogeneous visions of ‘the nation’” (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 21).

Thus, the construction of Swiss national identity was at least partly founded on what I have termed elsewhere the Swiss ‘dream of order’ (Mottier 2000). The social and political order was seen to be ‘troubled’ by various categories of ‘unorderly’ (‘unordentlich’) citizens and non-citizens, such as Jews, ‘vagrants’ (Jenitsch and other ‘travellers’), the mentally ill, the physically handicapped, unmarried mothers, homosexuals etc. The eugenic ‘imagination’ of the national order was concerned with the elimination of such ‘troubles’. The rational management of reproductive sexuality was a central mechanism for doing so.

The emerging Welfare state, concerned with regulation, policing and disciplinarisation as well as care and protection, provided the means to translate eugenic narratives of the nation into large-scale social experiments. It also added an additional motive to that of preventing degeneracy: limiting public expenditure. Indeed, the ‘inferior’ categories of the national population were to become the main recipients of the expanding welfare institutions. Limiting their numbers appeared as a rational means of reducing costs. The fact that, in the Swiss federal state, local authorities and not the Federal state carry the financial burden of supporting ‘indigent’ members of local communities may also have increased the appeal of the argument of cost-reduction.

It is important to point out that the eugenic experiments in social engineering were indeed shaped by specific Swiss political institutions and federalism, in particular. Federalism led to important cantonal differences in policy frameworks and practices. The main dividing line here seems to have been religion: while Protestant cantons tended to adopt sterilisation policies, for example, catholic cantons tended not to do so, reflecting the differences in attitudes towards poverty, illness and disability amongst Protestant and Catholic doctrines.

Eugenicist ideologues, often drawing on organic metaphors, called for scientifically founded” state intervention to prevent further degeneration of the diseased national ‘body’. Forel, for example, called for an “intelligent, scientific (not dogmatic) social-democracy” in order to “solve the eugenic problem”. (Forel 1910). The newly emerging disciplines of psychiatry and sexology played a pivotal role in providing the scientific expertise that was used to legitimise eugenicist policies, in turn legitimising their own emergence as autonomous disciplines. 'Degeneracy experts' were actively involved in the process of policy making, for example through their routine inclusion in expert committees. Psychiatrists also played an important role in the policy implementation. For example, cantons such as Basel introduced an examination by a psychiatric expert of candidates
for the acquisition of Swiss citizenship, with the aim of detecting hereditarily transmissible degenerate features.

Thus, eugenic ideas were influential on a number of Swiss pre-War and post-War health and social policies. Such policies included forced sterilisation practices, legitimised by the subordination of individual interests to the collective interest of the nation, but also education programs, non-voluntary incarceration in psychiatric clinics, as well as other measures targeting specifically vagrants, Jenitsch (gypsies) and Jews.

World-wide, the first eugenic sterilisation law was introduced in Indiana in 1907 and by the 1930s, almost two-thirds of US states had similar legislation targeting in particular institutionalised individuals such as criminals and those labelled as mentally ill. In 1912, Switzerland was the first European country to introduce eugenically motivated marriage interdiction legislation targeting the mentally ill (see Wecker 1998: 169). In 1928, the Swiss canton of Vaud, influenced by Forel's ideas, adopted the first eugenic sterilisation law in Europe (followed by Denmark in 1929, Germany in 1933, Sweden and Norway in 1934 and Finland in 1935).

It has been argued that for decades, Switzerland “occupied a ‘top position’ with regard to eugenicist sterilisation practices, which was only surpassed by the US and, within Europe, by Germany after 1933” (Aeschbacher 1998, 299). However, some caution is necessary in estimating the extent of these practices in various Swiss cantons since few systematic data are as yet available. More archive work is currently under way but access to data is often problematic. Institutional actors such as psychiatric clinics do not seem over-eager to cooperate with historians of science, citing patient confidentiality as an argument for denying or restricting access to archives. Until more data become available, it remains difficult to judge whether the Swiss sterilisations exceed the number of those carried out in Sweden, for example, where recent research has claimed that between 1934 and 1976, some 63 000 individuals were sterilised on the basis of eugenic legislation (Runcis, 1998). Historians agree, however, that the practice became relatively widespread in Switzerland, especially amongst individuals who were already institutionalised in those psychiatric clinics that were the playgrounds of the eugenicist ideologues. When various cantons introduced legislation permitting sterilisation of the mentally ill without consent, this allowed already existing sterilisation practices to belatedly acquire a legal basis - an argument which was in fact used to promote this legislation. It has also been argued that the introduction of the legislation in fact restricted a previously less regulated and more widespread practice (Aeschbacher 1998, 299).

The law in the Canton of Vaud targeted in particular the mentally ill, stating : “When it is likely that a person who has a mental illness or a mental defect, which is proven to be incurable, will have degenerate offspring,” medical measures may be applied to this person in order to prevent the birth of offspring” (my transl.). It should be noted, however, that the label of mentally ill was a rather loose category which could include vagrants, people of ‘weak morals’, delinquents, unmarried mothers, etc. The Vaud law existed from 1928 to 1985 and was applied to 187 individuals during these 57 years, other cantons introducing similar legislation subsequently. Though only a handful of eugenic sterilisations took place in the Post-war period in Vaud, the last case took place only 25 years ago: in 1977 (see Jeanmonod and Heller 2000).

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8 Such distinctions being of somewhat less symbolic importance in Switzerland, which had remained neutral during the second World-War, compared to other European countries.

9 The original phrasing is “une descendance tarée”.

Reflecting the eugenicist focus on women as the reproducers of the nation, the sterilisation of 'inferior' categories of the population was a strongly gendered practice. An early evaluation of the application of this law in the canton of Vaud carried out in 1944 reported that nine out of ten eugenic sterilisations were carried out on women (see Ehrenström, 1991, 74). Similarly, data on Zurich show that from 1929 to 1931, eugenic sterilisations were carried out on 480 women (in conjunction with abortion) and 15 men, while Runcis (1998) reports that almost 95% of the Swedish sterilisations were carried out on women. As Jeanmonod and Heller (2000) note, the majority of legal sterilisations in the canton of Vaud were applied to young female social deviants: women who were deemed ‘maladapted', living in poor conditions, mostly unmarried, and were judged to have “low intelligence”. The policing of respectable female sexuality appears as a central motive, since “loose morals”, “uninhibited” female sexuality or “nymphomania” were frequently used arguments for forced sterilisation.

While sterilisation policies were the most extreme form of eugenic regulation of reproductive sexuality, they were complemented by ‘preventive' education policies. Following Forel’s and other campaigners’ insistence on the necessity for eugenicist sexual education and marriage advice, eugenics entered the education curriculum. For example, an information brochure was produced and distributed to Swiss schoolchildren in 1939. The brochure educated children about the dangers of reproducing with degenerate others, and pointed out their patriotic duty to the national collective. Schoolchildren were encouraged to: “Choose your spouse from a physically and morally healthy, mentally superior family! You owe this to your offspring and to the Nation' (Schmid 1939, 44). A 'Central Agency for Marriage and Sex Advice' was founded in 1932, and organised exhibitions and conferences on themes such as 'hereditary responsibility' and 'psychiatric-eugenic advice on marital candidates' (1930s), or 'prevention of hereditarily diseased offspring' (1949) (see Gossenreiter 19xx).

Other mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the national community though practices with eugenic overtones included the notorious policy of the removal of Jenitsch, 'vagrant' or 'traveler' children from their parents, to be raised in State orphanages. The policy operated from 1926 until 1973 and was implemented by the Federal agency titled Pro Juventute, Hilfswerk fuer die Kinder der Landstrasse ('Aid agency for children of travelers') which has since been disbanded as a result of later controversies around the policy. Although, strictly speaking, this policy seems somewhat contradictory with eugenic doctrines, demonstrating that the social meanings around policies are not necessarily always coherent, it reflected the views of eugenicist scientists such as Forel and Bleuler, who considered travelers to be hereditarily flawed, and was legitimised on the basis of eugenicist ideas about degeneracy.

Eugenicist practices towards gypsies were intertwined with disciplinarisation mechanisms that targeted marginalised categories of the population more generally, including the economic underclass and social deviants. This can be illustrated by the case of the currently celebrated Swiss/Jenitsch novelist Mariella Mehr, who reports a quote from her own file: “an easily disgruntled, unstable, impulsive psychopath, in need of admiration, with neurotic tendencies and a strong tendency to over-rate herself, as is proven by her wish to become a novelist. In consideration of her hereditary dispositions - the subject belongs to the fourth generation of a

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12 Also quoted in Kreis (1992,184); my transl.  
13 Mehr also suggests that lobotomies and electrochocs were routinely applied to gypsies within psychiatric institutions. Few systematic data are available, however (CHK) (see Lerch 1998).
degnerated family of vagrants - is permanent admission in a psychiatric clinic not to be excluded.” (see Lerch 1998).

Overall, the eugenic technologies of power in the Swiss Welfare state were characterised by a mix of (relatively low levels of) intervention by the Federal State, such as through Pro Juventute and through federal legislation prohibiting marriage for mentally ill persons or Jews, and high levels of intervention through legislation and administrative measures by communal and cantonal authorities as well as para-state actors such as institutional psychiatry. Psychiatric institutions, especially the university clinics in Zürich, Basel and Lausanne, offered practical opportunities for developing eugenicist ideas and technologies on a population which was most often already under tutelage. While eugenic ideas were articulated within opposite political projects, these projects shared a common call for interventionist state policies in this domain. Eugenicist versions of Volksnation narratives provided the ideological basis for the Swiss ‘Gardening State’, concerned with eliminating the ‘weeds’ from the national garden.¹⁴

¹⁴ I borrow the term ‘Gardening State’ from Bauman (1989).
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