

THE EXILE OF „THE UNDESIRED” ORCLEANSING OF THE NATION

Branka Ljiljak

Juridicum, Universitat Wien, AUSTRIA, e-mail: djosa56@hotmail.com

Abstract: *Do we ever wonder – how similar we are and what makes us different? Are the matters that make us different the reason why we shouldn't have a right to life? When somebody's child doesn't have blue eyes does that mean that he/she shouldn't live and enjoy childhood? The rise of Nazism in the 1930's and during the Second World War, supported by the eugenics and anthropological-social theories about the creation of a better society resulted in mass exile and elimination of homosexuals as inferior beings. The concentration camps were the place where not only science but the policy of Nazi Germany was at play. Methodologically speaking, this paper will analyze historical facts through two sections, one within the other, and try to present opinions in favor and against eugenics, that is, elimination of homosexuals as un "undesired species".*

Keywords: *homosexuality, eugenics, concentration camp, nature*

Eugenics is a term loaded with historical significance [1] Its initial meaning was well born. Eugenics represents a selection of desired characteristics for future generations to inherit, typically relating to humans. The term "eugenics" was forged by British researcher and scientist, Francis Galton (1822-1911) in 1883. However, its historical connotations have been connected with the program of natural selection, horrible concentration camps, medical experiments and mass extinction exercised by the German Nazi regime during the Second World War (1).[2] The idea promoted by eugenics to produce better human beings has existed since Plato, who suggested a state reproduction program to be put in place to create a better society. Eugenics is a scientific discipline aiming at reducing the birth of inferior human beings. The program for the improvement of human kind or modern eugenics, negative and positive eugenics, and the eugenic movement originated in the XIXth century and was quite popular in the USA in the 1920's. Francis Galton and Charles Davenport[3] advocated the prevention of reproduction of mentally and physically disabled people in order to protect human kind and "improve human action".[4] Breeding the „desired“, and developing a social control mechanism to reduce the number of „undesired“ was the guiding idea of the eugenics movement. Anthro-po-sociological classification of Europeans contends that Homo europaeus tall, blond, with a dolichocephalic skull (typical for the British Isles and northwest Europe), from the psychological standpoint he strives to be a master, he is

self-confident, ambitious, courageous, enterprising, and deems that his country's duty is only to respect his economic activity; he is a cousin of the „Aryans“. Homo alpinus is short, brown haired, with a round skull and face, and politically he is a „perfect slave, or serf“. Vacher de Lapouge used „internal selection“ to mark the success that some individuals or groups have in their social environment, and he understood „interstitial“ selection as an intrusion of foreign elements into the group causing a negative impact on the characteristics of the group.[5] The history of eugenics and the anthropo-sociological school of thought was imbued with the tendency to reduce entire cultures to genetic predisposition which was the source of many racist theories. The teachings of the anthropo-sociological school strongly supported racial arrogance, the culture of a blond and dolichocephalic man from the north, the myth of pan-germanism and Teutonic [6] chauvinism. The eugenics movement that suggested improvements of genetic traits of the population quickly found a breeding ground in Europe. The worst of all was that different kinds of elitist groups and ultrarightist (and leftist) embraced eugenics in its most negative sense, thinking that they could control and shape the population as they deem fit. The extent to which „negative selection“ („negative Auslese“) was used for cleansing the nations was best visible in Germany, where different mechanisms of depopulation and sterilization were employed. Racist doctrines were efficiently implemented. Concentration camps and eliminations applied to everyone who didn't comply with strict eugenic standards of racial purity and an ideal image of an Aryan and future super-human. All those who were „unworthy of living“ were the target of the Nazis, they were mostly called „Ballastexistenzen“ and „useless eaters“ and those were primarily mentally and physically disabled persons, the handicapped, those who opposed the regime, criminals, the weak, alcoholics, people with special needs but also prostitutes and homosexuals. They were considered undeserving of a „beautiful death“ (Gnadetot), and an unnecessary burden to society in terms of spending funds for medications, hospital beds and staff, food, etc. [7]

By the end of the 1940's homosexuality was considered a form of psychopathological, paranoid and schizophrenic disorder. Homosexuality considered as pathology was something that psychiatrists and other doctors tried to „treat“. Gay men were treated with castration [8] and various other aversion therapies while lesbians were forced to undergo hysterectomy.

The importance of racial hygiene at the beginning of the XXth century was presented to the citizens of Germany through film industry, print media and to children in schools. Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*[9] in 1924; a book that calls to „fight“, a book that indirectly invited supporters of Hitler's regime in purging the inferior races[10] Referring to nature, Hitler explains his fight: „Numerous forms that the will for life takes on in nature are all obeying one basic and, if you will, sacrosanct law... that every animal mates with another animal of the same species...“ With the intention to create a healthy nation, the Nazis were more governed by Wilson's assertion that a super-human is the whole society rather than by Nietzsche's philosophy[11] of an individual as a super-human, and because of that they were systematically cleansing their ranks in order to clean the entire German society.[12] The Nazi regime formed hereditary health courts (Erbgesundheitsgerichte)[13] that increased the number of victims with their rulings to 400,000.

Moments when wars reach paroxysm are when the army starts killing civilians during combat justifying their act as unavoidable in war rather than admitting that it had been coldly devised and planned for a long time. Moral criticism is often used to support changes to the law. Some have even claimed that interpretation of law must serve morality

(Dworkin).[14] The law adopted on July 14, 1933 with the aim to prevent persons suffering from hereditary disorders to produce offspring, represents an imperative eugenic measure which prescribed sterilization of people with disorders with/against their will. The Nazis began imprisoning and killing in camps: mentally and physically disabled people, criminals, political opponents, alcoholics, loafers, the blind, the deaf, prostitutes, homosexuals and bisexuals, and all those who were considered an inferior race – in particular Roma, Jews, the Slavic nations). By applying negative eugenics Nazi Germany removed a “surplus” of people with the aim of preserving resources and creating “Lebensraum” a living space for Aryan race free of any possibility for defilement because of the extermination of those who do not resemble Aryans. Concentration camps didn't apply the science of healing but the policy of evil. Homosexuality could not be part of the ideology of the National Socialism because lesbians and gays do not participate in reproduction and enlargement of the German “higher race”. The Nazi eugenics program was implemented by the same principle of forced sterilization and castration used in the States. The Law on the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, passed in July 1933, required doctors to report any case of hereditary disease they learn about except in women over the age of 45. Doctors, but also citizens, could report to the authorities any person who, according to them, belonged to the “undesired group”. Very quickly, eugenics became a powerful weapon for depopulation of the undesired and less appreciated races. Since for a person to be deported to a concentration camp or sterilized, as e.g. homosexual, it would only take an anonymous notification of a citizen (it was enough to say that someone is gay, and at that point he would be considered mentally disabled and “undesired”) it may be said that eugenics served for cleansing Germany, not just from the politically and morally unfit, but also from anyone who was unsuitable because of his/her personal beliefs”.[15]

It is not necessary to mention that, in this way, crimes against humanity were committed along with genocide and violation of all human freedoms. The “surplus” of people who were considered morally unacceptable and reproductively inactive – the LGBT[16] – experienced the same fate as many prisoners of concentration camps of Nazi Germany.[17] Namely, in Germany, ever since the 19th century there was a significant movement for the rights of the LGBT population. In the mid-nineteenth century, Karl Heinrich Ulrich[18] began publicly advocating the rights of LGBT persons and seeking removal of anti-gay laws in the country (§175 StGB, Strafgesetzbuch). Adolf Brand in Berlin[19], launched the first LGBT journal in the world – *Der Eigene* (the Unique) [20], in 1896. The publication of the journal lasted until the time when the Nazis came into power. In 1897 in Berlin the first LGBT – Scientific and Humanitarian Committee was established. The purpose of this organization was to contribute to social acceptance of homosexuals – man and women and transgender persons. Magnus Hirschfeld (1868 - 1935), or the “Einstein of Sex”, the founder of the committee, established in 1919 the Institute for Sexual Science, (1919 - 1933)[21] where the first sex change operation took place at the beginning of the 1930's. The institute, amongst other things had a large library with references on homosexuality[22] A group of students and *Sturmabteilung* (Nazi Party private police)[23], attacked the Institute for Sexual Science and destroyed its archive and library. Around 20,000 books and magazines and around 5,000 paintings and images were burnt on Opernplatz square (Babelplatz today), on May 10, 1933.[24] The Nazis also took the lists with names and addresses of LGBT persons from the Institute and organized deportation of homosexuals to concentration camps who had been previously tried and convicted on the basis of Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code (§ 175 StGB) [25]. As the National Socialist Party headed by Adolf Hitler grew stronger LGBT

organizations were prohibited, LGBT clubs and print media that dealt with matters of sex closed, homosexuals imprisoned and killed.

The impact of medical and racial-biological understanding of homosexuality in the 19th century visibly affected the opinions of the elite of the Weimar Republic. As the birth rate dropped the fear of eugenic supporters that it was due to, amongst other things, homosexuality grew stronger. They thought that medical intervention could be a cure for homosexuality.[26] The proposal to introduce sterilization and forced euthanasia made by the Liberals and Socialists was not accepted by the public, but as with many other campaigns launched to create social outsiders, the Nazis managed to use bias to make certain opinions socially acceptable to German people.[27] The period of the great depression of the 1920's, famine, poverty and hyperinflation were the times when it was easy to impose on the German people the opinion that the "undesired" were a true burden for society. They represented "the death of the nation" because they refused to take part in providing a future for the "Aryan race".[28]

The Gestapo was put in charge creating lists of homosexuals – the so-called Rosa Listen– and could put homosexuals in "preventive detention" at any time. Such an arbitrary measure was used after acquittal or when a previously served punishment was considered insufficient. The Third Reich's Central Office for Security published a circular letter which read as follows: "all homosexuals, who had more than one partner, should be put into preventive detention after their release from prison". During the period of the Third Reich around 100,000 gays were arrested, and half of them sent to prison. According to recent reports of the Deutsche Welle TV outlet, almost 55,000 gays were killed – which is found based on the study of documents from the archive which were found in East Germany and which recently became available to researchers.

Prisoners of concentration camps, both male and female, had to wear a mark which would classify them into one of the persecuted groups. Homosexuals (LGBT persons) had to wear a pink triangle (Rosa Winkel) [29]. Not all prisoners with pink triangles considered themselves gays; some were married and had sex with men on rare occasions. Besides, not all persons convicted on account of Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code (§175 StGB, Strafgesetzbuch) were sent to concentration camps; most of them were placed in ordinary prisons. Many of them emigrated. Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code treated homosexual relations among men as a criminal offense. The law came into effect on May 15, 1871. The paragraph was amended several times. In 1935, the Nazis expanded the scope of Paragraph 175 and made it stricter. The maximum punishment for homosexual relations, which previously was up to 6 months in prison, was raised to 5 years in prison. "More serious cases" which included: the abuse of power, homosexual relations with men below the age of 21 and male prostitution were punished with a sentence of between 1 and 10 years in a correctional institution.[30] Also, gays of Jewish origin were marked with a yellow star. These are the reasons why it is not easy to determine the number of killed or imprisoned gays during the period of Nazism in Germany. Richard Plant, an American author of German origin, estimates that the number of imprisoned gays in the period between 1933 and 1944 was around 50,000 people and that around 140,000 men were punished on account of Paragraph 175.[31]

Prisoners marked with the pink triangle were used for medical experiments with the aim of finding a cure against homosexuality. They were often treated much worse than other prisoners, they worked harder, longer than others, they were often denied food and water and were maltreated and humiliated and ridiculed because of the anti-gay policy, and the "destruction by work" policy would lead them to a certain death. They were confronted by

not only the guards in the camps but by other inmates as well, and they were often beaten to death. Though present in society, homophobia was even more prevalent in camps, which contributed to even higher death rates of homosexuals in concentration camps compared to other “anti-social” groups. There were several cases in which gays would remove yellow triangles from Jewish camp uniforms to replace their pink triangles hoping that they would be treated better as Jews.

On the other hand, the supporters of eugenics considered that there was a high risk of survival of other “anti-social groups”. Homosexuals, according to them, didn’t carry good genes and posed a high risk to the nation. Robert Lifton, who also favored the idea of clean nation, wrote: “The argument was that the best young men were killed in war and that the nation (Volk) because of that lost the best available genes. The genes of those who haven’t fought (the worst genes) then began freely expanding thus speeding up biological and cultural degradation”. [32] The eugenic supporters considered that the state had to intervene in order to prevent this.

Hitler literally organized “purges”, cleansing his ranks also of homosexuals. The “Hummingbird” operation, “Röhm’s Putsch” or “the Night of Long Knives” (Nacht der langen Messer) took place between June 30 and July 2 in 1934. The Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime organized the execution of the members of the Nazi fraction gathered around Ernst Röhm [33], a leader of the Nazi paramilitary formation, SA [34]. During that operation, members of the Hitler’s SS troops and Gestapo secret police eliminated 85 persons including Röhm himself and arrested around a thousand people. Originally, Hitler had protected Röhm from other NSDAP [35] members, who thought that his homosexuality violated the party’s firm anti-gay policy. Nevertheless, Hitler changed his opinion about Röhm later on when he felt that the latter might threaten his position. The tendency of SA members towards unprovoked street violence, ostentatious lifestyle, homosexuality, harlotry was a reason good enough to eliminate SA members. Röhm’s homosexuality served as pretext for his murder. The largest number of executions was made by members of the Schutzstaffel, elite Nazi troops and the Gestapo, the regime’s secret police.

After Röhm’s killing, a strong campaign against LGBT persons was launched. In 1936, Heinrich Himmler [36] a leader of SS troops established the Reich’s central Office against homosexuality and abortion. Himmler considered homosexuality “degenerative” behavior. Gays were labeled as “enemies of the people”. They were accused of disturbing the public morals and endangering the birth rate of Germany. The regime tried to convert German gays, who after all were considered part of the German “higher race” according to the understanding of the National Socialists and forced them to be in line with social and sexual conformism. Those gays who did not succeed in “changing” their sexual orientation, that is, in complying with the German Nazi standard, were deported to concentration camp in order to be changed or killed by work. Hundreds of European gays who lived under German occupation were castrated. Some of those convicted according to Paragraph 175 would identify themselves as gays. The exile of gays during the Nazi period has been suppressed until the 1970’s because many countries had anti-gay laws until that time.

After the Second World War, many countries ignored the fact that concentration camps were the places where gays also suffered, and they were not recognized as victims of the Nazi persecution. Pensions, which are available to other groups, were at first not available to gays. Since Paragraph 175 was not rescinded, even a couple of decades later, many gays were returned to prison in line with evidence found against them by members of the Nazi government. The German Government recognized them as late as in the 1980’s, and an official

apology to the LGBT population for persecution during the Holocaust, in the Second World War, arrived in 2002. In 2005, the European Parliament, on the occasion of the celebration of 60 years of liberation of Auschwitz passed a resolution on the Holocaust which explicitly mentions homosexuals as one of the injured groups. Prisoners marked with the pink triangle were never awarded any damages by the German Government. The public became extremely negative towards the laws on eugenics because forced sterilization was directly connected with the genocide policy of the Nazi Germany.

The ideas of democracy, civil and human rights, freedom, equality of people, caused fury among the elite in power and control systems, not just when they were talked about but when attempts were made to implement them. It may be said that the highest achievements of the human mind were created through a continuous provocation and defiance to governance and control systems. On the other hand, the elite have always strived to remain at the top of the pyramid and have been finding ways to govern everything, including acting and thinking of every individual at the cost of creating the largest tragedies with immense consequences.

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