

Racial and Eugenic Thinking in Interwar Estonia: The Case of the Estonian Nationalist Club and the *ERK Magazine*

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Abstract. This article contextualises the participation of Estonian elites in the transnational exchanges of racial and eugenic ideas. The Estonian Nationalist Club (ERK) became a crucial platform where radical nationalist thinkers appropriated ideologies of race and eugenics for the Estonian context. The ERK's membership, elitist outlook, nationalist anxieties, and geopolitical orientation fostered enthusiastic engagement with racial and eugenic thinking. Inspired by the Swedish and German examples, ERK-affiliated commentators theorised Estonians' Nordic racial belonging and expressed ambivalence over racial purity. They skilfully navigated between criticism of German extremism and the drive to advance a racial and eugenic agenda compatible with their radical nationalist beliefs.

Keywords: Estonian Nationalist Club (ERK), right-wing radicalism, race, eugenics, racial mixing, nationalism, transnational history, Sweden, Germany, Estonia

INTRODUCTION

Interwar Estonia saw the rapid ascent of eugenics from an intellectual curiosity to a state-sponsored ideology. Before Estonian independence, racial and eugenic ideas had already been discussed among intellectuals.¹ In 1924, eugenicists and eugenic-minded intellectuals founded a national eugenic society. During the authoritarian era (1934–1940), the regime initiated a series of eugenic development: The creation of the interministerial Commission for Population Growth and Welfare (1935); the enactment of a compulsory eugenic sterilisation law by presidential decree (1936); and the establishment of the Institute of Eugenics at the University of Tartu (1939). Only with the beginning of Soviet occupation in 1940 did the development of eugenics come to a halt.² In fact, it has been suggested that, of the three interwar Baltic states, the strongest eugenic movement and the broadest social support for eugenics existed in Estonia.³

Studies on interwar Estonian eugenics have commented on the close relationship between eugenics and nationalism. In his extensive treatments of the history of Estonian eugenics,⁴ Ken Kalling points to the fear of national degeneration and extinction to explain the enthusiasm for eugenics from early-20th-century intellectuals, interwar eugenicists, and the authoritarian regime. He suggests that the authoritarian regime's endorsement of *rahvustervik* – translated variously as “national entirety”, “integral nation”, or “national community” – transformed the state into a partner of the eugenic movement.⁵ Other scholars have focused on racialisation and queer exclusion as the results of nationalist appropriation of eugenics. Björn M. Felder argues that both Estonian and Latvian authoritarian regimes launched eugenic projects with an ethnic-racial agenda for national regeneration.⁶ Rebeka Põldsam convincingly

- 1 See L. Kurvet-Käosaar. “The Vitality of Primeval Peasant Blood”: The Hereditary Potential of Estonians in the Work of Aino Kallas. – Aino Kallas: Negotiations with Modernity. Ed. by L. Kurvet-Käosaar, L. Rojola. SKS, Helsinki, 2011, 94–113; T. Karjahärm. Tõuküsimus Eestis iseseisvuse eel: Historiograafiline referaat. – Akadeemia, 1933, 7, 1347–1364.
- 2 K. Kalling. The Application of Eugenics in Estonia 1918–1940. – Baltic Eugenics: Bio-Politics, Race and Nation in Interwar Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 1918–1940. Ed. by B. M. Felder, P. J. Weindling. Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2013, 52–54, 65–67.
- 3 B. M. Felder. Introduction: Eugenics, Sterilisation and the Racial State: The Baltic States, Russia, and the Global Eugenics Movement. – Baltic Eugenics, 5.
- 4 K. Kalling. The Application of Eugenics, 49–82. See also K. Kalling. The Self-Perception of a Small Nation: The Reception of Eugenics in Interwar Estonia – “Blood and Homeland”: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940. Ed. by M. Turda, Paul J. Weindling. Central European University Press, Budapest, 2007, 253–262.
- 5 K. Kalling. The Application of Eugenics, 49–52, 56–59, 65–68. For *rahvustervik* and its origin, see L. Veski. Towards Stronger National Unity: Statist Ideas in Estonian Nationalism during the “Era of Silence”. – Journal of Baltic Studies, 2024, 55, 1, 178.
- 6 See B. M. Felder. Introduction, 13–18.

attributes the pathologisation of homosexuality and transsexuality to the unholy union between eugenic ideologies and “chauvinistic nationalism” in interwar Estonia.⁷

Research on eugenics has looked to transnational connections and factors to explain the local development of eugenics and racial beliefs. Sweden and Germany have been identified as inspirations for Central and Eastern European eugenicists.⁸ According to Per Anders Rudling, Swedish influence on Soviet eugenicists and racial scientists in the 1920s persisted well into the 1970s.⁹ In the early 1930s, Nazi Germany emerged as the most important model for not only Central and Southeast European supporters of eugenics, but also for American eugenicists looking for an example to respond to critics who questioned the scientific basis of eugenics.¹⁰ Recently, Marius Turda and Bolaji Balogun argue that eugenics in Central and Eastern Europe should be critically examined in relation to coloniality, peripherality, and the colonial logic of race and whiteness.¹¹ Specifically, they point out the similarity between the racial ideology behind eugenics in the region and “the dogma of white domination that enabled colonial functionality elsewhere”.¹²

Inspired by transnational approaches, this article examines the entanglement of race, eugenics, and nationalism in interwar Estonia. I choose the Estonian Nationalist Club (*Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubi*, ERK), which has been characterised as a radical nationalist organisation, as a case study.¹³ I focus on how the ERK appropriated racial and eugenic ideologies and incorporated them into its radical nationalism. A close analysis of the *ERK Magazine* and other writings by ERK members and collaborators will elucidate how the ERK became a crucial platform for the dissemination and popularisation of transnational racial and eugenic thinking in the 1930s.

7 R. Põldsam. Otsides kvääre lugusid sõdadevahelise Eesti ajakirjandusest: Eugeenika rollist homoseksuaalsust ja transsoolisust puudutavates aruteludes. – *Mäetagused*, 2020, 76, 114–115.

8 M. Turda. *The History of East-Central Eugenics, 1900–1945: Sources and Commentaries*. Ed. by M. Turda. Bloomsbury, London, 2015, 202–203, 277; M. Turda, P. J. Weindling. *Eugenics, Race and Nation in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940: A Historiographic Overview*. – “Blood and Homeland”, 8–9.

9 P. A. Rudling. *Eugenics and Racial Biology in Sweden and the USSR: Contacts across the Baltic Sea* – *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, 2014, 31, 1, 64–65.

10 M. Turda, P. J. Weindling. *Eugenics, Race and Nation in Central and Southeast Europe*, 8–9; E. Klautke. “The Germans Are Beating Us at Our Own Game”: American Eugenics and the German Sterilization Law of 1933 – *History of the Human Sciences*, 2016, 29, 3, 30–31.

11 M. Turda, B. Balogun. *Colonialism, Eugenics and “Race” in Central and Eastern Europe*. – *Global Social Challenges Journal*, 2023, 2, 170–173.

12 *Ibid.*, 172.

13 A. Kasekamp. *The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia*. Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000, 30–31; T. Karjahärm, V. Sirk. *Vaim ja võim: Eesti haritlaskond 1917–1940*. Argo, Tallinn, 2001, 275.

This three-part article argues that the ERK's racial and eugenic beliefs developed at the intersection of nationalist conviction and transnational exchanges. The first part seeks to contextualise eugenics in interwar Estonia. I highlight the concern for national survival and regional models, especially those in Sweden and Germany, as critical influences on Estonian racial and eugenic thinking. The second part outlines a concise history of the ERK, the *ERK Magazine*, and their connections with eugenicists and eugenic-minded intellectuals. The third part analyses the ERK's eugenic agenda, racial worldview, and reactions to German racial thinking and eugenic policies.

RACE AND EUGENICS IN ESTONIAN AND REGIONAL CONTEXTS

Eugenics was the belief, based on the knowledge of heredity, in the improvement of the biological quality of a certain human population.¹⁴ Francis Galton, who coined the term in 1883, theorised eugenics as a “science of human improvement”.¹⁵ Yet in a broader sense, as Philippa Levine and Alison Bashford have remarked, eugenics was essentially “an evaluative project for the classification of humans” into a hierarchy of fitness.¹⁶ Following this evaluative logic, eugenicists and eugenic-minded intellectuals looked to race, class, and gender to explain what separated the “fit” population from the “unfit”. Racial and eugenic thinking were therefore closely intertwined.¹⁷

In the early twentieth century, Estonian intellectuals found inspiration in racial and eugenic thinking. Preoccupied with the Estonian nation's survival, they identified alcohol and intermarriage as key factors which influenced national quality and quantity. Leaders of the temperance movement, who blamed alcohol for racial degeneration and the loss of vitality, sought to dissuade their co-nationals from alcohol

14 For this narrower definition of eugenics, see N. Roll-Hansen. What Are We to Learn from the History of Eugenics? – *Metascience*, 2023, 22, 2, 389. See also S. Kühl. *For the Betterment of the Race: The Rise and Fall of the International Movement for Eugenics and Racial Hygiene*. Trans. by L. Schofer. Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2013, 1.

15 D. B. Paul, J. Moore. The Darwinian Context: Evolution and Inheritance. – *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*. Ed. by A. Bashford, P. Levine. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, 28, 36–38; P. J. Weindling. *International Eugenics: Swedish Sterilization in Context*. – *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 1999, 24, 2, 181–182.

16 A. Bashford, P. Levine. Introduction: Eugenics and the Modern World. – *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 9.

17 For the centrality of race in eugenics, see M. Turda. *Race, Science, and Eugenics in the Twentieth Century*. – *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 62–79.

consumption.¹⁸ As for intermarriage and miscegenation, early-20th-century Estonian intellectuals held a range of different positions on the desirability, necessity, and permissibility of marrying non-Estonians.¹⁹ Some, such as Ado Grenzstein or Aino Kallas, believed in the eugenic potential of miscegenation to improve the national quality.²⁰ Others, such as Villem Grünthal-Ridala or Peeter Hellat, recommended mixing with “closer” racial types instead of “distant types”.²¹ Still others, such as Villem Ernits, praised the pursuit of racial purity, and rejected miscegenation for fear of further compromise of the Estonian nation’s core racial element.²² Ultimately, these intellectuals shared the conviction that the survival of Estonians as a nation depended not only on their distinct culture or language, but also on their inherent biological-racial composition.

The positive reception of eugenics among educated circles prior to Estonia’s independence, as Ken Kalling argues, contributed to the rapid establishment and expansion of a national eugenic society in interwar Estonia.²³ In 1924, a group of well-known intellectuals, physicians and professors established the Estonian Eugenics Society (*Eesti eugeenika selts* “*Tõutervis*”; EES) in Tartu. A branch of the EES was soon founded in Tallinn in 1927. The EES was renamed the Estonian Society of Eugenics and Genealogy (*Eesti Eugeenika ja Genealoogia Selts*; EEGS) in 1931, to reflect the new prominence of genealogical studies in the society’s eugenic agenda. The EES/EEGS supported eugenic research, campaigned for eugenic legislations, and organised national events such as the two Congresses of National Education to influence the public debate on eugenics.²⁴

The development of racial and eugenic thinking in Estonia received a further boost from transnational exchanges. In the early 1920s, Swedish eugenic research strongly influenced regional neighbours such as Germany, the Soviet Union, and Estonia. Estonian eugenicists visited the Swedish Institute of Racial Biology (SIRB), the world’s first state-directed eugenic research institution, with their German, American, and

18 See K. Kalling. *Karskustöö sünnitab eugeenikaliikumise*. – *Mäetagused*, 2007, 36, 59–78.

19 See T. Karjahärm. *Tõuküsimus Eestis iseseisvuse eel*, 1347–1364.

20 *Ibid.*, 1347–1348; L. Kurvet-Käosaar. “The Vitality of Primeval Peasant Blood”, 100–107.

21 T. Karjahärm. *Tõuküsimus Eestis iseseisvuse eel*, 1351; K. Kalling. *The Application of Eugenics*, 57.

22 See T. Karjahärm. *Tõuküsimus Eestis iseseisvuse eel*, 1355.

23 K. Kalling. *The Application of Eugenics*, 52.

24 *Ibid.*, 52–53, 64–65. For the Congresses of National Education, see also M. Loper. *Eesti Vabariigi rahvusliku kasvatus kongressid 1927 ja 1935: eeskujud, retseptioon ja mõju ühiskonnas*. – *Tuna*, 2022, 2, 41–59.

Finnish colleagues.²⁵ Both Jaan Tõnisson, an Estonian statesman, and the EES advocated the creation of an institution modelled on the SIRB.²⁶ Even in the 1930s, as I will show later, Swedish racial and eugenic research continued to inspire their Estonian admirers.

The SIRB launched a major survey of the Swedish population, using anthropometric measurements and photographic portraits to document what was believed to be “racial traits”: height, skull shape, eye colour, hair colour, and skin pigmentation. According to a gradation of whiteness that implied racial hierarchy, the SIRB identified six race types in different states of purity: the purer Nordic type, the purer East Baltic type, the light mixed type, the medium dark type, the dark mixed type, and the dark type. The Nordic, East Baltic, and dark types were accordingly represented by the Swedes, the Finns, and the Sámi.²⁷ This racial hierarchy reflected intra-Nordic power relations and colonialism.²⁸ The SIRB project, as Ulrika Kjellman convincingly demonstrates, was to “decide who were truly white and who were not”.²⁹

The SIRB’s inaugural director, Herman Lundborg (1868–1943), shaped its strongly race-oriented research agenda. A racial theorist, eugenicist, and propagandist of Nordic racial superiority, Lundborg believed that the Nordic race must be protected from the degeneration that resulted from miscegenation.³⁰ He also found inspiration in the eugenic research, segregation laws, and anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States.³¹ His own research focused on the Sámi people’s racial traits and their racial mixing with the Swedes.³² Lundborg’s methodology followed the Swedish anatomist Andres Retzius’s “cranial index” to distinguish the superior Nordic race from the inferior Finns and the Sámi.³³ For Lundborg, the SIRB racial survey could form the basis of a eugenic population policy to determine “who was pure Nordic, true white, and who was not, and what strategies to encourage the former to reproduce and ensure that the latter did not”.³⁴ A National Socialist

25 P. A. Rudling. *Eugenics and Racial Biology in Sweden and the USSR*, 42, 52.

26 K. Kalling. *The Application of Eugenics*, 53; Eesti 14. Karskuskongress. – *Kaja*, 27.06.1924.

27 U. Kjellman. *A Whiter Shade of Pale: Visuality and Race in the Work of the Swedish State Institute for Race Biology*. – *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2013, 38, 2, 180–181, 183.

28 S. Keskinen. *Intra-Nordic Differences, Colonial/Racial Histories, and National Narratives: Rewriting Finnish History*. – *Scandinavian Studies*, 2019, 91, 1–2, 171–177.

29 U. Kjellman. *A Whiter Shade of Pale*, 197.

30 See *ibid.*, 180–181, 188–189.

31 P. A. Rudling. *Eugenics and Racial Biology in Sweden and the USSR*, 44.

32 G. Broberg, M. Tydén. *Eugenics in Sweden: Efficient Care*. – *Eugenics and the Welfare State: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland*. Ed. by G. Broberg, N. Roll-Hansen. Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 2005, 89.

33 R. Andreassen. *The Search of the White Nordic: Analysis of the Contemporary New Nordic Kitchen and Former Race Science*. – *Social Identities*, 2014, 20, 6, 444–445.

34 U. Kjellman. *A Whiter Shade of Pale*, 180.

sympathiser, Lundborg enthusiastically approved the racially and eugenically motivated policies implemented soon after Hitler came to power in Germany.³⁵

The radicalisation of German eugenics under the Nazi regime invited variegated responses from international commentators and eugenicists.³⁶ Overall, this led to the splintering of the international eugenic movement and increasing scientific criticism of Nazi racial and eugenic policies.³⁷ However, radical American eugenicists, who believed in Nordic racial superiority and saw eugenics as a tool to ensure the survival of the white race, openly expressed their envy of the thoroughness of Nazi racial measures.³⁸ In his foreword to the Estonian translation of the Nazi sterilisation law of 1933, Hans Madissoon (1887–1956), the chief campaigner for eugenic sterilisation in Estonia, described it positively as the success of German eugenic activism.³⁹ However, in Scandinavian countries and in Latvia, which also introduced eugenic sterilisation legislation, proponents of eugenics sought to distance domestic eugenic policies from Nazi racism and extremism.⁴⁰ As Nazi German eugenic policies came under the international spotlight, responses to German eugenics formed part of the strategies of local eugenic activists in their push for domestic eugenic laws, or to pre-empt criticism from Nazi opponents.

THE ERK AND THE *ERK* MAGAZINE

In the early 1930s, political and economic crises contributed to the rise of Estonian right-wing radical groups. The government's ineffective responses to sharp economic downturn fuelled general mistrust of the liberal parliamentary order. The public increasingly saw the creation of a strong presidency through constitutional reforms as the solution. This allowed the momentous radical right Vaps movement to mobilise mass support. The intense political and social polarisation paved the

35 P. A. Rudling. *Eugenics and Racial Biology in Sweden and the USSR*, 44–46.

36 For a summary of Nazi racial and eugenic measures, see P. Weindling. *German Eugenics and the Wider World: Beyond the Racial State*. – *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 321–324.

37 See S. Kühl. *For the Betterment of the Race*, 109–119.

38 R. N. Proctor. *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA., 1988, 100–101; E. Klautke. “The Germans Are Beating Us at Our Own Game”, 26–27.

39 H. Madissoon. *Pärilikult haigete sigivõimetuks tegemine*. – *Eesti Arst*, 1933, 12, 10, 494–497.

40 M. Tydén. *The Scandinavian States: Reformed Eugenics Applied* – *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 368–369; V. Kuznecovs. *Latvian Psychiatry and Medical Legislation of the 1930s and the German Sterilisation Law*. – *Baltic Eugenics*, 156–162.

way for Konstantin Päts's seizure of power and the establishment of the authoritarian regime in 1934.⁴¹ It was against the backdrop of profound instability that the ERK emerged as an ambitious contender for political influence.

The self-styled "ERK", the right-wing radical nationalist group, was founded in March 1931 by Tartu-based or university-affiliated intellectuals, including Ernst Ein, Edgar Kant, Juhan Aul, Leo Leesment, Hendrik Sepp, and Gustav Ränk. With a decisively elitist outlook, the ERK boasted of a membership from the upper echelons of Estonian society, such as teachers, academics, jurists, writers, industrialists, and businessmen.⁴² Convinced that the young nation state needed major reforms, the ERK formed working groups to research cultural, economic, and political problems while encouraging the publication of policy proposals and opinion pieces.⁴³ Existing literature on the ERK highlights its advocacy for constitutional reform and a strong presidency, its ideological exaltation of the Estonian nation, attacks on national minorities, and its contributions to the development of Estonian economic nationalism.⁴⁴ The ERK's eagerness to highlight its intellectual credentials was thus associated with its desire to exert political influence.

The ERK functioned as a closed ideological-oriented fraternity with a hierarchical leadership structure. Its constitution explicitly restricted membership to "ethnic Estonian citizens of the Republic of Estonia".⁴⁵ Membership applications depended on members' recommendation as well as approvals by its central council (*põhikogu*) and by the general meeting.⁴⁶ New members had to raise their hands and swear an oath to "remain faithful to ERK objectives, to use the utmost strength to contribute to their realisation, to submit to the Club's discipline, and to fulfil all voluntary duties".⁴⁷ As the ERK's ideology evolved around nationalism, this ideological brotherhood aimed to turn

41 A. Kasekamp. Fascism by Popular Initiative: The Rise and Fall of the Vaps Movement in Estonia. – Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies, 2015, 4, 156–158. See also A. Kasekamp. The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia, 32–33.

42 Mis on Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubi? – Postimees, 23.11.1931. See also Peakoosolekute protokolliraamat. Rahvusarhiiv (National Archives of Estonia, RA) Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-1, 9.

43 Mis on Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubi?

44 A. Kasekamp. The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia, 30–31; T. Karjahärm, V. Sirk. Vaim ja võim, 274–283; M. Klesment. The Origins of Economic Nationalism in Interwar Estonia. – Acta Historica Tallinnensia, 2005, 9, 1, 119–122, 128–131.

45 Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubi (lühendatult ERK) põhikiri, Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubi (E.R.K.). RA, Tallinn, ERA-14-11-59, 4.

46 See Peakoosolekute protokolliraamat, RA, Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-1, 9, 68.

47 Ibid., 9.

the Estonian social and economic elites into a united front of activists that would elevate the Estonian nation state to new heights.⁴⁸

The ERK soon expanded to other Estonian cities, including Tallinn, Narva, Petseri, Pärnu, Haapsalu, and Rakvere, which copied the ERK constitution and established their own local organisations. The rapid expansion of local ERK chapters nationwide brought the total membership to around 500 by the end of 1932.⁴⁹ In mid-1933, the Tartu and Tallinn ERKs spearheaded the creation of an umbrella organisation, the ERK Union (*Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubide Liit*), to better coordinate ERK chapters to advance their radical nationalist objectives.⁵⁰ The establishment of the ERK Union precipitated the shift of the organisational centre of gravity from Tartu to Tallinn, not least due to the heavy reliance on the Tallinn ERK to fund various campaigns and projects.⁵¹

The ERK's monthly journal, *ERK Magazine of General, Economic, and Cultural Politics* (*ERK: üld-, majandus- ja kultuurpoliitiline ajakiri*), was published from January 1933 until shortly before the Soviet annexation in June 1940. In the words of Edgar Kant, its founding editor-in-chief (1933–1934) who stayed on the editorial board until 1937, the *ERK Magazine* aspired to provide a “nationalist platform”, unaffiliated with party interests, for timely analysis of serious issues.⁵² Even though notable exceptions – such as the acclaimed novelist A. H. Tammsaare – also existed, most of the magazine's contributions came from the ERK membership. A major outlet of nationalist commentaries and critiques, the *ERK Magazine* had a print run of about 1,100 to 1,200 copies by early 1934, and its content was frequently reproduced or summarised in major newspapers.⁵³ The magazine provided valuable insight into the ERK's reception of racial and eugenic thinking.

In January 1934, the ERK Union publicly endorsed Konstantin Päts's presidential candidacy. It argued that Päts's statesmanship and nationalist conviction made him a suitable candidate.⁵⁴ This decision, though a unilateral one taken by the Tallinn ERK, was probably the start of a cosy relationship with future authoritarian leader Päts.⁵⁵ Soon after the coup d'état, the ERK Union sent two petitions to Päts and claimed to

48 For a discussion on the ERK's ultranationalism, see T. Karjahärm, V. Sirk. Vaim ja võim, 275–276.

49 Peakosolekute protokolliraamat, RA, Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-1, 56.

50 Ibid., 71–72.

51 Ibid., 61; Protokolliraamat, RA, Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-7, 5-6.

52 E. Kant. Lähteks. – ERK, 1933, 1, 1, 1–2.

53 Peakosolekute protokolliraamat, RA, Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-1, 89.

54 Eesti rahvuslaste klubide algatus. – Järva Teataja, 16.01.1934.

55 Põhikogu protokolliraamat, RA, Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-2, 42–43.

speak for “the nationally-minded intelligentsia” who supported a strong government unfettered by mass opinion and free to “pursue the right nationalist policies”.⁵⁶ In return, the authoritarian regime treated the ERK as the new representatives of the nationalist intelligentsia, inviting a ten-member ERK delegation to advise the government on nationalist cultural policies.⁵⁷

According to Toomas Karjahärm, the *ERK Magazine* became the authoritarian government’s “semi-official organ”, whose editorial practices mirrored those of the official daily *Uus Eesti*.⁵⁸ Two of its editors-in-chief, Järvo Tandre (Rudolf Stockeby-Tandre) and Kaarel Särgava (Karl Peterson), would run for seats in the lower chamber in 1938 for the Popular Front for the Implementation of the Constitution (*Põhiseaduse elluviimise rahvarinne*), the only officially sanctioned party created by the authoritarian regime’s political movement, the Fatherland League (*Isamaaliit*).⁵⁹ Ultimately, the firm partnership between the ERK and the authoritarian regime rested on the former’s support of Päts and their shared nationalist agenda for a strong leader, a corporatist state, an interventionist economy, and the curtailment of minority cultural autonomy.⁶⁰

From its very inception, the elitist ERK attracted race theorists, eugenicists, and eugenic-minded intellectuals to its ranks. Many members of the EEGS, including Juhan Aul, Edgar Kant, Juhan Vilms, Kaarel Parts, Hendrik Sepp, Juhan Vasar, and Hans Mühlberg (Kauri), were also active members of the ERK.⁶¹ The overlapping membership of the two organisations – perhaps an unsurprising result of the eugenicists’ preoccupation with the Estonian nation’s “racial quality” – contributed to the incorporation of racial and eugenic thinking into the ERK’s agenda. The more influential ERK also provided race theorists and eugenicist with a platform to amplify their voices.

Collaborations between the ERK and the EEGS intensified in the mid-1930s. About a third of the EEGS’s Draft Bill for Protecting

56 ERK-ide Liidu Märjukiri Nr. 5 nimeede-estistamise asjus – ERK, 1934, 2, 5, 87; ERK-ide Liidu Märjukiri Nr. 6 keskkooli reformi asjus. – ERK, 1934, 2, 5, 87–89.

57 Kultuurtegelased pidasid Toompeal nõu. – Virumaa Teataja, 10.10.1934; Peakooosolekute protokolliraamat, RA, Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-1, 107.

58 T. Karjahärm, V. Sirk. Vaim ja võim, 275.

59 For these two organisations, see A. Kasekamp. The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia, 122, 129.

60 See T. Karjahärm, V. Sirk. Vaim ja võim, 284–288; M. Klesment. The Origins of Economic Nationalism, 128–131; D. J. Smith. Estonia: A Model for Inter-War Europe? – Ethnopolitics, 2016, 15, 1, 99.

61 Eesti eugeenika seltsi põhikirjad, kodukord ja liikmete nimekirjad. RA, Tallinn, ERA-4855-1-1, 10; 1935. a kassa aruanne ja 1936. a celarve ning kirjavahetus klubi töösse puutuvais küsimustes juhatuse ja liikmete vahel. RA, Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-6, 81–83.

the Racial Value of Future Generations (*Järeltulevasoo tõulise väärtuse kaitseseaduse eelnõu*), submitted to the government in February 1934, closely resembled the ERK Union's demands to restrict the rights of non-Estonians, limit the cultural autonomy of national minorities, and prevent the assimilation and de-nationalisation of Estonians.⁶² At the Second Congress of National Education, an EEGS-organised eugenic conference, the ERK enjoyed disproportionate influence. Out of a total of 17 presenters, at least eight of them were members of the ERK. Listed separately from other invited organisations and privileged to send two additional delegates, the ERK was evidently accorded a special status by the organisers.⁶³ The shared concern over national quality brought radical nationalists and eugenic activists into a strategic alliance.

THE ERK'S EUGENIC AGENDA

The class prejudice and the concern over national quality inherent in eugenics found a readily receptive audience in the elitist ERK. Among other causes of the ERK enumerated in the first issue of the *ERK Magazine*, Edgar Kant argued that Estonia's small population warranted "special emphasis on quality". To improve quality of the nation, he explained, the state must create a "competitive" society through "effective and diligent social selection" that would function like a sieve.⁶⁴ This belief to foster the best through competitive selection extended to an internal ERK discussion about reorganising primary education accordingly. Kaarel Parts (1873–1940), Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, argued that primary education should reflect "the principle of [natural] selection", while Teodor Lippmaa (1892–1943), a botanist, envisioned a fixed six-year primary education open only to talented children.⁶⁵ Their proposals seemed like a tacit nod to the blunt remark from Juhan Vilms (1893–1952), an ERK-affiliated eugenicist, who declared that "human beings are not of the same value, so they cannot always be equal!"⁶⁶ The ERK not only embraced eugenics in theory, but also searched for its social application.

62 Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubide Põhimõtteid. – ERK, 1933, 1, 9–10, 223; ERK-ide Liidu Märjukiri. – ERK, 1934, 2, 44–45; H. Madisson. Järeltulevasoo tõulise väärtuse kaitseseaduse eelnõu. – Tööd ja artiklid, 1921–1934. Manuscript and Rare Books Collection, University of Tartu Library, Tartu.

63 II Rahvusliku Kasvatuse Kongressi stenogramm. RA, Tallinn, ERA-4855-1-2, 185.

64 E. Kant, Lähteks, 5.

65 Peakooosolekute protokolliraamat. RA, Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-1, 78.

66 J. Vilms. Erakondadeta ühiskonna poole: Eesti kui korporatiivne riik. Vaba Maa, Tallinn, 1933, 92.

In an *ERK Magazine* article, the ERK- and EEGS-affiliated Juhan Aul (1897–1994) proposed the creation of a SIRB-style racial biology institute alongside a national anthropometric database, *Anthropologica estonica*. As a eugenicist, Aul strongly believed in the importance of heredity in physical and mental fitness.⁶⁷ Inspired by Lundborg’s eugenic vision for SIRB’s racial survey, Aul argued that his proposed national database of anthropometric statistics could be used to predict schoolchildren’s physical development and future career.⁶⁸ Aul’s ambition also echoed British statisticians and eugenicists Karl Pearson and Ethel M. Elderton’s claim that eugenics was essentially applied anthropology.⁶⁹ To appeal to the sensibility of nationalist intellectuals, Aul presented his proposals as an effort to intensify research into “national sciences”, or the knowledge about the Estonian nation, a call already endorsed by the *ERK Magazine*’s editors.⁷⁰

The ERK also adopted several measures to halt racial degeneration and to facilitate racial improvement. In a nod to the temperance movement’s fight against alcohol’s degenerative influence on the Estonian nation, the ERK’s constitution forbade alcohol consumption during internal meetings and activities.⁷¹ Meanwhile, the ERK Union officially adopted eugenic principles, stressing the “improvement of Estonians’ physical and racial value” through public health measures as well as physical culture and sports.⁷² Recent studies about physical culture in France, Britain, and Germany in the interwar era have shown that physical culture was widely promoted as a preventative remedy against racial degeneration.⁷³ In interwar Estonia, it was Juhan Vilms who promoted physical culture as a nation-building measure to combat the degenerative effects of urban lifestyle. As the long-term chairman of Estonia’s Physical Culture Endowment (1928–1936), he speculated that physical culture, as a healthy lifestyle, could have a positive impact on the nation’s racial fitness in the remote future, especially since “health

67 See K. Kalling, L. Heapost. Racial Identity and Physical Anthropology in Estonia, 1800–1945. – *Baltic Eugenics*, 98.

68 J. Aul. Eesti antropoloogilise uurimisest. – *ERK*, 1937, 5, 7–8, 159.

69 K. Pearson, E. M. Elderton. Foreword. – *Annals of Eugenics*, 1925, 1, 1, 1.

70 See J. Aul. Intensiivsemale loomingule rahvuslike teaduste alal. – *ERK*, 1936, 4, 9–10, 205.

71 Põhikirj 1934. a. tegevuse aruanne. ERK-i juhatuse teadaanded klubiliikmetele. RA, Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-13, 5.

72 Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubide Põhimõtteid, 221.

73 See J. Tumblety. *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, 44–54; I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska. Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain. – *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2006, 41, 4, 596–599; M. Hau. Sports in the Human Economy: “Leibesübungen”, Medicine, Psychology, and Performance Enhancement during the Weimar Republic. – *Central European History*, 2008, 41, 3, 384–385, 407–408.

cannot negatively affect heredity".⁷⁴ In this manner, the regenerative promise of sports and physical culture became integrated into the ERK's eugenic agenda.

Although many non-eugenicist members of the ERK enjoyed cooperation with the EEGS, the ERK stopped short of fully endorsing the agenda of the EEGS. The question of sterilisation, for example, never appeared in the *ERK Magazine*. Even in a rare exception, which reported a eugenicist's public lecture about the prevalence of the eugenically unfit in Estonia, the commentator emphasised the need for healthy and talented offspring, rather than elaborating on any negative eugenic measures as the solution.⁷⁵ This reticence showed the limit of the radical nationalist organisation's support for a comprehensive eugenic agenda. The ERK approved of eugenics in principle for the compatibility of its central message – improvement of the quality of the nation – with nationalistic purposes. But it seems to have distanced itself from the radical proposals of negative eugenic measures, such as sterilisation and marriage bans for the unfit, which the EEGS actively campaigned for the 1930s. This suggests that the ERK might have considered these proposals to be extreme or controversial, or simply perceived them as marginal to the ERK's own political activism.

THE ERK'S RACIAL WORLDVIEW

The ERK adopted a racial worldview in which the national race, or the racial constitution of a nation, determined the nation's development, viability, and potential.⁷⁶ In the first open interview with journalists, the ERK's leadership highlighted race as a fundamental factor in their radical nationalist ideology. The ERK's mission, they explained, was to "research and address our cultural, economic and social phenomena in a nationalist perspective, and in accordance with our natural, racial [*rassiline*], and historical preconditions and geographical position".⁷⁷ The ERK's belief in race as a fateful determinant of the nation's past, present and future thus manifested itself in a myriad of commentaries

74 K. Kalling. "Kultuurrahvaste mentaliteet peab saama enam kollektivistlikumaks" (Dr Juhan Vilmsi sõnad ja teod). – Tartu Ülikooli ajaloo küsimusi, 2015, 43, 97–99; J. Vilms. Abinõud ja teed tõutervise tõstmiseks. – Pärivus ja valik: Tõutervishoiu käsiraamat. Koost. A. Audova *et al.* Loodus, Tartu, 1927, 283–284.

75 E. Sahkenberg. Miks hooldame alaväärtuslikke isikuid? – ERK, 1933, 1, 4, 109.

76 For a discussion of concept of race in interwar Estonia, see K. Kalling. The Application of Eugenics, 50.

77 Mis on Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubi?

and polemics about national independence, fear of assimilation, and often inconsistent stances on miscegenation and racial purity.

From its very inception, the ERK sought to harness race as a scientific concept to legitimise Estonian nationalism and independence. It was no coincidence that the first opinion piece by the ERK published in a newspaper, written by the racial anthropologist Juhan Aul, mercilessly criticised a recently published monograph on the Estonian racial constitution for its ambivalence towards the Mongoloid Question, or the Estonians' alleged Asian racial ancestry.⁷⁸ In an internal meeting soon after the ERK's establishment, Edgar Kant stated that the ERK's immediate agenda was to "publicly confront pessimism, scepticism, perverse stances as well as fake views and pseudo-scientific claims of nationalism and statehood" in "words, writings, and actions".⁷⁹ Aul's brutal polemic to refute what he deemed the disreputable association of Estonians with a non-White race, lauded at the next ERK meeting, was an enthusiastic response to Kant's radical nationalist exhortation to political activism.⁸⁰ Similarly, in an overtly didactic article published in the ERK's *Yearbook of Estonian Nationalism*, Aul not only emphasised that "our belonging to the WHITE racial group is indisputable" (emphasis in original), but also speculated that, given their anthropometric peculiarities and exceptional height, the Estonians must have constituted a distinct national race, a subtype of the Nordic race.⁸¹ This rejection of Asiatic racial heritage in favour of white belonging echoes Bart Pushaw's observation that, from 1850 to 1950, a gradual "whitening" of the Estonians in visual representations paralleled the racial reclassification of Estonians from "Mongoloid" to "Nordic".⁸² Across Central and Eastern Europe, nationalists increasingly reproduced a colonial and racialised vision of whiteness as the proof of Europeanness, civilisational superiority, and right to sovereignty.⁸³ For the ERK, race offered a scientific justification necessary for claims to national independence and a viable state.

The ERK also used race science to justify its geopolitical orientation. The ERK Union urged Estonia to pursue closer ties with

78 J. Aul. Mõnda H. Reimani "Eestlaste rassilisest koostisest". – Postimees, 13.06.1931; H. Reiman. Eestlaste rassiline koostis. Loodus, Tartu, 1931, 126. For an extended critique, see J. Aul. Mõningaid märkmeid H. Reimani "Eestlaste rassilise koostise" kohta. – Olion, 1931, 2, 7/8, 259–262.

79 Peakooosolekute protokolliraamat. RA, Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-1, 22.

80 Ibid., 24.

81 J. Aul. Eestlaste tõuline kuuluvus. – Tähisteid: Eestluse Aastaraamat. Koost. E. Roos. Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubi Kirjandus, Tartu, 1935, 43–45.

82 B. Pushaw. The Visual Whitening of Estonians. – Eurozine, 30.11.2020.

83 J. Mark et al. Introduction: Racial Disavowals – Historicising Whiteness in Central and Eastern Europe. – Off White: Central and Eastern Europe and the Global History of Race. Ed. by Catherine Baker et al. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2024, 7–10.

Finland, Scandinavian countries, and other Baltic states. It performed a balancing act that combined the Scandinavian regional attachment in Estonian nationalism, the ERK membership's ideological belief in Finno-Ugric affinity, and the realist geopolitical outlook which called for stronger cooperation with Latvia.⁸⁴ This Baltic-Nordic regionalism found expression in ERK ideologue Edgar Kant's use of the concept of "Baltoscandia" as a rejection of the external perception of Estonia's Central and Eastern European belonging.⁸⁵ In his treatise on Estonia's belonging to Baltoscandia, Kant praised Swedish geographer Sten De Geer's synthesis of human and physical geographical approaches – combining "nature-landscape" indicators with the "Nordic demographic and cultural region" – to define the boundaries of the Nordic region.⁸⁶ This suggests that Kant welcomed a broader definition of the Nordic region based on the habitat of a biologically and culturally Nordic population. One of De Geer's indicators of Nordic belonging, the "core area of the Nordic race", was influenced by the race scientist and eugenicist Hermann Lundborg's research on the Swedish racial constitution.⁸⁷ The motivation to highlight Estonia's Nordic belonging also prompted the ERK-affiliated race scientist Juhan Aul to argue for greater inclusion of Estonian territories into the "core area of the Nordic race".⁸⁸ In the pursuit of a Scandinavian belonging, ERK ideologues not only aimed to translate racial belonging into geopolitical orientation, but also the other way around.

Many ERK members and contributors to the *ERK Magazine* subscribed to Nordicism, the belief in a superior Nordic race endangered by degeneration and assimilation.⁸⁹ Following the logic of Nordicist discourse, a Nordic racial predisposition would mark the Estonian nation for higher cultural achievements, yet it would also expose the Estonian nation to greater danger of "denationalisation". Such an implication

84 Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubide Põhimõtteid, 224; M. Kuldkepp. The Scandinavian Connection in Early Estonian Nationalism. – *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2013, 44, 3, 321; Peakooosolekute protokolliraamat, RA, Tallinn, ERA-2698-1-1, 82–83.

85 E. Tammiksaar et al. Edgar Kant, Estonian Geography and the Reception of Walter Christaller's Central Place Theory, 1933–1960. – *Journal of Historical Geography*, 2018, 60, 79. For the ERK Magazine contributors who advocated Baltoscandia, see M. Lehti. Baltoscandia as a National Construction. – *Relations between the Nordic Countries and the Baltic Nations in the XX Century*. Ed. by K. Hovi. University of Turku, Turku, 1998, 40–41.

86 E. Kant. Eesti geograafilisest kuuluvusest. – *ERK*, 1935, 3, 7/8, 139–140.

87 T. Lundén. The Dream of a Balto-Scandian Federation: Sweden and the Independent Baltic States 1918–1940 in Geography and Politics. – *Baltic Worlds*, 2019, 2, 23–24.

88 J. Aul. Põhja tõu osatähtsusest ja levikust Eestis. – *Litterarum Societas Esthonica 1838–1938: Liber Saecularis. Õpetatud Eesti Seltsi*, Tartu, 1937, 79–86.

89 For Nordicism, see C. Hutton. Racial Ideology as Elite Discourse: Nordicism and the Visual in an Age of Mass Culture. – *Social Semiotics*, 2017, 27, 3, 337.

was hinted at by an *ERK Magazine* contributor when he commented about Estonian emigrants and their new adopted homelands. Using immigrants to the United States as an example, he argued that “culturally advanced nations” such as the Germans, the Swedes, and the Danes “de-nationalised” faster than “culturally underdeveloped nations” such as the Spaniards, the Italians, and the Greeks.⁹⁰ Here, unequal cultural achievements served as a thinly veiled reference to a Nordacist racial hierarchy that exalted Germanic and Scandinavian biological quality. Racially predisposed to denationalisation like their light-skinned Nordic brothers, the Estonians therefore had to increase their efforts to strengthen ties with overseas compatriots so as not to lose them altogether.

THE ERK’S REACTIONS TO GERMAN RACIAL MYTHS AND EUGENIC AGENDA

The ERK’s commentaries about Germany and the Baltic Germans should be interpreted in the context of anti-German sentiments in interwar Estonia. In public discourse, the Baltic Germans appeared as the historical oppressor of the Estonians. Mistrust of Baltic Germans was further fuelled by the fear of Nazi expansionism. In the *ERK Magazine*, it was commonplace to attack Baltic Germans as disloyal citizens and Nazi agents.⁹¹ Association with National Socialism or Nazi Germany could be used to discredit political opponents.⁹² Contributors to the ERK’s publications would have been aware of the normative expectation to position oneself against Nazi Germany and the Baltic Germans.

In an early issue of the *ERK Magazine*, the ERK-affiliated race scientist Juhan Aul lambasted what he called Nazi Germany’s “political anthropology”.⁹³ He highlighted the prejudice inherent in German studies of the racial composition of ethnic Estonians.⁹⁴ He also ridiculed German myths of Aryan superiority and racial purity as scientifically baseless: “It has long been clear in anthropology that talking about the Aryan race or German blood is as absurd as talking about a

90 J. Maide. II Ülemaailmse Välis-Eesti Kongressi puhul. – ERK, 1933, 1, 7, 192.

91 T. Karjahärm. Unistus Euroopast. Argo, Tallinn, 2003, 92–95.

92 See *ibid.*, 91; A. Kasekamp. The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia, 75–76.

93 See J. Aul. Poliitilisest antropoloogist. – ERK, 1933, 1, 7, 190–191.

94 J. Aul. Kirjandust. – ERK, 1934, 2, 9–10, 171–172; K. Kalling, L. Heapost. Racial Identity and Physical Anthropology, 94.

blond dictionary or a long-headed grammar".⁹⁵ In the context of the *ERK Magazine*, Aul's anti-German polemics established his nationalist credentials and promoted his self-fashioning as the leading racial expert in Estonia.

Nevertheless, following Lundborg's and the SIRB's methodology, Aul reproduced a racial hierarchy of whiteness that divided the Estonian population into the Nordic type, the East Baltic type, the light mixed type, the dark mixed type, and the dark type.⁹⁶ In his research, Estonia's own Nordic racial element received outsized attention.⁹⁷ Driven by nationalist sentiments, Aul tried to prove that the Nordic racial core area should have included most of Estonia, especially the Western coastal region.⁹⁸ He was also among the first Estonian racial theorists to problematise the existence of the "dark types" as alien to the Estonian nation. These "individuals with dark brown to black-brown hair and with dark eyes", he argued, constituted a "foreign body in our national body" (*ein Fremdkörper in unserem Volkskörper*).⁹⁹ Despite his criticism of German racial myths of superiority and purity, Aul perpetuated the racial politics of classification and exclusion in his research.

In one of his contributions to the *ERK Magazine*, the EEGS-affiliated genealogist Adolf Perandi gave a positive twist to Nazi Germany's obsession with racial origins. In an earlier public talk, Perandi had criticised the unscientific Nazi politicisation of the Aryan race.¹⁰⁰ Here, however, he warmly received Nazi Germany's Civil Service Law of 1933 and subsequent decrees, which made it compulsory for civil servants and political leaders of the Nazi party to provide proofs of their ancestral origins and racial acceptability.¹⁰¹ Although acknowledging antisemitism and discrimination as the dark sides of the "Aryan racial movement", Perandi still welcomed the objective to "sow faith in people in their own abilities", as well as greater public interest and involvement in researching family ancestry, as the "positive aspects".¹⁰² For him, genealogy was as a nationalist and eugenic tool which, among others, could uncover the hereditary origin of Estonia's Baltic German minority and Germanised

95 J. Aul. Poliitilisest antropoloogias, 191.

96 J. Aul. Anthropologische Forschungen in Eesti. K. Mattiesen, Tartu, 1936, 11.

97 See, for example, J. Aul. Põhja tõu osatähtsusest ja levikust Eestis, 79–86.

98 Ibid., 80–83.

99 J. Aul. Anthropologische Forschungen in Eesti, 11, 13.

100 Kes on aarialased? – Vaba Sõna, 25.10.1934.

101 A. Perandi. Genealoogia rahvuslikke ülesandeid. – ERK, 1935, 3, 9–10, 177. For an overview of Nazi legal requirements for racial proof, see E. Ehrenreich. *The Nazi Ancestral Proof: Genealogy, Racial Science, and the Final Solution*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2007, 58–70.

102 A. Perandi. Genealoogia rahvuslikke ülesandeid, 177–178.

Estonians.¹⁰³ Curiously, Nazi imposition of ancestral proof requirements became an inspiration to Perandi due to a shared interest in identifying those people considered to be inauthentically German.

In March 1936, the *ERK Magazine* published the eugenicist Juhan Vilms's summary of the Tallinn ERK's closed-door discussion about intermarriage and miscegenation. Partially a response to Nazi Germany's Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour of September 1935, which prohibited marital and sexual relations between Jews and Germans, the summary tacitly rejected what the ERK considered to be a futile attempt to regulate racial mixing through legislation: intermarriage would continue to happen, it claimed, and no legal decree could ban it.¹⁰⁴ Instead, the summary sought to convince its readers of the tangible harms of marrying non-Estonians. According to its cost-benefit analysis, intermarriage offered no promise of higher fertility or more talented offspring, as some pre-independence Estonian intellectuals alleged; instead, it would only increase domestic disharmony, hinder children's intellectual development, and affect their patriotic mentality.¹⁰⁵ In particular, the ERK framed its objection to intermarriage between Estonians and non-Estonians as primarily motivated by not only German and Russian expansionism, but also the fear that ethnic Estonians would be assimilated into the German and Russian minority communities.¹⁰⁶ But the summary also betrayed a sense of eugenic anxiety in its reference to intermarriage as a matter of the Estonian nation's "biological-psychological life".¹⁰⁷ Against the backdrop of extreme eugenic legislations in Nazi Germany, the ERK trod carefully when phrasing its disapproval of intermarriage and miscegenation.

Indeed, the ERK had ambiguous attitudes towards racial purity and miscegenation. On the one hand, it believed that the German myth of racial purity justified Baltic German colonialism and promoted Nazi expansionism. ERK members lambasted the Baltic German nobility's claim to a pure lineage as mere fantasy. They highlighted that the Germans, including their role models and prominent representatives, were in fact racially mixed.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, racial mixing became

103 Ibid., 180; A. Perandi. Genealoogia senine viljelemine tuleviku ülesanded Eestis. – ERK, 1937, 5, 7–8, 161, 163–164.

104 J. Vilms. Segaabielud rahvuspoliitiliselt. – ERK, 1936, 4, 1, 19. For the Nuremberg Laws, see P. Weindling. *Health, Race, and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism, 1870–1945*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, 530–532.

105 J. Vilms. *Segaabielud rahvuspoliitiliselt*, 18–20.

106 See also K. Kalling. *The Application of Eugenics*, 58–59.

107 J. Vilms. *Segaabielud rahvuspoliitiliselt*, 20.

108 J. Aul. *Poliitilisest antropoloogias*, 191–192; O. Liiv. *Eesti sakslaste päritolu. – Tähiseid: Eestluse aastaraamat*, 63–64.

increasingly conceptualised as a liability. While ERK racial ideologues such as Aul and Vilms maintained that the Estonians were a racially mixed people, they saw it primarily as a regrettable *fait accompli*, an attitude ranging from Aul's insistence on the "biological inevitability" of racial mixture to Vilms's assertion that it happened historically through coercion.¹⁰⁹ Intermarriage, Vilms insisted, offered no benefit but only harmed to the national organism, and had to be avoided to prevent future miscegenation.¹¹⁰ Thus, the ERK deemed it imperative to sustain a relative degree of purity and to prevent further miscegenation.

It was precisely when the ERK sharpened its criticism against German racial myths, therefore, that it became tempted to borrow the same tropes to create the Estonians' own myth of racial purity. This tendency was evident among the first generation of professional Estonian historians, who believed that historical research should "serve Estonian interests".¹¹¹ Many of these historians, such as Juhan Vasar, Hendrik Sepp, Evald Blumfeldt, and Otto Liiv, joined or collaborated with the ERK. Following a nationalist agenda of historical research, they focused on historical factors – such as the myth of the "good old Swedish times" – behind the Estonian nation's survival over the centuries.¹¹²

In an ERK-published collection in 1935, Liiv claimed that the Estonians enjoyed a much higher degree of relative racial purity than the Baltic Germans, contrasting the Baltic German "international" racial blend with the "indigenous" and "purer" Estonian peasant stock.¹¹³ The purpose of his comparative racial analysis was manifold: Liiv sought to discredit the founding myth of Baltic German superiority; to refute the historical prevalence of Estonian intermarriage with foreign elements; and most importantly, to establish the genealogy of the Estonian nation through the uninterrupted lineage of Estonian peasants who had "settled in the same place at least since the [Livonian] Order's time".¹¹⁴ He credited racial purity as the reason behind the Estonians' survival under Baltic German subjugation, and hinted at the Baltic German nobility's racial degeneration due to frequent mixing as the cause of its eventual

109 J. Aul. *Eestlaste tõuline kuuluvus*, 42; J. Vilms. *Segaabeliud rahvuspoliitiliselt*, 19.

110 J. Vilms. *Segaabeliud rahvuspoliitiliselt*, 18–20.

111 M. Tamm. *History as Cultural Memory: Mnemohistory and the Construction of the Estonian Nation*. – *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2008, 39, 4, 504.

112 See J. Vasar. *Meie rahvusliku ajaloo ülesannetest ja orientatsioonist*. – ERK, 1933, 1, 5, 120–121; H. Sepp. *Võõrast mõjust, eriti venestumishädaohust enne Eesti iseseisvust*. – ERK, 1933, 1, 3, 6–71; H. Sepp. *Ajaloolilisi mõjusid eesti rahvuse säilitamisel*. – ERK, 1935, 3, 1, 10–14. For the pro-Swedish tendency in interwar Estonian historiography, see M. Kuldkepp. *The Scandinavian Connection*, 325–326.

113 O. Liiv. *Eesti sakslaste päritolu*, 64, 67.

114 *Ibid.*, 67.

removal from power. Despite Liiv's subversion of the German racial myth of racial purity, he adapted it to construct a radical nationalist narrative of Estonian superiority and self-preservation not unlike the German original.

CONCLUSION

The ERK and their publications demonstrate how Estonian intellectuals participated in the transnational exchanges of racial and eugenic thinking in the interwar period. The ERK became a crucial platform where radical nationalist thinkers appropriated ideologies of race and eugenics for the Estonian context. The eugenic promise to improve national quality appealed to the ERK's strong belief in biological determinism and nationalist anxieties of assimilation and denationalisation. Inspired by Swedish approaches, ERK ideologues promoted Estonians' Nordic racial belonging and reproduced a racial hierarchy of whiteness. The ERK's elitist outlook and significant number of eugenic-minded members also explain why it often looked to racial and eugenic ideas for inspiration.

ERK ideologues strategically navigated the transnational exchanges of racial and eugenic thinking. In their calculated replies to Swedish and German racial ideas as well as eugenic development, they often resorted to similar ideas to promote their own racial and eugenic agenda. Despite anti-German sentiments, the ERK's commentaries about racial purity and miscegenation remained ambivalent. The *ERK Magazine* and other ERK publications revealed the limits of radical nationalist criticism of German racial thinking and eugenic policies.

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RASSILINE JA EUGENILINE
MÕTLEMINE SÕDADEVAHELISES
EESTIS: EESTI RAHVUSLASTE KLUBI
JA ERK AJAKIRI

Paris Pin-Yu Chen

Artikkel käsitleb juhtumiuuringuna Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubi (ERK) ja selle publikatsioone rassilise ja eugeenilise mõtlemise teemal rahvus-ülese mõttevahetuse seisukohalt. Radikaalsete rahvuslaste jaoks oli ERK näol tegemist üliolulise platvormiga rassiliste ja eugeeniliste ideoloogiate siirdamiseks ja kohandamiseks Eesti konteksti. Eugeeniliste ideede saamiseks hoidis Eesti haritlaskond end kursis Rootsi ja Saksa uuemate eugeenikaalaste arengutega.

Tartus baseerunud paremradikaalne rahvuslik rühmitus ERK meelitas oma ridadesse Eesti ühiskonna kõrgemaid kihte. ERK kiire levik teistesse linnadesse kulmineerus ERK-de Liidu nimelise katuseorganisatsiooni loomisega. Vaikiva ajastu perioodil kajastus ERK-de Liidu valitsusmeelne hoiak ka ERK ajakirja toimetamises. ERK-ga liitusid paljud eugeenikud ja eugeenikast huvitatud haritlased, ühtlasi tegi ERK rahvusliku ja eugeenikaalase agenda edendamiseks koostööd Eesti Eugeneika ja Genealoogia Seltsiga.

ERK võttis omaks eugeenikaalase lubaduse parandada rahvuse kvaliteeti. See tõi kaasa ettepanekud muuta elustiili, haridust ja ühiskonda laiemalt eugeeniliste põhimõtete kasutuselevõtu kaudu. Samuti uskus ERK, et rass määrab riigi arengu, elujõulisuse ja potentsiaali. Seistes silmitsi vastamata küsimusega eesti rahvuse tõulise kuuluvuse kohta, oli osa ERK varasest tegevusest suunatud sellele, et leida rahuldav vastus rahvusluse ja Eesti riikluse õigustamiseks. See ajendas jõuliselt eitama eestlaste väidetavat mittevalget rassipärandit ja toetama n-ö Põhja tõu identiteeti. ERK üldine n-ö Baltoskandia suunitlus andis ERK ideoloogidele veel ühe põhjuse Põhja tõu sideme edendamiseks.

ERK ideoloog Juhan Aul sai eugeenikaalasteks ja rassiteemalisteks uuringuteks inspiratsiooni Rootsi Riiklikust Rassibioloogia Instituudist (SIRB). Luues valgesusel põhinevat rassihierarhiat, mis tõstis esile Põhja tõutüübi ja käsitles „tumedaid tõutüüpe“ probleemseks, järgis Aul SIRB-i meetodikat. Auli eesmärgist kasutada eugeenika tööriistana enda välja pakutud antropomeetrilist andmebaasi peegeldus SIRB-i direktori Herman Lundborgi ambitsioonikas plaan.

ERK ajakiri ja teised väljaanded näitasid ERK kriitika piiratust Saksa rassiteooria ja eugeenika vastu. Tihti püüti artiklites leida tasakaalu Saksa-teemalise kriitika ning oma rassiliste ja eugeeniliste ideede levitamise vahel. ERK kahepalgelisus rassipuhtuse ja tõusegunemise teemal oli eriti silmapaistev. Kuigi ERK diskrediteeris Saksa rassiteemalisi müüte, loodi rahvusliku meeletatuse tõukel eestlaste jaoks sarnased müüdid.