

INTRODUCTION

## Scientific medicine and the politics of public health: Minorities in interwar Eastern Europe

Nadav Davidovitch<sup>1,\*</sup> and Rakefet Zalashik<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Public Health, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Beersheba, Israel and <sup>2</sup>School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

\*Corresponding author. Email: [nadavd@bgu.ac.il](mailto:nadavd@bgu.ac.il)

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The aim of this topical issue is to examine the politics of health in relation to minorities' health rights in interwar Eastern Europe. This volume brings a fresh look on both the history of interwar Eastern Europe and the history of medicine and public health, by creating a dialogue between these two seemingly unrelated fields, showing the importance of medicine and public health to the understanding of the social and political dimensions of minorities in interwar Eastern Europe. For a long time, the history of medicine was preoccupied mainly with the history of great physicians, scientists, medical discoveries, and the history of the medical profession and institutions. Since the 1970s the “social history turn,” which took place mainly as a result of the entrance of professional social historians, has changed the field of history of medicine dramatically (Huisman and Warner 2004). Social historians were especially valuable as they called attention to the history of social institutions in which healing flourished. Historians of public health pointed to the role of medicine and health in the economic and political spheres, including the rise of the nation state as well as the globalization process (Porter 1999).

After World War I, the question of minorities' civil rights had intensified both in the old countries as well as in the newly created states, which had an important influence on the life of the minorities who lived in their territories. At the same time, many governments as well as medical scientists and social reformers perceived that medicine and public health during the interwar period played an important role in improving the everyday life of populations. The rising relevance of new scientific discoveries in a variety of fields, ranging from bacteriology to physiology, started to have an impact on everyday life by promoting practices such as vaccinations, school and work hygiene, nutrition, and screening programs (Tomes 1998). These new practices gave impetus to the establishment of public health institutions that were perceived as crucial to nation-building projects around the world. These new initiatives were also deeply influenced by the politics of health, which involved questions such as, what are the priorities, who should be included as targets for the new public health interventions, and what is the relation between the new scientific discoveries and the new social and political context that emerged after the Great War. Some minorities perceived the rise of public health as an opportunity to reform their communities, but others approached the new public health measures with suspicion. And in any case, many were ambiguous about the introduction of public health measures into their lives.

Scholars of Jewish studies have paid little attention to health and science as a shaping force in the lives of Jews and other minorities in modernity, with some exceptions. Noah Efron explored the relations between science and Judaism and showed how Zionism used science in the process of nation-building. John Efron analyzed the role of medicine and race in the German perception and German-Jews self-perception from the Middle Ages until the 1930s (Efron 2008). Sander Gilman,

in various works examined Jewish identity and medicine at the turn of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century (Gilman 1984 and 2013). Mitchell Hart has brought attention to the responses of Jewish physicians and scientists within Jewish law to modern medicine and especially to accusations that Jews were degenerate and sick (Hart 2000). These works focused mainly on Western and Central Europe.

The topic of medicine and minorities in Eastern Europe brings an analytically rich perspective to examine the development of public health, the emergence of social medicine, the struggle with epidemics, the creation of new medical professions, and the introduction of preventive medicine. It also offers a good case-study to examine the interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish medical professionals, as well as the dialogue between scientific centers in the United States and Western and Eastern Europe. The transfer of knowledge, expertise, technologies, and the implementations of this transfer in different local contexts are the central foci of this volume. Focusing on Eastern Europe and on Jews and non-Jews can contribute to deepening and diversifying the current analyses of interwar health mainly in the US and Western Europe.

The articles in this collection bring to light the great potential for integrating this variety of historical research interests, representing different countries, different research methodologies, and different historical sources. The volume offers new insights on health and minorities in interwar Eastern Europe from various perspectives. Marina Mogilner, in her article on the American Relief Association's campaign in the Volga Region, surveys representatives of the "project of medicalized modernity" to explore the influence of the medicalized language of Jewish politics and modern Jewish medical practices on the emerging new Jewish national subjectivity. Marek Tuszewicki, in his paper on correspondence columns published in the Yiddish medical press in Poland, uses Yiddish medical journals to understand popular Jewish notions of health and disease within a process of modernization. Katharina Kreuder-Sonnen shows the role of weekly epidemiological reporting in Warsaw in the process of epidemiological nation building and also state and nation building by drawing a clear line between healthy-clean and dirty-infectious ethnicities. Per Anders Rudling points to the role of eugenics and racial anthropology in Ukrainian nationalist thought from the 1930s to the 1960s in mapping diverse populations in the vast territories claimed by Ukrainian Nationalists within a radical nationalist tradition. Rakefet Zalashik and Nadav Davidovitch analyze the role of gender in promoting scientific medicine in the context the transnational knowledge exchange and philanthropy between the United States and Eastern Europe as manifested in the case of nursing education.

The interwar period was a decisive moment for international health. In the aftermath of the First World War, relief organizations had a crucial role to play. The devastating effects of 1914-1918 and then the Russian Civil War affected all aspects of human life from the economy to public health. Thus, postwar Europe became the focus of relief and reconstruction. Though the concept of global health changed greatly since its beginning, infection control and delivery of healthcare remained important core features of global health. Yet though different, the implementation of various public health interventions in international health had a major influence on the development of medical research and on the exchange of ideas and people (Birn, Pillay, and Holtz 2017). Many relief agencies from Western Europe and the United States, which believed in an ideology of development and progress, attempted to introduce constructive programs in medicine and public health. This activity had political, cultural, and humanitarian aspects. Philanthropic organizations founded in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were now utilized in the spread of a cultural agenda through their activities abroad. Jewish and non-Jewish organizations such as the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and the Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations wanted to bring the "American way" to the European context through science, the management of projects, and the rebuilding of communities.

Historians have long sought to make sense of the spectacular, if contested, consolidation and legitimation of the attempts of nation-states to regulate and discipline bodies and minds. Different studies point out the significant roles of science and medicine in the formation of national

identity as well as in the building of nations. As historians of medicine, Roger Cooter and John Pickstone noted:

In many ways, the history of medicine in the twentieth century is the history of the twentieth century. Through the century, medicine became increasingly central to changing expectations of life and death and to institutions of welfare and education. It pervasively and profoundly influenced the ways in which people came to maintain their bodies, to mind their minds and to interact with the world around them. (Cooter and Pickstone 2000, xiii)

In the last decades, new themes have emerged in the history of medicine and public health that show the richness of the field. Such themes include, among others: the use of scientific justification for inclusive/exclusive social strategies by the state; technologies and ideas moving beyond national borders; the role of health care workers, medical practices, and technologies in shaping social practices; the spread of diseases and epidemics; the encounter between different systems of knowledge and the tension it creates; and continuities and discontinuities between experiences, ideas, and medical policies along different periods and spaces.

Nevertheless, despite the opening up of these large new areas of research, most historians do not consider the full potential and relevance of the history of medicine and public health to their work. This is probably more acute in the case of Eastern European history. The interrelations between the rise of the modern welfare state and the public health infrastructure from the nineteenth century onwards have had a profound impact on our understanding of the twentieth century, including the formation and elimination of borders, nations, and diseases. As such, the history of medicine has profound importance for historians. The history of medicine and public health is not only the history of hospitals, clinics, and the medical profession, but of health defined as physical, mental, and social wellbeing. The history of medicine and public health is no longer a separate narrow field cultivated entirely by and for physicians. These subjects have been attracting the interest of social historians for several decades. Therefore, we have taken advantage of collecting the present papers, written by leading experts in the fields of both history of medicine and public health and of Eastern European history, to show the vast potential in combining these fields.

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**Nadav Davidovitch** is a public health physician and historian of public health. He is Professor and Director, School of Public Health at the Faculty of Health Sciences, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. His current research deals with health policy; health inequities; vaccination policy; health and immigration; environmental health and public health history and ethics. He has authored or co-authored more than 130 papers and book chapters, co-edited 6 volumes and books. Among his recent publications is *Bioethics and Biopolitics in Israel* (Co-editor, Cambridge University Press, 2018).

**Rakefet Zalashik** is a historian of history of medicine, German Studies and Israel Studies. She is a researcher in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Edinburgh. Her research deals with combat trauma, health and migration in Israel and Europe, and the history of bioethics. She has authored and co-authored more than 50 papers and book chapters, co-edited 5 volumes and books. Among her recent publications are “Medical Welfare in Interwar Europe. The Collaboration between JDC and OZE-TOZ Organizations,” in *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism*, edited by Avinoam Patt, Atina Grossmann, Linda Levi and Maud Mandel (Wayne State University Press, forthcoming 2019), and “The Shadow of the Holocaust and the Emergence of Bioethics in Israel.” *Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift*, 130, S183-S186 (2018).