HEQA - Ana Fumurescu

[00:00:00] **Jack Schneider:** Welcome to *HEQ&A*, the podcast of the *History of Education Quarterly*. I'm your host, *HEQ* co-editor Jack Schneider. Every few weeks, we'll dive into recent work from the journal, asking authors how their projects challenge or extend what we know about a topic, exploring what's interesting and surprising about it, and then taking a step back to consider broader implications. In the second half of the show, we turn our sights to teaching. So, if you're an educator, make sure to stick around until the end. And now let's hear from one of our authors.

[00:00:48] **Ana Fumurescu:** I'm Ana Fumurescu, PhD candidate in history at the University of Pittsburgh, and I'm the author of Nurturing Eight Grade Social Organisms: School, Hygiene, and Body Politic in the State in Late Imperial Russia. I know my title focuses specifically on Imperial Russia, but the article itself takes a comparative look at the state of school hygiene, and by this, I mean the legislation, practice regarding the inspection supervision, and treatment of school children in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. And I do this, this comparative angle because the nineteenth century development of school hygiene practices was entangled in a much broader attempt on the part of European great powers to stave off national degeneration, real or perceived.

[00:01:32] So in this atmosphere, policing and tending to children's bodies became a matter of policing and tending to the body politic to the very future of the state. So with this in mind, my article explores the attempts of these states to legislate and implement school hygiene measures with an eye to chronology. Essentially, I asked who did it first, why, and how. What I discovered, and this is my main argument, is that late Imperial Russia legislated, and also began to implement, more widespread school hygiene measures earlier, and with more involvement from its public, then the Western states in which theories of school hygiene first developed and were by this time better established in the literature.

[00:02:12] And I argue that Russia was able to do this because its autocratic state ideology--which is the very feature that relegated it to backward, quote unquote status in the eyes of many at the time--and since (really) gave the state and its subjects a shared vocabulary that they could use to rationalize the implementation of really quite comprehensive school hygiene measures, as we will see in a minute. So essentially what I talk about in this article, uh, how I unfold this argument is that autocracy saw society and the state as being coterminous, as forming a great social organism, as my title says. And this gave--rhetorically speaking, a lot of this is on the realm of theory--each and every subject, a role to play in sustaining the body politic, sustaining the state.

[00:03:01] And this idea is scored very well with the vocabulary of school hygiene or really a public hygiene more broadly for anyone familiar with public hygiene literature in this period. Um, because school hygiene, public hygiene debates, literature at this time, um, very often employed biological metaphors to explain the significance of individual health to the health of the entire state, the entire society. And perhaps, obviously, um, children who are the youngest and most vulnerable "organs," um, of those great social organism became prime targets for physicians in Imperial Russia as a result. So by the turn of the twentieth century, we see all of the states in my study empowering physicians to periodically inspect school buildings, um. In France and Germany, we also see some efforts to inspect school children themselves, but these efforts were usually confined to urban public schools.

And in the United States and Britain, these types of inspections really only happen in isolated instances, if at all. But in Imperial Russia school doctors had much greater responsibility by this time, by the turn of the 20th century.

[00:04:07] So unlike the colleagues to the West, school doctors in Tsarist Russia were empowered to regularly inspect, supervise, and treat school children. Um, they were considered servants of the state here. They had state pensions and, um, numerous job perks and also had a very wide range of responsibilities, which extended to all levels of learning. So not just public urban schools, but private schools as well and rural schools, um, as a result as well. So there's really just a huge umbrella of coverage for their responsibilities.

[00:04:38] What this meant in theory, at least, because practice is always a different matter in the Tsarist state, but, uh, we see some in there as well. Um, all school children in the Russian Empire would be subject to consistent and comprehensive examinations of their physical and mental health. And on top of that, they would also receive treatment while in school, which differed it very much from what we see in the other states.

[00:05:02] On top of this as well, school hygiene will not be contained within school walls. Um, and I delve into this a little bit in my article. Um, the fact that social hygienists in Imperial Russia understood public hygiene and especially school hygiene as really being this holistic project that entailed the cooperation of all members of society. Everyone had a stake in it. Everyone had to do their part. So this included, not just school doctors, but school teachers, school children, and also the parents of these children, um, in their homes were supposed to guard the health of their children. So this is ver-- it was very much all in line with this organic theory of the state: that each had to do their part for the health of the body politic and this differed significantly from what we find in France, Germany, Britain, and the United States in the same period.

[00:05:48] Um, in these self-proclaimed liberal states--we won't get into Foucault here [chuckle]--it was a lot more difficult to get away with any comprehensive school hygiene programs, because there were just a lot more rhetorical dissonance, um, between, on the one hand, the vocabulary of school hygiene, which was really quite invasive and all encompassing, and then on the other, the liberal contracteering ideology championed by these states. This ideology, unlike the organic ideology of the state, saw the body politic, not as an organic whole, but rather as an artificial aggregation of consenting individuals. And as a result, their ideology place a lot more importance on individual's rights over their own bodies, which of course we know didn't quite play out, from Foucault and a million other studies. But, um, this is what, what the ideology at least, um, maintained in theory. So that's why we see a lot more restraint in the field of school hygiene in these states.

[00:06:49] Um, not only was there a far less systematic inspection of school children's health and even less compulsory inspection, there was also, and--this was very explicitly stated--no treatment within schools. This was just a big no-no in these states. So, um, on top of this, um, you know, obviously this meant that school doctors' responsibilities in these states were quite limited or a lot more limited than the Tsarist state. Um, and on top of this school doctors and these other things, um, regularly complaints of their low social status, of their poor pay, the fact that they basically had no benefits, no incentives to work--in fact, there were plenty of incentives not to work as school doctors--um, and also of the constant pushback they got not just from their states, but from parents

themselves, for instance, who, um, especially in the United States did not want anyone else dictating, you know, what their children, what kind of treatment their children would receive. Um, and also from their colleagues in private practice who constantly disparaged school doctors and, um, really lobbied hard to keep their patients themselves. Um, so school doctors could not, you know, do--could not treat school children in the schools.

[00:08:01] So these tensions, as I already mentioned, for the most part did not exist in Imperial Russia. Physicians were state employees with growing social prestige by the turn of the twentieth century. And, um, they had extensive duties and they were incentivized to stay out of private practice. And I'd go into this more in my article. And on top of that, they had this vocabulary with which they could justify their agenda and call on all Russian subjects to help uphold. So, this is broadly what my article covers, what my article is about, and what my argument is.

[00:08:34] My article contributes on the one hand to scholarship on civil society in Imperial Russia and on the other to public health scholarship. So briefly speaking literature on civil society and Imperial Russia initially denied the existence of civil society within an autocratic state, which was pretty evident that it would do so because it employed a very limited definition of this term, essentially drawn from the usage of this term in a west European context. Of course the scholars were hard pressed to find anything that truly resembled autonomous bourgeois social action in Imperial Russia, but over the past several decades now, this scholarship has broadened its understandings of civil society to include more amorphous stirrings, um, I would say of individual initiative with examples such as volunteering associations or a peasant activism in the rural elementary schools (in the [Russian word]), um, to name just a few things. There are many other examples.

[00:09:33] Um, and my article speaks to this (now) well established trend. It suggests yet another facet of what I think we may call civil society in late Imperial Russia. And it argues as I already mentioned, in this case, it least these initiatives on the part of autocratic subjects came about because not in spite of the autocratic nature of the Tsarist state, which is what a lot of the literature on the subject tends to focus on: these tensions between subjects and the state. Whereas here I show an opportunity for converging interests.

[00:10:05] As concerns my contributions to public health scholarship, my article contributes to discussions within the field regarding the interplay between governance models and public health measures. And a fair bit of work has already been done on this front, there certainly is plenty of literature out there. But I would say that the survey literature has typically left very little room for consideration of autocratic Russia, and also little consideration for the role discourse has played in aiding or preventing governments from implementing public health measures, which incidentally, um, and entirely accidentally on my part, since I did the bulk of this project in 2019, I think it also shed light on [COVID-19] pandemic measures across the world today.

[00:10:53] So in terms of the broader implications, like I already mentioned, I think this study helps us in thinking about today, uh, when it comes to the pandemic, when it comes to, um, the relationship between the state and its citizenry, the types of, uh, legislation that states are able to pass when it comes to pandemic measures and the level of public support expected from this legislation. Um, I think this study, um, could maybe inform us as to that-- as to what exactly, um, is

the, is the interplay of these forces here? How do these policies come about? Um, and what essentially helps to dictate public support for these policies?

[00:11:40] **Jack Schneider:** The second half of the show is dedicated to thinking about teaching. We ask authors to put on their guest lecturer hats and take students into the weeds. What should they pay attention to, methodologically speaking? What else should they be reading if they want to take a deep dive into the historiography? And where are there opportunities for further research?

[00:12:00] **Ana Fumurescu:** In terms of methodology, I would say that there's not an awful lot that is surprising in my [chuckles] articles. So I first went through school hygiene conference reports, periodicals, and government directives to piece together a chronology of school hygiene legislation in the states I examined. And then I analyzed discourses around school hygiene and state ideology within those same publications.

[00:12:24] So what I would say students should pay attention to is not necessarily the way I worked with the sources that I had as [opposed to?] my general approach to this project, which was that I took a bird's-eye view of a field into which others have already done very comprehensive, very interesting, deep dives. And I looked beyond the single state, both in terms of my analytical angle and of my sources, which came from multiple, um, in this case, digital, archives in several different languages. I think it's something that many of us tend to forget when we're sort of deep in the trenches of our own specialty. For me, neither Russian history nor public hygiene are my main fields of study. So it was much easier for me to, to take this approach in this project than it has been with my dissertation. And I think this is something that's important for all of us to keep in mind that it's useful every now and then to take a step back and look at the bigger picture and explore questions that are maybe so simple, so sort of there for the taking, that they are maybe easy to overlook.

[00:13:29] If students are interested in delving deeper into this topic when it comes to the civil society and Imperial Russia portion of it, um, I would suggest titles such as Joseph Bradley's *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia*. Most works by Ben Eklof, um, especially on Russian peasants schools, um, as well as Yanni Kotsonis, *States of Obligation*. And, um, Ekaterina Pravilova's *A Public Empire* and many others besides.

[00:13:59] When it comes to the public hygiene side of things, especially when it comes to literature, dealing with how types of state governance affects public hygiene measures, some works that I found particularly useful have been Peter Baldwin's *Contagion and the State in Europe*, um, or Andrew Aisenberg's, *Contagion: Disease, Government, and the 'Social Question' in Nineteenth-Century France*, um, as well as for the US case Richard Meckel's *Classrooms and Clinics*. So these are just some of the books that I found most useful, studies I found most useful in putting this article together, and there are many others besides of course.

[00:14:38] When it comes to further research on this topic, I would say that, um, there's definitely a lot more that can be done with it. Um, research of the "down in the trenches" variety. Um, this is the kind of research that I was myself unable to do, and since this project is completely unrelated to my dissertation will likely [chuckles] not be able to do anytime soon. So, um, I would love if those with deep field knowledge and access to unpublished archival sources-- because like I said, I dealt with digital sources here-- in really any of the states my article deals with, but I think especially in Russia, could put a lot of, a lot of meat on the bones of my thesis and really delve much deeper into the

actual implementation of school hygiene measures as well schoolchildren's and also school doctors, school teachers, parents experience, uh, experiences with it, which is really what drew me to this project in the first place and unfortunately, I wasn't really able to get to those questions myself, but I would say that this is sort of the next logical step, as well as, in terms of Imperial Russia, really digging through the-- comprehensively-- through the legislation, through the measures that the state took and just filling in any gaps that might be on this sort of initial overview of this topic.

[00:15:58] **Jack Schneider:** Check out *History of Education Quarterly* online. The journal is published by Cambridge University Press and it's carried by most academic libraries. You should also be sure to follow *HEQ* Twitter handle: @histedquarterly, which regularly sends out free read-only versions of articles, and the show's Twitter handle @HEQandA. And don't forget, subscribe to the show so you don't miss forthcoming episodes. We're available on iTunes, Stitcher, and wherever you get your podcasts. HEQ&A is produced at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. Our producer is Jennifer Berkshire and our theme music is by Ryan Shaw. I'm Jack Schneider. Thanks for joining us.