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### Working Class and Eugenic Feminism in the Nordic Countries, 1890-1940 – Who is the Eugenic Polluter?

The concept eugenic feminism, developed by Mary Ziegler (2008), describes the involvement of feminists in the early twentieth century in eugenic movements. In the Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland feminists not only took a special interest in eugenic ideology, like in most other Western countries but they were also able to actively use eugenics for their own empowerment for example as medical experts, social workers or in politics,

Eugenic feminist ideas had an impact on all women in the Nordic countries. This paper focuses on the impact eugenic feminism had on description and perception of working class women. The special emphasis is on the presentation of female working class bodies and sexualities by feminists interested in eugenics from the middle class.

The main question of the paper is how eugenic feminists delimited female working class bodies in context of eugenic thinking from on the one hand middle class bodies and on the other hand from the category of underclass women`s bodies.

The paper argues that working class women and their bodies formed a third category of women in the eugenic discourses, beside the category of middle class women, worthy of reproduction and underclass women, unworthy of reproduction. Working class women were considered as victims of the capitalist system, forced to leave their home for work and neglect their children. However, education and social reforms directed towards them could provide them the necessary assistance to return to their female duties at home and become worthy mothers of the nation.

#### Biography:

Merle Wessel (b. 1985) is a Doctoral Candidate at the Centre for Nordic Studies/ University of Helsinki. In her doctoral dissertation “Eugenic Feminism in the Nordic Countries, ca. 1920-1940 – Concepts of Body, Sexuality and Citizenship” she discusses the involvement of Nordic feminists in the eugenic debates in the interwar period and its effects on Nordic women`s bodies, sexuality and their social positioning in the early

Nordic welfare states. Her main research interests are Nordic history, gender history and history of the body in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.