Eugenics without the state: anarchism in Catalonia, 1900–1937

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Current historiography has considered eugenics to be an emanation from state structures or a movement which sought to appeal to the state in order to implement eugenic reform. This paper examines the limitations of that view and argues that it is necessary to expand our horizons to consider particularly working-class eugenics movements that were based on the dissemination of knowledge about sex and which did not aspire to positions of political power. The paper argues that anarchism, with its contradictory practice afforded by the convulsive social situation of the Civil War in Spain, allows us to assess critically the parameters of the social action of eugenics, its many alliances, and its struggle for existence in changing political circumstances not of its own making.

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1. Introduction

Recent studies have rejected stable or essential characteristics for ‘eugenics’, acknowledging the diversity of driving motivations and theoretical underpinnings from which its varied expressions were established (Adams, 1990). Two authors have recently urged a comparative transnational analysis of the reception of eugenic ideas (Barrett & Kurzman, 2004). The shift away from considering national movements alone and the broadening of histories of eugenics outside of its ‘mainline’ expression (Kevles, 1985) has allowed attention to focus on eugenics movements formerly thought to be on the geographical and scientific periphery (Stepan, 1991). Such a shift has also enabled the discussion of a much wider range of ideas and practices to be subsumed under the title of ‘eugenics’.

Despite these developments, however, certain assumptions as to what inspired eugenics or what eugenics was ‘really’ about still prevail. Barrett and Kurzman (2004, p. 497) regard eugenics as a movement that attempted to change policies ‘in a context of broad ideological support and little organized opposition, through non-confrontational mobilization that bordered, at times, on public relations or lobbying’. The same authors also note that, by and large, proponents of eugenics were confined to an emerging group of professional scientists and the ‘educated’ classes. Indeed, ‘The privileged social position of eugenicists and their consensus-mobilization approach no doubt helped them to capitalize on international political opportunities and to speak the elite and often elitist discourse of global culture’ (ibid.). In order to assess the success of this transnational movement, Barrett and Kurzman use two indicators: one representing the nature and characteristics of the activity of eugenics movement in terms of propaganda, publications and general activity and the second representing ‘eugenic-inspired state policy’ (ibid., p. 498).

From the perspective of the history of eugenics in Spain, however, such comments by Barrett and Kurzman need to be questioned. In the Spanish case, it is also not possible to assert that eugenicists of different stripes enjoyed ‘broad ideological support and little organized opposition’ (ibid., p. 497), or that most of those who advocated eugenics came from the professional or scientific class, or even that eugenics in all its different expressions appealed to the state for the implementation of policy. In contrast, some eugenicists in Spain suffered from a ban on their activities in 1928 and, given their lack of durable institutionalization, were

1 Adams has pointed to four myths related to eugenics that hamper progress in its historiography. These are: the notion of a ‘mainline’ eugenics arising in Britain, Germany and the United States as a benchmark to judge other eugenics movements; the reliance on a model of eugenics informed exclusively or predominantly by theories of heredity established by Gregor Mendel in detriment to others; the assumption that all eugenics was racist; and, finally, the consideration of eugenics as inherently rightist in political terms.

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confronted with a difficult and uphill struggle to make their voices heard. Other advocates of eugenics, particularly those involved in the working-class movement of anarchism in Spain, and particularly in the eastern region of Catalonia, did not look initially to the state to implement eugenic policies. Given these realities, which may recur in other national spaces, we have to ask: what happens to our understanding of eugenics when some of its expressions were not dedicated to working within the institutions of the state? How do we consider the reception and implementation of eugenic ideas in working-class movements which attempted to operate outside of and against the state?

1. The rejection of notions of ‘mainline’ eugenics

After Mark Adams’s work (Adams, 1990), Nancy Stepan’s (1991) analysis of eugenics in Latin America further decentered ‘mainline’ eugenics and illustrated the variety of notions of heredity entertained and the nature of the issues broached by eugenics movements in that continent. These movements considered sex education, improvements in hygiene, health care and child pedagogy, to name some areas, to be integral to their eugens.2 Other more recent work on Cuba (García González & Álvarez Peláez, 1999) and Australia (Wyndham, 2003), to name two examples, has reinforced a similar perspective.

I would like to add two further dimensions to these authors’ reconsideration of the boundaries of eugenics. Firstly, rather than trying to delimit what eugenics ‘really’ was, I take eugenics to be what movements, groups or individuals, acting ‘in the name of eugenics’ (Kevles, 1985) actually took eugenics to be. Secondly, I follow Ian Hacking’s notion of ‘dynamic nominalism’ (Hacking, 1990) as a key to understanding the development of eugenics movements and language. Hacking (1990, p. 78) discusses the creation of certain sexual identities in the late nineteenth century. These sexual identities do not describe anything real or factual about the world, he argues; they are ways of understanding and categorizing human activities. In the same way, there is nothing in eugenics that corresponds to anything ‘real’ or pre-defined about itself. Eugenics can be understood as being invented—from a dynamic nominalist perspective it generated its own realities as it developed. While on the one hand eugenics does not have to perform to a checklist of contents, on the other hand, we should not consider related campaigns, such as anti-tuberculosis or social hygiene measures, as ‘really about’ eugenics unless they were integrated into the concerns of eugenics movements.

2. Eugenics in Spain: the ‘official’ eugenics movement

Eugenics in Spain, as already stated, corresponded to variety of tendencies with low levels of institutionalization, a characteristic that makes it difficult to talk of a ‘eugenics movement’ at all. Rather than a unified movement, there were several regional centres with very different ideological and institutional realities from which eugenics was advocated, a characteristic that may well have reflected the fragmented scientific community of the period. On the one hand, there was what we might call an ‘official’ professionally oriented eugenics movement, connected to medical organizations or reviews and which was somehow linked to state structures.3 This official movement possessed no national eugenics organization as such, was centred on Madrid, and was generally unsuccessful in its aims until the early 1930s.

But largely outside of this official movement, we can see a cluster of social movements that spoke the language of eugenics from a variety of different perspectives. These were usually not integrated into professional medicine or state structures. This latter category included alternative currents of thought and practice such as nudist and vegetarian movements and anti-statist anarchism, all of which were notably strong in the eastern regions of Catalonia and the Levant.

2.1. The ‘take-off’ of the sexual sciences in Spain

The reception of eugenics in Spain is related to the ‘take-off’ of the sexual sciences in this country from 1850 and, in particular, to their most vociferous period from 1900 to 1936 (Vázquez García & Moreno Mengíbar, 1997, pp. 131–137; Cleminson & Amezúa, 1999). Eugenics is understood here as part of what Foucault has called ‘bio-power’: the maximization of individual and collective resources of a nation or a state against degeneration in order to promote the health and efficiency of the collective (Foucault, 1990, pp. 140–145). In this sense, eugenics forms part of a broader process of the disciplining of the population as part of ‘governmentality’ (Foucault, 1991; Dean, 1999). Discipline, the technologies of surveillance, and even self-correction, however, were techniques not limited to the institutions of the government or state but pervaded a much broader social and political milieu (see Gerodetti, 2008; Jiménez, 2008; Mottier, 2008; Rose, 1996, pp. 14, 114; Vázquez García, in preparation).

Although Francis Galton, generally understood to be the ‘founder’ of eugenics, was discussed in Spain in the sociological and philosophical Revista Europea in 1874, his impact was rather limited (Álvarez Peláez, 1988, p. 182). Eugenics had difficulty in finding a home for itself and the early movement was characterized by individual figures such as the Santander-born medical doctor Enrique Diego Madrazo, often held to be the ‘father’ of eugenics in Spain. Dr Madrazo (Cleminson, 2006) advocated the creation of a eugenic utopia by means of a one hundred year project of biological reform under the auspices of a socialist revolution. Outlining this project in his 1930 essay ‘Un siglo de civilización bajo la influencia eugenésica’ (‘A century of civilization under the influence of eugenics’), Madrazo envisaged a Eugenic Committee to be established in every locality as an emanation of the ‘executive power’ and vice-ridden can never form the socialist State’ (Madrazo, 1932, pp. 281–282).

2.2. The attempted institutionalization of eugenics in Spain

The early Catalan Institut Mèdic–Social embraced ‘bio-social’ debates on questions of illness and health, social hygiene and

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2 Donna Guy (2000), pp. 33–34, has discussed the first Pan-American Conference on Eugenics and Homiculture (which took place in Havana in 1927) in this light. A proposal at that conference suggested that governments should grade their populations into ‘good’, ‘doubtful’ and ‘bad’ genetic categories with a view to marriage. Delegates refused to support the code. Guy points out that many of them had been at the Fifth Pan-American Child Congress, also in Havana, two weeks earlier. In that event, delegates had taken a strong stand in favour of using social workers and environmental improvements to prevent family problems. Her example shows how many people active in eugenics were sceptical of the power of the state. It also shows how organizations and their memberships overlapped to a significant degree.

3 A similar aspiration to power in state structures can be seen in the development of psychiatry in Spain. Psychiatry tactically accepted its new role as arbiter in legal cases but was sceptical about the use of psychiatric knowledge for that purpose. On this paradox, see Campos Marín (1999a,b).

4 All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
environmental improvements. The short-lived national Instituto de Medicina Social (1919–1923) reenacted these debates (Álvarez Peláez, 1988b). Some of these issues would eventually find a home in the emerging Spanish eugenics movement. Other elements that would also be characteristic of particularly ‘Latin’ eugenics movements, such as ‘puericulture’, would reach levels of importance and institutionalization in the 1920s under the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera in the form of the National School of Puericulture (Huertas, 2000). Again, although these areas were not necessarily a part of ‘eugenics’ from their outset they formed part of a myriad of strategies for the improvement of the ‘race’.

Despite this rather uneven development, there was sufficient support for eugenic ideas in the country to enable the organization of the so called ‘First Spanish Eugenics Course’ of 1928. This programme, however, was to fall foul of Primo de Rivera’s regime, being accused of peddling ‘pornography’ although the real reason for the ban may have been a response to the Course’s harbouring of intellectual currents in opposition to the dictatorship (Trounson, 1928; Pérez Sanz & Bru Ripoll, 1987). The course had been conceived as a series of separate conferences to be reproduced in the prestigious Gaceta Médica Española and aimed to cover a wide range of issues including the laws of inheritance, physiology, philosophy, politics, morality, neo-Malthusianism, social hygiene and the economy (E. Noguera, 1934).

It was the ‘First Eugenics Days’ of 1933, however, that would constitute the foundational moment for the official Spanish eugenics movement. This impressive event, composed of several panels each of multiple talks, was organized in conjunction with the Gaceta Médica Española once more, the Professional Medical Students’ Association, and the Spanish branch of the World League for Sex Reform (WLSR) (Cleminson, 2003; Sinclair, 2003; Sinclair, 2007, pp. 111–113). It took place at the Madrid Faculty of Medicine between 21 April and 10 May 1933 and was, under the new democratic Republic, graced with the ‘presence of the authorities of the State’ (J. Noguera, 1934, p. 3). Certainly, the Minister of Education, Professor Fernando de los Ríos, who also held the Chair of Madrid’s Law Faculty, was present and gave a talk on eugenics in the university sphere (De los Ríos, 1934). As in 1928, the parameters of the event were wide ranging and rather than a fully formed movement we have the impression of something emerging out of the new ambience of scientific and political liberty afforded by the new political and social regime.

The director of the Gaceta, president of the Spanish branch of the WLSR, and co-organiser of the event, Juan Noguera, understood eugenics in the following broad terms:

Eugenics, on defining itself as race Hygiene, illustrates its huge scope, to the extent that within it all the biological sciences, all anthropological, philosophical, social, economic, political, artistic researches fit perfectly … Eugenics is the light in those ideals [which stand for] a nobler, more beautiful life and clarity in the scientific means to realize those ideals. (J. Noguera, 1934, pp. 4–5)

This eclecticism should not be taken somehow as proof of a lack of scientific underpinning at the event. Luis Huerta discussed inheritance from the perspective of Lamarck, Weismann and Galton (Huerta, 1934) and the medical researcher Jimena de la Vega discussed theories of inheritance from a Mendelian perspective (De la Vega, 1934). Technical discussions, nevertheless, were a minority part of the programme. By reading through the report on the event we get the impression of a deliberately broad sweep which tried to integrate approaches that may not have come together in the past. In this way, we see birth control, prostitution, health and safety at work, puericulture and ‘maternology’, studies on syphilis, cancer, endocrinology, neurology, psychoanalysis, hygiene, law, history, politics and literature all covered. Arguably, currents such as puericulture could now be seen as an integral part of eugenics in Spain.

Many of those speaking in 1933 came from the social and literary sphere and intended their comments as recommendations rather than impositions. But it is in the areas of prostitution, puericulture, public hygiene, pedagogy, law and politics that the question of the implementation of eugenics is firmly posed. Dr Yagüe y Espinosa, the secretary of the Sociedad Española de Higiene, advocated the introduction of a ‘certificado prenuncial’ (pre-marriage certificate) in order to ensure that the ‘degenerate’ did not marry and reproduce (Yagüe y Espinosa, 1934). Dr J. M. Otaola, a gynaecologist, a member of the Spanish branch of the WLSR and a prominent participant in the Gaceta, argued that medical doctors needed to draw a fine line between science and morality when it came to questions of sterilization. In the absence of any organism of the state to regulate procreation, Otaola argued, it came down to the medical doctor to impede conception in undesirable cases (Otaola, 1934, p. 296). This was a difficult task since doctors were not trained to take such decisions. While in Germany, Otaola noted, between fifty and one hundred women were sterilized each year (one must recall the date of writing, 1934, when the Nazi laws on compulsory sterilization had already been passed; see Proctor, 1988, pp. 95–117), in Spain where there was no juridical norm, at least one other doctor should be present to certify a sterilization procedure (Otaola, 1934, p. 300). Another medical doctor who spoke during the series, Dr César Juarros (1934), advocated the abolition rather than the regulation of prostitution by means of a combination of social change and legislation, and in particular the establishment of the ‘delito sanitario’ (a measure that would sanction venereal disease contagion). Abolitionist legislation was passed a year later, in 1935 (Guereña, 2003, pp. 387–397).

The section on eugenics and politics during the ‘Eugenics Days’ underscored the relationship between eugenics and political power invested in the state. The doctor in law Rodolfo Reyes, after a long historical excursion on the importance of the Spanish empire and the results, generally held as positive, of ‘misciegenation’ and its consequent mestizo culture, argued in favour of the Argentinean Juan Bautista Alberdi’s proposal ‘To govern is to populate’ (Reyes, 1934, p. 308).

However, it would be to over-simplify the kind of eugenics presented during the Eugenic Days if we were to declare it as predominantly ‘statist’. In fact, a wide variety of means were sought to introduce eugenic reform. Nonetheless, there were significant voices that called for the implementation of eugenics from positions of political power. Indeed, it is significant to note the number of medical doctors who took seats in parliament during the republican period (Glick, 1981), many of whom had some connection with eugenics. We can talk, therefore, of an aspirant medical class seeking to occupy positions of influence in the state apparatus in order to introduce a variety of health and education related measures conceivably under the banner of eugenic reform.

3. The ‘alternative’ eugenics movement: the Catalan anarchist engagement with eugenics

3.1. Social movements and communities without the State

Pierre Clastres (1989, p. 189) has argued that in anthropology the conception that certain ‘primitive’ societies are without a state entails an ethnocratic view that sees those social formations as suffering ‘the painful experience of a lack—the lack of the State—
which, try as they may, they will never make up’. These communities are depicted as primitive, lacking in progressive social development, uncivilized and bound eventually to succumb to ‘modern’ techniques of government. But in anthropology, as in the history of eugenics, the dismissal of movements that lack state apparatus or involvement in the state becomes a way of erasing historical diversity.

In the case of eugenics, there were movements that actively campaigned against the state as a resource for its implementation. Such was the case of those sectors of the anarchist movement that advocated eugenics in the east of Spain in the early twentieth century. Having subscribed to a broad programme of sex reform by means of neo-Malthusianism from the beginning of the twentieth century in reviews such as *Salud y Fuerza* (1904–1914) and by means of eugenics from the 1920s in reviews such as *Generación Consciente* (1923–1929), and *Estudios* (1929–1937), certain sectors of anarchism attempted to draw up a programme of venereal disease prevention, neo-Malthusianism and eugenics that would not, at least at its outset, be state driven or authoritarian (Nash, 1984; Cleminson, 2000; Masjuan, 2000).

This autonomous project was, however, only partly successful. Having relied on the advocacy of eugenics through sex education articles in anarchist reviews as its principal methodology up to 1936, when anarchism was confronted with the changed political and social situation brought about by the civil war and social revolution of 1936 its tactics underwent a significant change. The anarchist movement became integrated into rekindled state structures during the autumn of 1936, ostensibly in order to better organize the fight against the Nationalists, and a programme of eugenics was instigated under the auspices of the Catalan government’s newly established Sanitar i Assistència Social (SIAS) (Health and Social Sanitation Department) in which anarchist delegates participated. This programme coexisted with the ongoing anarchist advocacy of eugenics as an educational measure outside the parameters of the state in increasing tension. The maximum expression of this integration into state structures was the passing of what was termed the ‘eugenic reform’ of abortion in December 1936 under the banner of SIAS (Nash, 1983).6

In order to examine the anarchist movement’s attempted implementation of eugenics against the backdrop of the main concern of this article—the reliance or otherwise of eugenics movements on the power of the state or on state institutions—we now focus on three principal questions. Firstly, in order to set some context, we consider anarchist perspectives on general health-related issues as an example of part of a range of activities impinging on eugenic understandings. Secondly, we focus on some key debates on eugenics within anarchist reviews during the 1920s related particularly to questions of the implementation of eugenics and the problematic questions of coercion and voluntarism. Finally, anarchist practice during the early Civil War period (1936–1937) is analysed.

### 3.2. Anarchism and anti-statism in Spain

Anarchists had long derided the state as the manifestation of hierarchical and corrupt political power, an embodiment of capitalism, war and unequal social and economic relations. Anarchists in Spain attempted to instigate a self-managed stateless society, organized either into communes or articulated by revolutionary trade unions. Spanish anarchist reviews, through the juxtaposition of autodidactic workers, anarchist doctors, traditional medical figures and ‘naturist’ doctors, managed to produce a diverse health oriented, sexological and eugenic current in their movement that sought self-management in health, access to information outside of the dogma of the Catholic Church, an end to ‘sexual hypocrisy’ and the creation of a eugenically sounding proletariat as part of a revolution in bodies, mentalities and social conditions. While science was deemed a rational path towards human improvement (Cleminson, 2000), anarchists mistrusted institutionalized programmes of health and sex reform, having declared, for example, that they would not accept compulsory maternity credits (Porras, 1998) or sex reform ‘from above’ from an organization such as the WLSR, which was deemed bourgeois and ineffectual (Puente, 1932; Cleminson, 2003).

#### 3.3. The politics of health

As part of a broader positive evaluation of nature, anarchists in Spain argued that there were no natural illnesses; bad social organization was understood to produce disease. To quote the influential anarchist Revista Blanca:

> Natural living cures all illnesses … It is logical to assume that future societies, which above all else will care for health in order to provide happiness, will not be composed of large cities, products of capitalist exploitation which centralizes production, but rather by colonies which will be situated where they are most beneficial for health and not where they provide the most profit. (Redacción, 1923a, pp. 2–3)7

One prominent medical figure in the anarchist movement, Dr Isaac Puente, argued that capitalism, the Church and the state had created a ‘race of the poor’, overcome with poverty, tuberculosis and venereal disease. This ‘race’ was not the same kind of entity talked about in German Nazi or Spanish nationalist movements but had more in common with the human race in general or the working class (Puente, 1929).

As part of the attempt to create structures independent of the state those medical workers affiliated to the anarcho-syndicalist CNT (National Confederation of Labour, established 1910) undertook to create a National Federation of Health Unions in 1931 in accordance with the CNT’s recently adopted policy. The foundation stone of this organization would be the concept of ‘health communism’, available to all. Dr Augusto Alcrudo, prior to the establishment of the Federation, had stated that ‘health is liberating because health is freedom. Our health communism will be liberating for all those who are suffering’ (Alcrudo, 1931, p. 24). Once the Federation was established, its mission was understood in the following terms: ‘It is only in a society which is founded on economic independence and the wellbeing of all that health facilities can possibly be provided efficiently. The right to health must be guaranteed by the social organization, which should provide all members with food, clothing, housing, education and technical provision’ (Anon., 1931, p. 6). Part of the attempt to make this reality was the CNT’s own Organización Sanitaria Obrera (Workers’ Health Organization), providing a more formalized structure than individual anarchist doctors giving health advice in reviews or in free or reduced cost surgeries (Jiménez Lucena & Molero Mesa, 2003; see also Martí Boscà, 2002).

#### 3.4. The creation of a ‘conscious generation’: practical neo-Malthusianism and eugenics

The argument in favour of the self-management of health was reiterated extensively in the pages of anarchist reviews. The first

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6 It is necessary to make a further distinction, in our view, between eugenics and ‘sex reform’. Many eugenists were opposed to sex reform as too radical or ineffective. See Weindling (1989), pp. 5, 146, and Weiss (1987), pp. 131–132. For a discussion of sex reform and its relation to eugenics in Spain, see Cleminson (1994). For a more recent discussion in general terms see Barrett and Kurzman (2004).

7 See also Cleminson (1995a,b); Barona (2003).
issue of Generación Consciente, edited by Juan J. Pastor, argued that if workers wanted 'universal happiness synthesized by love and beauty' they should not reproduce in large numbers 'unconsciously' (hence the title of the review) but should elevate their 'physical and moral education in order to combat that which is iniquitous and inhuman ... and degenerate in this corrupt society' (Redacción, 1923b, p. 1). In 1930, the successor to Generación Consciente, Estudios, declared that 'We understand that the social problem, the most important of all human problems, is a profound question of culture and biology, of moral and physical improvement' (Redacción, 1930a, p. 2). Estudios vowed that it would continue the neo-Malthusian and eugenic task initiated by Generación Consciente, faithful to its aim of creating a generation 'conscious' and capable of understanding matters related to sexuality, reproduction and health (Redacción, 1930b).

While much discourse in anarchist reviews on these matters was articulated by medical figures, it is important to recognize, as we have noted above, that medical figures did not dominate to the exclusion of all others. Given the limitations of space here, we concentrate primarily here on medical figures but as we will see, others from a non-professional background also participated in debates.

The medical doctor Isaac Puente was one major contributor to these questions. Puente, in an article on ‘Eugenics’ in 1923, argued that eugenic reform was vital in order to destroy sexual ignorance and the privatization of knowledge in the hands of doctors (Puente, 1923a). It was necessary, however, not to follow the route taken by some unnamed countries that had advocated ‘absurd and anti-scientific legislative solutions’, which did nothing other than reveal their ‘derision of individual freedom [and] the complete misunderstanding of the problem’ (ibid., p. 33). Instead of such impositions, an educational route was favoured. Puente (ibid., pp. 33–34) argued that it was necessary to make known the laws of inheritance in order to avoid pathological inheritance, ‘the monstrosity which can only be forgiven because of ignorance’. It was necessary to educate children rationally and teach them about sexuality in order to cultivate in them feelings of ‘Health, Goodness and Beauty’. These qualities would be useful later in the ‘amorous embrace’.

In this article and the following one a month later on Inheritance, Puente (1923b) discussed the laws of heredity, focusing on Darwin, Mendel, William Roux, Jacques Loeb and Weismann, principally. The four ‘essentially practical’ conclusions to the article advised that: parents should avoid reproduction in those cases where ‘the integrity and health’ of the child would be placed in jeopardy; parents should counter the transmission of any physical or moral defects by choosing a mate with the opposite qualities; good food and physical and psychic balance should be sought in order to maximize the selection of the best characteristics; and, finally, the couple should seek optimum conditions whereby the ejaculation of sperm and the ‘genital secretions’ of the woman were abundant, thus facilitating conception.

In addition to advocating this practical form of eugenics, Puente, writing under the pseudonym Un Médico Rural (A Rural Doctor), advocated neo-Malthusianism as a means of preventing conception when this was undesirable, as in the case of the illness of the mother (Un Médico Rural, 1924a). Neo-Malthusian techniques were also promoted as a means of satisfying sexual pleasure without resulting in procreation (Un Médico Rural, 1924b). Anarchists advocated the control of women’s bodies by themselves and workers’ self-regulation in terms of the quantity and quality of offspring by means of the provision of what were at the time illegal barrier and chemical methods against conception.

Puente also argued that it was necessary to avoid ‘dysgenic’ factors in the reproduction of the species, including alcohol and tobacco and to refrain from the attempt to conceive when suffering from a venereal disease (syphilis at the beginning of the twentieth century in Spain was a scourge), and even to avoid offspring when the family’s economic position would not permit it. Such advice touched upon Platonic ideas that had become part of folk knowledge: Puente (1924) advocated the reproductive act when parents were young, during springtime and in the morning. This combination of hereditary and environmental rationales was to characterize the understanding of eugenics of many anarchists up to and during the Civil War. Such a broad picture was reinforced by the non-anarchist but influential contributor to these reviews, Luis Huerta, an educationalist with an interest in eugenics. For Huerta (1930), eugenics was composed of four main principles of ‘sanitation’: the sanitation of the ‘race’ (eugenics); the sanitation of the environment (euthenics); that of finance (the economy); and the sanitation of the mind (education, ethics and schooling for all).

### 3.5. The question of sterilization

The extent to which the forced sterilization of the ‘unfit’ formed an integral part of eugenics practice worldwide is a matter of historical debate. Sterilization, of the male by means of vasectomy or Roentgen rays and of the female by the extirpation of the ovaries, formed part of a ‘negative’ eugenics strategy for many eugenics movements (e.g. Sweden, Germany). As a eugenic measure, it was relied upon less by ‘Latin’ movements, although it was by no means absent (Stepan, 1991, passim; Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d’Eugénique, 1937).

In the anarchist milieu, sterilization was discussed, and even advocated as a voluntary means of controlling fertility. Such was the case of a group of anarchists in Bordeaux, reported on in the Catalan anarchist press in the mid-1930s (Faure, 1935: Puente, 1935). However, the limits of sterilization were not always so clearly set. The thorny question of coercive sterilization as a eugenic measure is now discussed.

Two rather different articles on eugenic questions by the former member of the English Eugenics Society, Dr Nicolás Amador, were published in Generación Consciente in 1924 and 1925 (Amador, 1924, 1925). The ideas contained in these articles merited a warning from the editor of Generación Consciente to say that, while the views expressed were deemed worthy of respect, the review’s stance was very different from that of Amador. Amador (1924, p. 215) wrote of society being dominated by ‘biologically inferior elements’ and ‘morons … vagabonds, professional criminals, prostitutes, [and] ruffians’ of various descriptions. In order to deal with these people, it was necessary to proceed apace with their segregation and isolation and, better still, to proceed with their sterilization as part of an ‘eliminatory eugenics’. ‘Euthenics’, or environmental eugenics, was rejected in favour of the creation, following the German Fritz Lenz, of colonies in order to allow for ‘optimum biological inheritance’. An Institute of Race Biology would be founded by the state to implement and monitor these procedures (Amador, 1925).

This support for classic negative eugenics was hotly contested by Isaac Puente two months later (Puente, 1925). The anarchist doctor rejected Amador’s articles as prejudiced and dogmatic and pointed out that in general three main solutions had been proposed in order to prevent the procreation of ‘eugenically unsound’ individuals. The first option relied on the prohibition of marriage by means of the medical examination and certificate. However,

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8 This position was maintained by anarchists throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Luis Hernández Alfonso, in his Eugenesia y derecho a vivir (1933) argued that ‘The task of the doctor is not to dictate norms for the social structure of future society but to afford those experiences and curative, hygienic methods’ that medicine has developed (cited in Álvarez Peláez, 1995, p. 39).
all this did, according to Puente, was to push the question into the realm of the clandestine as couples would continue to procreate with or without the certificate. The second alternative was sterilization. The third possibility was segregation or isolation in special work colonies. Puente reasoned that for the state, the most attractive option would be sterilization as it was the cheapest. Isolation on agricultural or industrial colonies would be a more humane solution, disliked by the state because of the costs entailed, but it would allow those individuals to become useful for the collective and to overcome the limitations forced upon them by capitalism—lack of culture, ignorance and lack of awareness or ‘inconsciencia’. For Puente, however, instead of negative eugenics, what was required was ‘preventive eugenics’ including so called ‘trophology’, a food-based therapy, naturalism, the cultivation of the personality, and the broadening of one’s ‘conciencia’. Better than all these measures would be ‘full Liberty’, which would purify ‘the social ambience as the Sun [purifies] the contents of the sewers’ (ibid., p. 299). Rather than the imposition of eugenic measures, it was advisable to ‘hope for more from the culture and acceptance of the public’ (Puente, 1928, p. 67).

Such was the importance of the question of the implementation of eugenics in Generación Consciente that the editor launched a new section in December 1926 asking supporters of eugenics from inside and outside of the anarchist movement to evaluate eugenics as a means of aiding the reproduction of the ‘best’ types. The survey, according to the editor, emphasized that it was worth trying to put eugenics into practice even though only a handful of conscious individuals might actually be able to do so. Furthermore, it was necessary to prosecute eugenics ‘without the need for coercion’ (Redacción, 1926, p. 292). The editor continued: it was necessary to foment the best characteristics of the ‘race’ and prevent the most noxious ones from being reproduced. There were three main ways of carrying this out: the union of the most favourable types; the ‘neutralization’ of defective characters by means of marriage with an opposing type; and, the prevention of the reproduction of those least fit, in whom sterilization would be a ‘last resort’.

What means would be sought to implement such a process? Generación Consciente explained its position in the following terms: ‘Respectful of the human personality, enemies of all imposition external to the individual, we aspire, rather than trusting this eugenic labour to governments, to achieve it by means of man’s control over himself’ (Redacción, 1928, p. 293). It was vital, the text continued, for the individual to be conscious of his or her own acts and especially of the reproductive act. However, towards the end of declaration, a more disturbing concession slipped in: ‘We believe that this is not practicable for those in whom their inheritance, illness or vice has destroyed their human personality, almost to the point of erasing them in their entirety’ (ibid.). In these groups, would sterilization still be ‘voluntary’? If such individuals were not capable of taking such a decision, could sterilization be voluntary in their case?

Despite these vagaries, it would appear that as near a consensus as is possible to detect was articulated around the mid-1930s, with a number of key articles, in this case coming primarily from non-medical figures, opposing ‘eugenic sterilization’. In 1929 the French anarchist E. Armand wrote that eugenics and sterilization were important issues for the state precisely because the state was keen that the ‘abnormal’ became no longer one of its problems (Armand et al., 1929, pp. 30–31). De Campollano (1934) viewed science and the law as incompatible and, in the light of Nazi abuses, understood sterilization to be a tool of the oppressor. Laws would be passed but poverty, militarism and vice would be left intact by ineffective governments. Instead of legislation, what was required was the recognition that ‘progress obtained by man over the ages in all spheres of human activity was due to his own initiative and genius’ (ibid., p. 30). The Belgian anarchist Hem Day would write in 1935 that it was impossible to foresee whether sterilization laws would pave the road for the ‘triumph of brutality over man’, ‘political reprisals’ and ‘dogmatic absolutism’ (Day, 1935, pp. 15–16).

4. The limits of the anarchist project: eugenics within the state

This paper argues finally that anarchism, with its contradictory practice provoked by the convulsive social situation of the Civil War in Spain, allows us to assess critically the parameters of the social action of eugenics, its many alliances and its struggle for existence and implementation in changing political circumstances.

The failed army coup d’état of July 1936, which attempted to destroy the republican government, resulted in a three-year civil war. The republican state collapsed in many parts of Spain, especially Catalonia, and was replaced, at least temporarily, by union power, workers’ committees, and agrarian and industrial collectives. The anarcho-syndicalist union (CNT) was at the forefront of this revolutionary movement but soon the worsening war situation against Franco’s troops called for greater emphasis to be placed on winning the war and less on prosecuting the revolution. Part of this process entailed the CNT’s historic volte face on participation in government as representatives entered both the Catalan and national government in the autumn of 1936. In the national government, Federica Montseny took the portfolio of Health Minister (Montseny, 1937; Taverna, 2005, pp. 197–226) and in Catalonia, the young psychiatrist Dr Félix Martí Ibáñez, the writer of many articles on ‘eugenic reform’ in Estudios, took control of SIAS on 30 September 1936 (Anon., 1936, p. 24). Anarchists remained in these positions of power until May 1937.

While the writing of articles and pamphlets on issues related to sexuality and eugenics continued during and after this period, Martí Ibáñez, once outside of SIAS, reflected on the eugenic project undertaken under his auspices. In a number of publications from 1937 and 1938 he reported on the ‘eugenic reform’ of the abortion decree passed on 25 December 1936, the anti-venereal disease campaigns taken to the front, the project to introduce ‘liberatorios de prostitución’ (centres for the ‘rehabilitation’ of prostitutes by offering training and alternative means of earning a living), a partially successful Maternity House run in conjunction with the anarchist women’s organization, Mujeres Libres (Free Women), the project for youth sex counselling services and the idea of an Institute of Sexual Sciences (Cleminson, 2000, pp. 232–253).

While clearly many of these endeavours were faithful to previous anarchist discussions on environmental factors in eugenics, the need for sex advice and a large element of educational resources in order to alter sexual behaviour, it is deeply ironic that implementation of some aspects of anarchist eugenics was effected from the institution that anarchists explicitly decried: the state. Anarchist negotiation of questions of coercion, sterilization and eugenic reform is illustrative of the tensions that existed in the implementation of eugenics. There are unifying factors, however, between anarchist eugenics within and without the state: both forms can be understood as part of a rational campaign for the improvement of the ‘race’. Both strategies—whether as an educational undertaking in order to alter voluntarily the individual’s practice or as a measure introduced through a quasi-governmental body—can be understood as forming part of the techniques of ‘governmentality’, or government of the self, internalized in the individual and collective body.

In terms of the historiography of eugenics, what the anarchist implementation of eugenics illustrates is the sheer diversity of eugenic practice in one national space as well as the diversity of eugenics internationally—not all eugenics hailed from professional medical organizations. Anarchist eugenics also shows the existence of an avowedly non-statist eugenics movement that, despite its...
limitations, sought to put into practice eugenics insights, at least in many of its manifestations and for some time, outside the apparatus of the state. Where anarchism did not achieve this may well illustrate some of the limitations of anarchist practice or the entry of ‘bourgeois’ thought in its ranks (Álvarez Peláez, 1995a). Rather than this, the question of the implementation of eugenics can be understood as an example of the problematic relationship between the ‘social’ and the ‘scientific’, something that became vital to both eugenics and anarchism in Catalonia in the 1920s and 1930s.

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