

# Neo-Malthusianism and eugenics in the struggle over meaning in the Spanish anarchist press, 1900-1936

*Jorge Molero-Mesa*

Professor, Facultad de Medicina/Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona.  
Barcelona – Cataluña – Spain  
jorge.molero@uab.cat

*Isabel Jiménez-Lucena*

Professor, Facultad de Medicina/Universidad de Málaga.  
Málaga – Málaga – Spain  
isajimenez@uma.es

*Carlos Tabernero-Holgado*

Professor, Facultad de Medicina/Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona.  
Barcelona – Cataluña – Spain  
carlos.tabernero@uab.cat

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the debate on neo-Malthusianism and eugenics in Spanish anarchist publications in the first third of the last century. Using theoretical frameworks that have been under-utilized thus far, it provides new interpretations of what the term “eugenics” meant in pro-anarchist neo-Malthusian journals. Framed within a “struggle over meaning,” Spanish neo-Malthusianism re-signified eugenic ideas in an attempt to recover political ground that had been lost in the drive to promote individual control of human sexuality. This study also analyzes the role of the anarcho-syndicalist movement’s “direct action” strategy, in which actions undertaken by individualist anarchists were seen as a complement to revolutionary action.

Keywords: neo-Malthusianism; eugenics; anarchism; anarcho-syndicalism; degenerationism.



You can die of love just as you can die of hunger.  
Luis Bulffi (1904, p.2)

The sexual question is at the root of the social question.  
G. Hardy [Gabriel Giroud] (1933, p.36)

This article analyzes the debate on eugenics and neo-Malthusianism that took place in Spanish anarchist publications in the first third of the last century. Incorporating anarchist sources gives us a better understanding of the mechanisms whereby hegemonic medicine became a global design (Mignolo, 2012), and how it arrived at the notion of a normalized body subject to common, universal patterns, both in health and in disease states. The topic we are dealing with is very complex, due to the large number of variables related to human sexuality and the collective, populational approach to it, in which biological issues are only one of many elements that need to be taken into account. In order to help overcome this reductive view, we wish to contribute to the debate on neo-Malthusianism and eugenics by analyzing elements that might help open up new lines of research on the history of the regulation and scientific-medical normalization of the body, and on the forms of resistance to that regulation, which attempted to reinterpret and re-signify the meaning of certain words and acts.

In the period being studied, there were various responses to the problem of the “proletarian population surplus” and the phenomenon of “racial degeneracy” that accompanied industrial development in western countries. The most visible aspect of this, which was cited as evidence, was the dire poverty of hundreds of thousands of wage-earning employees. The chronic physical frailness characteristically seen in the impoverished meant that the growing numbers of people contracting diseases like tuberculosis and syphilis came almost exclusively from the working class. Along with alcoholism, these pathologies made up the so-called “race degeneration triad” for all social groups (Molero-Mesa, 1999). In a European context of social conflict and class struggle, two theories emerged to deal with these problems: neo-Malthusianism and eugenics.

Our underlying hypothesis is that throughout the first half of the twentieth century, there was a struggle between opposing social groups over the meaning (Jiménez-Lucena, Molero-Mesa, Tabernero-Holgado, forthcoming) of the signifiers “neo-Malthusianism” and “eugenics.” If we assume that “power inhabits meaning” and that meanings “are a fundamental resource of social power” (Escobar, 2010, p.30), we must acknowledge that struggles over meaning are essential in a social dynamic that channels and resolves conflicts over scientific and cultural distribution (Escobar, 2005, p.123-144). In this case, the conflicts stem from differing biopolitical attitudes (Jiménez-Lucena, Molero-Mesa, 2009, 2011, 2014) regarding the extent and purpose of contraceptive practices in the public and private sphere. Likewise, cultural struggles, including struggles over meaning, play an important role in the configuration of hegemonic/subaltern relationships, as defined by Gramsci, who considers this duality in a non-dichotomous, shifting way, rejecting the idea that some hegemonic groups impose meanings on other subaltern groups, which passively accept them (Jiménez-Lucena, Molero-Mesa, Tabernero-Holgado, forthcoming;

Jiménez-Lucena, 2014). Following this relational perspective, we argue that these groups are inserted in dialogic relations that mark their discourses, interests and strategies.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, heterogeneous social groups in subaltern situations (as is the case for anarchism) may function as agents who actively define sociobiological processes involving human beings. This gives rise to conflicts over power distribution that generate negotiations and forms of resistance, arguments and counterarguments, allowing us to problematize the origin of physical normalization processes and the reasons for the success of this “local history” generated by biopower, which became hegemonic through eugenic measures characteristically found in social reform policies, prevailing over other power devices such as the legal system, the Army, the educational system or religion.

There is now a large body of literature analyzing the development of neo-Malthusian and eugenic movements in western countries. True historiographical specializations have emerged, as in the case of research on Nazi racial hygiene policies. A review of this literature is beyond the scope of this article (Bashford, Levinell, 2010). Our approach to the issue is based on studies that link neo-Malthusianism to libertarian movements in the first third of the twentieth century in Spain; we wish to discuss the embrace of eugenic ideas by anarcho-libertarian groups, and its implications for individualist anarchist thought and practice.<sup>2</sup>

For the purposes of this article, we shall use three journals as our principal sources, each of which was, in turn, the main vehicle for the spread of neo-Malthusianism in Spain in the first third of the twentieth century: *Salud y Fuerza* (1904-1914), *Generación Consciente* (1923-1928) and *Estudios* (1928-1937); also *Solidaridad Obrera* (1907-1939), the publication of the National Labor Confederation (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, referred to hereafter as CNT).

## **The characteristics of Spanish neo-Malthusianism**

The start of the neo-Malthusian movement in Spain has been studied by a number of authors, who have approached it in terms of the history of sexuality, law, education, science and medicine, focusing on various different aspects and methodologies (Masjuan, 2000; Díez, 2001; Girón Sierra, 2005; Cleminson, 2008). Based on their work, we can reconstruct the theoretical framework and practices of the Spanish section of the League for Human Regeneration (Liga para la Regeneración Humana) led by the anarchist Luis Bulffi de Quintana (b. 1867). The league’s publication was *Salud y Fuerza*, and its general principles remained the same throughout the period under study, as we shall see later.

Briefly put, the movement supported conscious procreation on the part of the proletariat as a way to fight the state and the church, and it sought to achieve this by providing rational teachings that gave workers access to scientific knowledge about human reproduction from the sociological, economic and biological point of view. This knowledge, according to the proponents of neo-Malthusianism, was being kept “secret” by medical professionals and by the moral and legal mechanisms of the established social system, whose interests were served by keeping the proletariat ignorant so as to perpetuate an army of barely-surviving workers living in abject poverty (Tabernero-Holgado, Jiménez-Lucena, Molero-Mesa, 2013). For neo-Malthusianism, large families meant greater poverty in these families’ homes, with

all the attendant consequences (hunger, serious illnesses, acceptance of poorly-paid jobs...). This meant it was important to share contraceptive methods and make them available to working people of both sexes.

The journal *Salud y Fuerza* was able to promote this type of learning by using reader participation to help manage contraceptive knowledge, thus turning non-experts into active epistemological agents. It not only conveyed information by experts to be assimilated by lay people, but co-constructed knowledge through communication practices that set up an exchange with readers. In this dynamic of self-management of knowledge in a dialogic relationship with hegemonic thought, struggles over meaning were struggles for resources, both symbolic and material, in the process of (de)stabilizing social systems (Tabernero-Holgado, Jiménez-Lucena, Molero-Mesa, 2013; Jiménez-Lucena, Molero-Mesa, Tabernero-Holgado, forthcoming; Jiménez-Lucena, 2014).

This can be seen in various sections of the journal during its 10 years in print. One of them invited readers to interpret drawings showing the social reality of the working-class family with many or few children (Figure 1) or to interpret the paths humanity might take to reach social revolution (Figure 2). The winner of this last contest ended his interpretation of the rocks on the cliff as follows: "Let us be resolute and wade through social revolution, by way of womb strikes (huelgas de vientre), as well as strikes by politicians, clergy, the Army and employees, with no fear that any of them will fail, and we shall reach the land of anarchism strong and determined" (Oromil, 1906, p.74).

The goals of Spanish neo-Malthusianism are summed up in the article "New humanity" ("Nueva humanidad"), by the anarchist José Chueca (d. 1927), published in *Salud y Fuerza* in 1913 and reprinted, significantly, in *Generación Consciente* ten years later (Chueca, 1923). Chueca argued that the human race was "degenerate" and pointed to the usual vices and diseases (syphilis, alcoholism, tuberculosis), but above all, he argued that poverty and ignorance were responsible for creating and maintaining the problem of degeneracy. As a result, among the multiple possible ways to combat them he proposes two "whose virtue is immediately revealed: one is conscious, limited procreation, and the other is rationalist, comprehensive education" (Chueca, 1913, p.290). Chueca believed (p.290) that neo-Malthusianism showed people how to choose their descendants by using contraceptive methods, and he predicted that: "In a few generations a physically beautiful, strong, healthy species could be obtained. And if those generations were taught and given a solid, rational, scientific education, then mankind would become ideal, superior, good, and wise as a result."

Meanwhile, the neo-Malthusianist G. Hardy (the pseudonym of Gabriel Giroud)<sup>3</sup> wrote in *Salud y Fuerza* about the advantages of this method of population control as opposed to other, traditional ones such as war or epidemics:

neo-Malthusian methods solve the problem of the proportions that must be established between the population and the means of subsistence without brutality, trouble, or pain... From society's point of view, these methods facilitate the resolution of problems that bedevil the working world: if there are fewer workers competing for jobs, salaries will be higher, the work will be less tiring, and strikes will be successfully suppressed by workers. From the point of view of individuals and families, people will live more comfortably, air and light will penetrate their hovels, children will be



Figure 1: Cover (*Salud y Fuerza*, 1906b, p.65)

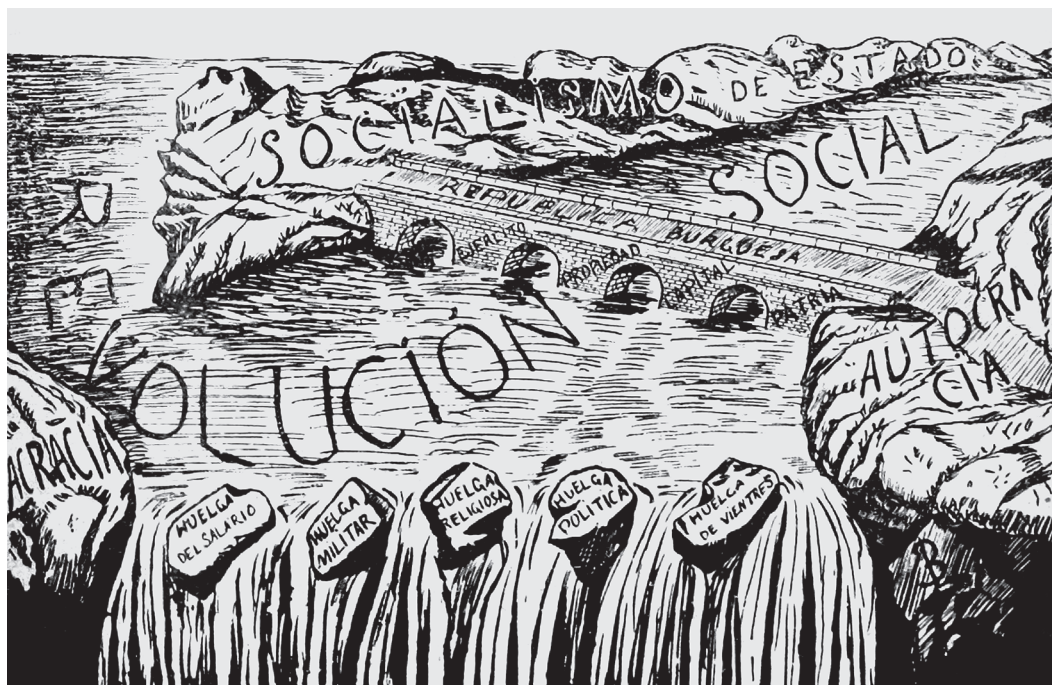


Figure 2: Cover (*Salud y Fuerza*, 1906a, p.49)

better brought up, politer and better-educated, women will be emancipated, and men will use their leisure time intelligently, since the terrible anguish of overwork will no longer absorb all their strength and brain-power. In short, this will lead to a new era in the near future, an era in which we shall barely remember those criminal powers: the state, capital, and the church (Giroud, 1904, p.4).

We can see that in diagnosing the etiology of the problem, there is an appeal to social and biological factors, using the talking-points of radical environmentalism (Jiménez-Lucena, 2004; Molero-Mesa, Jiménez-Lucena, 2010) and neo-Malthusianism adapted to the circumstances and interests of libertarian ideas. Luis Bulffi, the director of the journal *Salud y Fuerza*, declared in the first issue that one of the magazine's fundamental goals was "to publicize the positive data of 'biological and social science' so that future generations will not be like our own" (Bulffi, 1904, p.1; emphasis added).

Logically, therefore, Spanish neo-Malthusianism was linked from the outset to the progressive educational goals of the Modern School (Escuela Moderna), which helped spread libertarian-style neo-Malthusianism in Spain before *Salud y Fuerza* was founded. The most famous figure associated with the Modern School was Francisco Ferrer Guardia (1859-1909) (Masjuan, 2000; Girón Sierra, Molero-Mesa, 2016). It is no accident that it was in a publication of the Modern School, the *Boletín de la Escuela Moderna*, that Paul Robin (1901, p.32) laid out the principles of comprehensive education and the three ideas for promoting human happiness: "Good birth, good education, good social organization," a slogan that saw both neo-Malthusianism and education as the two indispensable pillars of a libertarian revolution. Articles from neo-Malthusian journals and books were found in rationalist schools founded by libertarian Athenaeums and labor unions belonging to the CNT. In 1934, the journal *Solidaridad Obrera* declared that, as a result of the action of the rationalist schools, "every one of the young pupils in the libertarian Athenaeums knows more about hygiene, physical fitness and heliotherapy than ninety per cent of our rural schoolteachers" (Otra vez..., 1934, p.3).

### Scientific legitimization of neo-Malthusianism

Neo-Malthusianism used science to legitimize itself socially and to validate its theories. It did so both to attack its traditional enemies (the State, the Church, and the Army), whom it accused of being "immoral," and to provide a basis for its own concept of morality. Indeed, neo-Malthusians argued that along with the need to avoid procreation, medical knowledge showed there was a physiological need for people to use their sexual organs regularly. According to neo-Malthusians, medical science had demonstrated that sexual continence led to physical disorders similar to those associated with non-use of other organs like the stomach or the lungs:

A physiological law that is of utterly supreme importance [sic] and that applies in a rigorously universal manner orders that every member in our bodies must be exercised normally in order to remain healthy and vigorous. The eyes, the organs of sight, need light; the legs and arms, the organs of locomotion, need movement; intelligence requires thought; our appetites and our passions need normal pleasures, otherwise they gradually weaken and inevitably become diseased (Leyes..., 1911, p.132).

The damage was not only physical, but also psychological:

An individual's nature is so closely related to sexual pleasures, and our happiness and health so depend on being able to indulge them naturally and normally, that we cannot ignore them without causing great damage to the body (Leyes..., 1911, p.132).

Neo-Malthusian rational education should therefore be rounded out by teaching new moral ideas based on scientific knowledge, since whereas official morality was based "on hypocrisy, aversion and scorn for matters relating to sex, which it considers shameful, neo-Malthusianism teaches the legitimacy and nobility of the sexual function." Therefore, "just as we teach the primary role of digestion or respiration, we should teach the primary role of copulation and fertilization" (Grandjean, 1910, p.64).

We can now understand the vehement opposition this movement aroused in hegemonic thought. These highly subversive ideas and practices threatened the central nexus of the capitalist-natalist system, and an entire way of looking at society based on religious, authoritarian thinking about sexual repression – in other words, all the ways that biopower was exercised.

Given the traditional forms of direct physical repression and the disparaged "civilized" social control carried out by the legal system and the church, it is not strange that the response to neo-Malthusianism arose from the very science it was advocating: the hegemonic system's attempt to regain control of the population was called eugenics and it was intended to dispute the territory gained by neo-Malthusianism, as we shall now see.

### **Hegemonic thought and the attempt to discredit neo-Malthusianism: the Church, the State and... science**

Neo-Malthusianism was fundamentally a self-regulated practice carried on outside the academy and run by heterogeneous groups of freethinkers including liberals, socialists and anarchists who shared an opposition to religious morality and the irrational and authoritarian rules issued by the State. In Spain, this movement was linked to anarchist groups who wished to destabilize the capitalist economic system by acting on the population. Neo-Malthusian practice also defied the power of the Church and State by defending free love and attacking marriage.

Hegemonic thought was well aware that the neo-Malthusian movement in Spain was opposed to the established social system, and it used all available means to counter it. The foundation of conservative Catholic social order, "religion, property, and the family," was being attacked, along with the populational and natalist foundation of the conservative bourgeoisie, and their publications announced this (Masjuan, 2000, p.233-282). For example, *La Lectura Dominical*, the journal of the Apostolate of the Press (Apostolado de la Prensa), congratulated itself in 1926 on the fact that the government had passed a decree protecting large families, while describing neo-Malthusian practices as "criminal." It reminded readers that Francisco Ferrer and Mateo Morral's Modern School was the main source of propagation for these "dissolute doctrines":

It is highly significant that the revolutionary elements who are opposed to religious morality are the intellectual agents of this social aberration; indeed, it is understandable that the proponents of free love, divorce, secularization and state control of the family should be defending and fomenting abominable neo-Malthusian practices (León, 12 jun. 1926, p.284).

However, the repressive discourses and practices of the church or state merely reinforced revolutionary practices among the working class in the early twentieth century. As Kate Austin (1864-1902) argued in an article reprinted in *Solidaridad Obrera* in 1916: “When the enemies of liberty expose their weak side in this way, anarchists know just where to target their attacks” (Austin, 10 ago. 1916, p.2).

The criminalization of neo-Malthusianism did indeed begin with its relationship to radical anarchism. In the aftermath of Mateo Morral’s attempted assassination of Alfonso XIII in Madrid in May 1906, much was made in the press of the fact that he belonged to neo-Malthusian groups. The goal was clearly to criminalize neo-Malthusian practice by identifying it with the violent actions of its followers, and giving a scientific explanation. The results of the autopsy on Mateo Morral (we now know he did not commit suicide but was murdered a few days after the attack) (Masjuan, 2009, p.111-119), relayed in the bourgeois press from a Lombrosian criminal anthropological perspective, stressed Morral’s high level of degeneracy. Antonio Lecha-Marzo, who was a young man at the time (1888-1919), examined Mateo Morral’s body, and concluded that:

From the anomalies noted in Mateo Morral, only three seem to be of any importance: prognathism, prominence of the frontal sinuses and the deviated septum. These three abnormal degenerate characteristics mean that Morral fits Lombroso’s description of the criminal type (Lecha-Marzo, 1906, p.87).

It was not new to use Lombrosian theory to establish that people who had become anarchists were degenerates (Girón Sierra, 2005). The novelty, in this case, involved associating the person’s physical, mental and moral characteristics with neo-Malthusian ideas and practices, which were getting a lot of coverage in the daily papers and, as we saw earlier, were still remembered years later. The bourgeois press, after the attempt on Alfonso XII’s life, stated that “Mateo Morral soon joined the anarchist neo-Malthusian movement. He was drawn to it by his negative attitude to life, its paltriness for this young engineer, his solitary, mystical nature, in disarray thanks to his passions and to womanizing, his physical degeneracy etc.” (El criminal..., 4 jun. 1906, p.1).

But official scientific doctrine not only asserted that neo-Malthusianism was commonly practiced by degenerates but also went so far as to contradict what the movement meant for the health of individual followers. Indeed, some physicians believed “neo-Malthusian practices” caused serious genital dysfunctions both in men and women, relating them directly to sexual continence, “early withdrawal” and masturbation. They not only ignored the fact that neo-Malthusianism defended non-reproductive sexual pleasure, but also overlooked all the contraceptive resources that neo-Malthusians were attempting to make available to the population, precisely to avoid resorting to the practices they were accused of. The urologist Narciso Serrallach Maurí (1875-1951), director of the Barcelona journal



*Hojas Urológicas* (1913-1935), which in 1931 published an article significantly titled “Genital dysfunction disorders: continence, neo-Malthusianism and masturbation” (Serrallach, 1931), wrote in 1916 that:

Controlling procreation, which Malthus advocates so as to make our descendants’ struggle for subsistence less arduous, necessarily involves not only sexual abstinence but incomplete acts, masturbation and even sexual excitations not followed by coitus (Serrallach, 1916, p.33).

All the publicity around the issue created by official science reinforced the impression that every neo-Malthusian was an anarchist and vice versa, even though not all anarchist workers agreed with these ideas, and not all neo-Malthusians were anarchists. In 1935, the journal *Estudios* reported that neo-Malthusians in France who underwent voluntary sterilization were starting to be prosecuted and sent to jail, noting that it wished to warn “comrades” for fear that this type of repressive legislation might be reproduced in Spain (Puente, mayo 1935, p.17).

### **The struggle over meaning: neo-Malthusianism and eugenics**

The various campaigns by the scientific establishment to disparage and criminalize neo-Malthusianism did not succeed in halting this world-wide movement, which continued to threaten the pillars of traditional capitalist society. Neo-Malthusianism supported individual management of sexuality, mainly in connection with contraception and population control, and it used science to support its call for equality, presenting itself as offering liberation through knowledge, which it saw as an emancipatory tool that revealed injustice and social inequality and offered a means to emancipation (Jiménez-Lucena, Molero-Mesa, 2009). Eugenics, however (according to the hypotheses we plan to demonstrate), arose with two fundamental goals: to discredit neo-Malthusianism by using the very same scientific and technological terrain to regain the biopolitical initiative on management of the body and human sexuality, and, at the same time, to legitimize the existence of social inequality politically, using scientific models, in a liberal and supposedly egalitarian society in which all citizens had the same rights and duties. It was thus in the terrain of science that the dispute over the meaning of the terms “neo-Malthusianism” and “eugenics” took place.

The first piece of evidence to validate our hypothesis comes from the International Neo-Malthusian Conference in The Hague in July 1910 (Quast, 2014). One of the topics scheduled for the day in private session was “Would it be useful or desirable to change the name of neo-Malthusianism?” (Programa..., 1910, p.1). Clearly, eugenics was starting to exert some pressure since it had emerged from the academy, with laws restricting births being passed in some European and North American countries. The physician and psychiatrist Auguste Forel (1848-1931) proposed at the conference that the name “neo-Malthusianism” should be changed to “eugenetism” or “eugenism.” The reason he gave, in addition to stating that it was a science of interest “to hygienists and doctors,” was that “the neo-Malthusian question is merely a question of seeking quality,” which was possible, he

argued, “without bothering to limit quantity, at least for now.” After general deliberation, it was finally decided that the name of neo-Malthusianism should be maintained, “because it has a broader meaning than the word ‘eugenism’ or ‘eugenetism,’ which indicates just one branch of neo-Malthusian action” (Grandidier, 1910, p.20; emphasis in the original).

Indeed, the belief that the objectives and methods of eugenics were already integrated into neo-Malthusianism was repeated at the first International Eugenics Congress, held in London in June 1912. Edmon Potier (1912, p.185), reviewed the conference for the journal *Salud y Fuerza*, and referred to eugenics as follows:

Regardless of whether this is acknowledged or denied, the new science is none other than neo-Malthusian science, with all its sub-divisions, as attested by comparing it to the various fields where our efforts have been directed and the various sections of the Congress. Its identity leads necessarily to the same fundamental goal: ‘good procreation’ (emphasis in the original).

At this early stage, the neo-Malthusians were happy to have media attention from the press, claiming that the conference drew “official experts the world over – biologists, hygienists, pediatricians, gynecologists, neurologists, educators, sociologists etc.” and they concluded that:

For our part, we see no problem in people calling it whatever they want. This will give rise to the curious spectacle of seeing newspapers that have so far been hostile to neo-Malthusianism combatting it on the one hand and valiantly defending Eugenics on the other! (Potier, 1912, p.187).

However, at this conference, eugenics came up with a definition, which was proposed by Galton himself, and linked to state intervention: “Eugenics is the study of the causes ‘subject to social control,’ and it can improve or exacerbate the racial qualities of future generations, whether mentally or physically” (Potier, 1912, p.187; emphasis in the original). In other words, following the traditional hygienic line, characteristic of medical policing, the 1912 conference attendees trusted that the power of the State would achieve all their proposals for improving the quality of the human race, while attempting to disassociate themselves from neo-Malthusian initiatives, which came to be seen only as a way of limiting births, with no further social or biological considerations.

In a presentation on “racial hygiene,” the German doctor Alfred Ploetz (1860-1940) pointedly attacked neo-Malthusian practices of self-management as being outside state control:

If we look at all its effects, we have to conclude that nowadays the spread of neo-Malthusianism, which is not regulated and is poorly run, is harmful from the racial hygiene point of view. We should strive to abolish it, but I believe it may be totally impossible to suppress. Whenever Malthusianism grows up somewhere, it remains in the families affected for many years... Even the Catholic church has proven powerless to stop it. There is nothing for it but to influence Malthusian practice through eugenics so that the race will suffer as little as possible from it... Right now, we need, firstly, to fight neo-Malthusian propaganda (Ploetz, 1913, p.189).

Ploetz believed that the problem being created by the spread of neo-Malthusian practices was that they were impeding the reproduction of the most intelligent members

of society, since they were widespread among the middle and upper class and less so among the proletariat. Furthermore, poor families who were practicing neo-Malthusianism were capable of rearing and nurturing sickly children who would not have survived if the family had been larger, so that, in his view, neo-Malthusian practice was contrary to natural selection (Ploetz, 1913, p.189). This argument based on “reverse selection” was key to the spread of eugenics. The medical journal *The Lancet* dutifully recorded this (Neo-Malthusianism, 1912, p.960) when the English Malthusian League published a pamphlet titled *Neo-Malthusianism and eugenics* (Drysdale, 1912), which fought these criticisms, claiming that the League was also in favor of improving the quality of the human race and not merely reducing the number of inhabitants, a charge the proponents of eugenics were leveling at neo-Malthusians.

It is true that what Foucault called “biopower” saw eugenic ideas as a way to turn the biological regulation of sexuality into a tool of domination for hegemonic thought, in the interests of the State and liberal society, but it did so at a point when the neo-Malthusian movement had spent decades offering anatomic and physiological information on human reproduction to the general population so that people could decide for themselves whether sexual intercourse would have a reproductive goal or not. This phenomenon, which was linked to the revolutionary potential of the southern European anarchist movements at a time of especially intense social conflict (Masjuan, 2017), helps explain the delay in the emergence of explicit eugenic activism, twenty years after Galton proposed the goals and limits of eugenics in 1883 (Schneider, 1990, p.5-7), and over thirty years after his work *Hereditary genius* was published in 1869. These sociopolitical forces also drove the switch from public hygiene to social medicine, a discipline that took on eugenic ideas in Spain (Rodríguez Ocaña, 1992; Álvarez Peláez, 1995), where specifically eugenic leagues did not flourish, since ecclesiastic and state powers were opposed to any manifestations of sexuality that were not uniquely oriented towards reproduction of the species.

The issue at stake was whether the body should be managed by the state (eugenics) or by each individual for themselves (neo-Malthusianism), since these two biopolitical endeavors pursued mutually exclusive goals in terms of ideological utopias, which were inherent both to libertarian-style neo-Malthusianism and to eugenics linked to the interests of hegemonic power.

After the International Eugenics Congress in London, the proponents of eugenics began stressing the differences between the two approaches to racial improvement. According to the anarchist José Chueca (1914, p.322):

Eugenics and neo-Malthusianism, even though they claim to pursue the same end – the regeneration of the human species – bear no relationship to one another whatsoever; the first is essentially bourgeois and falsely scientific, and the second is against the bourgeoisie and is catalogued among the things that really do belong to science; one vainly claims to regenerate humankind by brutally trying to prevent a certain number of individuals from procreating, and the other aspires to convince people to procreate consciously by offering them, in order to do so, the means to prevent fertilization, since neo-Malthusianism does not wish to impose on anyone by violent procedures, nor does it deny even the most miserable and degenerate of men the right to love.

The solution, he argued, was very different than the one offered by bourgeois eugenics:

What we need to do is to suppress the causes of species degeneration. Complete regeneration of all individuals is impossible, given the social conditions in which humankind currently exists. Thus, we neo-Malthusians do not limit ourselves to encouraging conscious, limited procreation; we aspire to transform society. We know very well that while the majority of people lack well-being and education, there will be cause for degeneration, and a great many degenerates (Chueca, 1914, p.322).

This argument was central also to a presentation by the Syndicate for Liberal Professions (Sindicato de las Profesiones Liberales) at the second CNT Congress held in Madrid in 1919. The talk was titled “Eugenic reasons why working-class organizations should fight for higher salaries.” The adjective “eugenic” was already integrated into the discourse of these anarcho-syndicalist intellectuals, but they acknowledged that they used it exclusively to reinforce the CNT’s economic demands with “scientific arguments.” Indeed, their presentation was announced as “a scientific topic that affects our working-class biology,” and it showed how the rise in the cost of basic foodstuffs from 1914-1919 had caused rising worker mortality, for which it blamed the “capitalist regime... for the physical annihilation and ethnic degeneration of our race... [which] perpetuates all kinds of incurable diseases among our descendants” (Segundo Congreso..., 1919).

However, in 1923, in the context of a harsh crackdown on anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist groups, an explicitly neo-Malthusian journal was relaunched, this time including a change in its theoretical stance on eugenics and neo-Malthusianism. The journal *Generación Consciente*, which was a continuation of the earlier *Salud y Fuerza*, maintained neo-Malthusian principles but under the denomination “eugenics,” leaving the term neo-Malthusianism limited to controlling the number of births. The journal’s title unequivocally defines it as a neo-Malthusian publication, but in order to preserve its objectives, it adopted the strategy of assuming a term already widespread in hegemonic scientific media at a time of great political complications for the libertarian movement.

Indeed, Isaac Puente, one of the physicians most widely supported by CNT members and the Iberian Anarchist Federation (Federación Anarquista Ibérica, FAI), launched the first issue of the journal *Generación Consciente* by acknowledging that eugenics had increasing numbers of followers, that it was “every doctor’s duty to disseminate and encourage its teachings,” since otherwise, he would incur “a great moral responsibility.” However, his approach remained neo-Malthusian, since he stressed the same issues as in prior years but under another name. He proposes as much up front:

to divulge the laws and information on heredity so as to avoid hereditary transmission of pathological criminal traits whose monstrosity only ignorance can excuse; to educate children rationally, teaching them the rudiments of sexuality and cultivating the sentiments of Health, Goodness and Beauty, so as later on to be able to influence amorous passion, which must obey this trilogy; to encourage the conditions of normality most favorable to the act of fertilization; forms of care required by this transcendental function in order to achieve the best possible product; the means to avoid fertilization (neo-Malthusianism) when it must be avoided; pre-natal care; rules for rearing infants properly (Puericulture) and prophylactic Hygiene (Puente, 1923, p.33-34).

Nevertheless, eugenics, whether neo-Malthusian in orientation or not, was viewed with suspicion by Spanish society, which was conservative and catholic, as seen in the suspension by governmental order of the Spanish Eugenics Course (Curso Eugenésico Español), organized by progressive and liberal groups in 1928 (Masjuan, 2000, p.395). But what concerned the Spanish authorities the most was neo-Malthusianism, as seen in the fact that in October of that same year, a new article was added to the Criminal Code that forbade the propagation of “contraceptive theories or practices” outside “purely scientific publications or the proceedings of expert bodies” (Martínez-Pereda, 1981, p.664). One of the consequences of this reform was the ban on the explicitly neo-Malthusian title of the journal *Generación Consciente*, which had been in publication since its foundation in 1923, despite various indictments and jail terms for its editor Joaquín Juan Pastor (b. 1895) (Navarro Navarro, 1997, p.26). At the same time, the criminal code outlawed the content of *Generación Consciente*, not only for attacking the tenets of public morality, but also because the journal could not be considered a scientific publication.

In December 1928, the journal had to be renamed *Estudios*; and it was not until 1930 that it could use the term neo-Malthusianism openly and frequently. Once the censorship imposed under the Primo de Rivera dictatorship ended, the journal *Estudios* (in its October 1930 issue) reaffirmed its “neo-Malthusian and eugenic” objectives, which, its editors acknowledged, were the same ones that had inspired *Generación Consciente*:

[*Generación Consciente*] aimed to provide mental and physical training, to diminish the endless supply of large, famished families, a mass of unconscious, unlettered, impoverished flesh, which provides the bodies that sustain this immoral, cruel society. Naturally, it drew hatred and war from all the vultures who traffic in and profit from human ignorance and suffering. Now that the odious censorship has disappeared... the educational work of *Estudios* will intensify neo-Malthusian and eugenic propaganda, prioritizing its initial slogan of *Generación Consciente* (Conscious Procreation) (La Redacción, oct. 1930, p.1).

It is no surprise, therefore, that the first article of the new, censorship-free era was devoted to neo-Malthusianism, and its author was the physician Isaac Puente, who, as we saw earlier, reduced it to the mere practice of contraception. However, this article is a defense of the revolutionary goals of neo-Malthusianism, which Puente presents as “a new idea,” perhaps because of the ostracism he had been subjected to, and he lists the justifications for it one by one. Significantly, he returns to the original neo-Malthusian idea of a comprehensive discipline and relegates eugenics to just another reason for contraception, concretely the “cold reason” of not procreating when there are cases of hereditary diseases or “transmissible pathological defects” present in the couple (Puente, oct. 1930, p.3).

In this assimilation of the term eugenics within neo-Malthusianism, what we might term “eugenic neo-Malthusianism,” we see the Spanish libertarian movement taking back the initiative in the struggle over the meaning of both terms, encouraged by the crisis of hegemony that characterized the historical period of Spain’s Second Republic, which made the rise of the libertarian movement possible.

Not completely abandoning the use of the word “eugenics” was to have strategic advantages in terms of spreading the neo-Malthusian ideal among the working class. On

one hand, during the Republic, eugenics maintained its subversive potential against the Catholic church and conservative governments, which had never passed any laws inspired by this science. However, using the term “eugenics” also made it possible to overturn the idea of “reverse selection” that came out of racial hygiene and blamed neo-Malthusianism for the degeneration of the species, as we saw earlier. In this re-signification, if neo-Malthusian couples did not procreate for eugenic reasons, social inequality would be the principal reason for this “reverse selection.”

André Lorulot (1885-1963), writing in *Estudios*, put it thus:

The millionaire's child who is degenerate and dimwitted will be showered with attention and surrounded by extremely expensive luxuries – which won't prevent him from dying or continuing to be depraved or immoral... And meanwhile, the proletariat might have produced a healthy, robust child, who will fall sick because his parents don't have enough time to take care of him or because he lacks the basics. Social injustice, based on privileges that come with money, leads to the degradation of the species (Lorulot, ene. 1934, p.58).

Thus, Spanish anarchism was able to appropriate a term that was linked in other countries to state intervention, the legitimation of elite bourgeoisies and repression of the working class.

### **Neo-Malthusianism, anarcho-syndicalism and direct action**

There is one feature to bear in mind when dealing with the history of thought and libertarian action, and that is the internal organization of the various groups that emerged. In the case of anarcho-syndicalism (the main anarchist movement in terms of the number of members, visibility and social impact), we should not overlook the mechanisms of inclusion-exclusion put in place to prevent the organization from being run by intellectuals, or the direct action strategy that separated it from the possibilism of other labor union organizations. The strategy developed by the CNT consisted of differentiating and protecting its core manual labor unionists from possible attempts by intellectual workers to direct or influence them, particularly people in technical professions. CNT's exclusive focus on union struggle (without joining forces with political parties vying for power) discouraged professionals seeking self-aggrandizement through the established power structure. Indeed, physicians, engineers and other specialized professionals had no particular interest in joining the ranks of the anarcho-syndicalists. However, the few intellectuals who did sympathize with or belong to anarchist-leaning groups were finally accepted into the CNT, but not mixed with blue-collar workers in their professional field. Instead, they were assigned to a union exclusively for intellectuals. The union never endorsed any proposal to distance itself from the struggle for change and revolution, for example by setting up health insurance, union stores or co-ops instead (unlike the socialist General Workers' Union [Unión General de Trabajadores, UGT]), nor getting involved in practices mostly followed by anarchists such as naturism, nudism, or, of course, neo-Malthusianism. This modus operandi was followed by people who were union members

and who also collaborated on an individual level with anarchist groups following these practices, since they knew what the role of each one was (Molero-Mesa, Jiménez-Lucena, Tabernero-Holgado, 2013).

This strategy pursued by anarcho-syndicalism provided a new focus for workers' cultural centers, which banded together in Athenaeums and naturist or neo-Malthusian groups that had their own journals to publicize their agendas. All of these were places where manual and intellectual workers mingled, and intellectuals who sympathized with anarchism could collaborate in its revolutionary work, but final say over whether their proposals would be included in the union's struggle lay exclusively with the CNT (Molero-Mesa, Jiménez-Lucena, 2013). Perhaps the most significant example of this was the CNT's utter disregard of a proposal issued by the first Congress of the Federation of Single Healthcare Unions (Federación de Sindicatos Únicos de Sanidad), held in Madrid in November 1931, to "consider healthcare ideals as equivalent to libertarian ones... and to substitute healthcare reform for economic struggle tactics, making healthcare part of the proletariat's demands" (Congreso..., 22 nov. 1931, p.3).

On the other hand, anarchist-leaning cultural journals were and called themselves "eclectic;" in other words, they would publish any article, even if the author did not identify with anarchist ideas or agree with the journal's particular editorial line. It is not surprising, therefore, that journals like *Generación Consciente* or *Estudios* published articles by thinkers who did not share anarchist views, such as Gregorio Marañón, César Juarros, Nicolás Amador or Luis Huerta (Navarro Navarro, 1998). Articles by these writers were not published in order to endorse their ideas but to generate debate and to make good use of anything in them that might be of help in achieving libertarian ideals. We can also point to other factors that might have influenced the inclusion of these articles, such as the need for legitimation by scientific authorities in a society that was persecuting libertarians, or as a nod to intellectuals who might end up sympathizing with their ideas; there was also the fact that they were seeking to widen their audience in society. A very significant case that helps illustrate how libertarian publications' eclecticism was perceived is that of the urologist Narciso Serrallach, who, as we saw earlier, disagreed with the anarchists' concept of neo-Malthusianism. Nevertheless, in 1924, the journal *Generación Consciente* published an article of his, without seeming to care who the author was, because it gave practical advice on gonorrhoea, a topic of interest to the journal's readership, like everything related to sexually transmitted diseases (Serrallach, 1924).

This phenomenon makes it difficult to know how to approach these journals, and it has caused confusion for many authors who have sought a consistent editorial policy reflecting the ideology of the publications' owners, as seen in the great majority of journals that are not "eclectic" in the libertarian sense.

However, the newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera*, the CNT's official publication, exercised strict censorship of articles that did not follow anarcho-syndicalist principles and doctrines by advocating direct action, although the degree of strictness depended on who was on the editorial team at each particular point in history. During the Second Republic, when editorial policy was determined by the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), in order for an article on the tendencies and attitudes of the "confederal body"

to be considered for publication in *Solidaridad Obrera*, it had to be rubber-stamped by the union to which the writer belonged. Examples of this censorship can be seen in the “Editorial” section, which listed the reasons why an article was rejected: “Pascual Cubells, Valencia – Your article cannot be published in our paper. We have no interest in religion whatsoever, unless it is to contribute to the complete disappearance of all of them;” “To a young Republican lady, Villafranca del Penedés – Indeed, dear young lady, he who keeps bad company will end up badly, and by praising the Republic, you are keeping very bad company, so, beware!” (Redacción, 15 mar. 1932, p.2).

The direct action strategy meant that unionists could not be involved in activities that distracted them from the only purpose that could end poverty once and for all: revolution. Neo-Malthusians thought that if there were less people in the proletariat, their social situation would improve both in the family (resources would be scarce but sufficient, if they did not have many children) and professionally (by reducing the number of workers competing for the same job). Therefore, neo-Malthusianism contributed to the ultimate emancipation of the working class, a goal that overrode all the partisan movements of circles outside the anarcho-syndicalist nucleus.

### **Final considerations**

Libertarian-style neo-Malthusianism in Spain was a movement that re-signified the term “eugenics” during the first third of the twentieth century. It took a radically environmentalist view of the relationship between health and disease in order to explain the degenerative process in humankind. The measures it advocated to prevent couples with serious illnesses from procreating (“eugenic neo-Malthusianism”) were only a part of its revolutionary objectives, and, because it was an anarchist movement, it opposed the imposition of such measures through laws or the dictates of bourgeois morality and religion. Neo-Malthusianism sought to convince individuals to subscribe to its goals by convincing them through consciousness-raising that practicing contraception was one way to help bring about a more just, egalitarian society, one that would be favorable to revolutionary change. Its socio-political view of biological processes was constructed within what we see, following Gramsci, as “struggles over meaning,” based on a dialogic relationship with hegemonic thought, which sought to recover lost ground in the management of individual sexuality via eugenics or racial hygiene. Biopower’s characteristically biological view of social processes became especially relevant when it began focusing on “improvement of the race” to avoid the transmission of pathological characteristics typical of the impoverished working class, whom it blamed for the process of “racial degeneration.” The dialogic relationship established against the backdrop of a violent political crackdown on libertarians led, in the Republic period, to a triumph of neo-Malthusian ideas, which were put into practice from 1936 on. Indeed, even though this falls outside the period under study here, we would like to point out that during the highly exceptional conditions of the Spanish Civil War, anarchist-style “eugenics” led to implementation of various measures from the neo-Malthusian agenda, such as free abortion on demand, sex education campaigns, social action against prostitution (led by the feminist anarcho-syndicalist group “Free Women”



[“Mujeres Libres”]), conscious maternity clinics and many other topics that we cannot go into here. This article is merely a beginning, and we invite others to revisit all these issues from a broader perspective than the one used so far, and to keep investigating this very complex phenomenon, since there is much still left to be explored. We should not forget that, for the anarcho-syndicalists, neo-Malthusianism was only a complementary contribution to the revolutionary struggle, and therefore it was never given as much coverage in their publications as in anarchist-leaning cultural journals, where workers and intellectuals could contribute to speeding the pace of social revolution.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> We use the “/” as Mignolo (2012, p.IX) does.

<sup>2</sup> See Parsons’ historiographical revision of anarchist neo-Malthusianism in Barcelona (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Iberian neo-Malthusianism was closely related to the French variety, which is why French authors were frequently featured in Spanish eugenic journals (Masjuan, 2000; Cleminson, 2003). For the French case, see Sonn (2010).

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