

ARTICLE

Sexual Revolution and the Spanish Anarchist Press: Bodies, Birth Control, and Free Love in the 1930s Advice Columns of *La Revista Blanca*

Sophie Turbutt 

School of History, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, United Kingdom
hysmt@leeds.ac.uk

This article examines the advice columns of a Spanish anarchist periodical, *La Revista Blanca*, in the 1930s. It considers how this example of interactive media, influenced by wider European scientific discourses including eugenics, contributed to shaping anarchist socio-sexual morality. By analysing the periodical's discussions of bodies, birth control, and 'free love', the article draws attention to anarchism's inherent tension between the free will of individuals and their obligations to collective progress. It asks how this tension played out at the intersection between anarchist sexual revolution and 'women's emancipation', and by extension how we might situate anarchist women in 'feminist' history.

Introduction

'... the first thing that YOU have to do, young lady, is emancipate yourself economically, so that hardship does not obligate you to live forever with a man whom you could stop loving'.¹ This was the advice imparted by the editorial team of the anarchist periodical, *La Revista Blanca*, to a girl who had written to their advice column expressing curiosity about 'free love'. It encapsulated the gendered dynamics of the anarchist sexual revolution: in theory men and women were equally free to decide the lengths of sexual partnerships, unburdened by marriage, but in practice women's sexual freedom was conditional on the overhaul of the patriarchal distribution of economic power. This article frames the interwar Spanish anarchist press as a venue of political, medical, and cultural thought which straddled the complex intersection between sexual revolution and 'women's emancipation'. It explores how the anarchists harnessed advice columns as radical spaces to empower, educate, and provide medical care to readers, as well as platforming their concerns. Advice columns offer us insight into the connections between private and public morality, as they were forums for the discussion and resolution of intimate problems.² Using *La Revista Blanca* and interwar Spanish anarchism as a case study, the article interrogates how political movements have historically constructed socio-cultural – including socio-sexual – moralities via interactive media.³

¹ La Redacción and L.N., 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.267, Barcelona, 1 Mar. 1934, 254.

² Paul Ryan, 'Asking Angela: Discourses about Sexuality in an Irish Problem Page, 1963–1980', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 19, 2 (2010), 319–21. The value of advice columns as a source in the study of Spanish anarchism has been demonstrated in work on the anarchist periodical *Estudios*: Carlos Taberero-Holgado, Isabel Jiménez-Lucena, and Jorge Molero-Mesa, 'Movimiento libertario y autogestión del conocimiento en la España del primer tercio del siglo XX: la sección "Preguntas y respuestas" (1930–1937) de la revista *Estudios*', *Dynamis*, 33, 1 (2013), 43–67.

³ Chronologically and in terms of approach, this builds on the impressive research of James Yeoman on anarchist print culture in James Yeoman, *Print Culture and the Formation of the Anarchist Movement in Spain, 1890–1915* (New York: Routledge, 2019). On the renewed relevance of research into the history of anarchist political culture, as we are surrounded once again by social justice movements using horizontal, acephalous organisation and prefigurative

The periodical press was the foremost means by which the interwar anarchists exchanged ideas.⁴ Published between 1898 and 1905 and then again from 1923 to 1936, *La Revista Blanca* was a weekly long-form political journal costing twenty-five cents per issue.⁵ No periodical could have legitimately claimed to represent all Spanish anarchists since the movement was such a broad church, and indeed *La Revista Blanca's* co-editors, the middle-class Montseny family, had some long-standing disputes with other anarchists.⁶ But in spite of its modest readership of 12,000 in its second period of publication, *La Revista Blanca's* multifaceted engagement with the anarchist community and particular fixation on sexual morality warrants historical attention.⁷ From 1933 to 1936 it became one of the few Spanish anarchist periodicals to include an advice column (*Consultorio*) manned by the editorial team and an anarchist doctor.⁸ The editorial team comprised Juan Montseny (alias Federico Urales), his partner Teresa Mañé (alias Soledad Gustavo), and their daughter Federica Montseny. Between 1934 and 1935, Federica took over managerial duties from her father who had fallen ill.⁹ The doctor recruited to assist with the advice column was one Javier Serrano Coello (calling himself 'Doctor Klug' – German for 'Doctor Clever'). Based in Barcelona, he had previously written for other anarchist periodicals under the pseudonym Doctor Fantasma and gave lectures on sexology at several Catalan anarchist community centres (*ateneos*).¹⁰ Through his efforts and those of the Montseny family, *La Revista Blanca* – especially in its advice columns – self-consciously intervened in the construction of a new anarchist socio-sexual morality, opposed to that of the Catholic and bourgeois Establishment.

Spanish anarchism encompassed a range of class perspectives, political programmes, and activist strategies. The largest interwar anarchist current was anarcho-syndicalism, organised through the unions and thus connected to the working classes. In February 1936 the anarcho-syndicalist National Confederation of Labour (CNT) boasted a membership of approximately 850,000.¹¹

politics, see Constance Bantman and David Berry, 'Introduction', in Constance Bantman and David Berry, eds., *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism: The Individual, the National and the Transnational* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 1.

⁴ Constance Bantman and Bert Altena, 'Introduction', in Constance Bantman and Bert Altena, eds., *Reassessing the Transnational Turn: Scales of Analysis in Anarchist and Syndicalist Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 14; Javier Navarro Navarro, 'Sexualidad, Reproducción y Cultura Obrera Revolucionaria en España: *La Revista Orto* (1932–1934)', *Arbor*, 769 (2014), 2.

⁵ These details apply to the period when the advice columns were introduced, although prior to November 1933 the periodical had been published half as often at a much higher cost of fifty cents per issue. La Redacción, "'La Revista Blanca' a sus Lectores', *La Revista Blanca*, No.250, 15 Oct. 1933, 319–20.

⁶ Susanna Tavera, *Federica Montseny: La Indomable, 1905–1994* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2005), 31–2, 130. For instance, described in La Redacción, 'Una Visita Molesta', *Suplemento de La Revista Blanca*, No.127, Barcelona, 1 Sept. 1928, iii–iv.

⁷ Readership statistic taken from Marisa Siguan Boehmer, *Literatura Popular Libertaria: Trece Años de La Novela Ideal (1925–1938)* (Madrid: Ediciones Península, 1981), 16.

⁸ The others were *Estudios* and *Ética-Iniciales*, researched by Javier Navarro Navarro, 'Reforma Sexual, Control de Natalidad, Naturismo y Pacifismo. La Cultura Libertaria Transatlántica en las Décadas de 1920 y 1930: Estudios. *Revista Ecléctica* (1928–1937) y su Proyección y Redes en América', *Historia y Política*, 42 (2019), 153; Xavier Díez, *Utopía Sexual a la Prensa Anarquista de Catalunya: La Revista Ética-Iniciales (1927–1937)* (Lleida: Pagès Editors, 2001), 52–3; Alejandro Lora Medina, 'Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad en el Anarquismo Español de los Años Treinta: De los Debates en la Prensa a la Aplicación de la Ley del Aborto Durante la Guerra Civil Española', *Hispania*, 78, 260 (2018), 824–5.

⁹ On Federica taking over, see Federico Urales, "'La Revista Blanca" Cambia de Director', *La Revista Blanca*, No.314, Barcelona, 25 Jan. 1935, 81. On the illness of her father: La Redacción, 'A Nuestros Amigos y Lectores', *La Revista Blanca*, No.328, Barcelona, 3 May 1935, 419; La Redacción, 'Para Nuestros Amigos y Lectores', *La Revista Blanca*, No.354, Barcelona, 1 Nov. 1935, 1056; La Redacción, 'El Estado de Federico Urales', *La Revista Blanca*, No.357, Barcelona, 22 Nov. 1935, 1102; La Redacción, 'La Salud de Federico Urales', *La Revista Blanca*, No.359, Barcelona, 6 Dec. 1935, 1140.

¹⁰ Josep Lluís Ausin i Hervella and Josep Maria Calbet i Camarasa, 'Xavier Serrano Coello (1897–1974), Metge Anarquista, i L'Occupació de L'Hospital Clínic en Esclatar la Guerra Civil', *Gimbernat*, 45 (2006), 90–1.

¹¹ Statistic taken from Martha Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Chico: AK Press, 1991), 40. For the social roots of Spanish anarchism's popularity, see Temma Kaplan, 'The Social Base of Nineteenth-Century Andalusian Anarchism in Jerez de la Frontera', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6, 1 (1975), 47–70 on the nineteenth century; Chris Ealham, *Anarchism and the City: Revolution and*

This extent of power, considered exceptional in the history of anarchism worldwide, was a contributing factor to the anarchists' inclusion in Spain's Republican government in 1936 in the context of the Spanish Civil War.¹² Although numerically impressive, the CNT did not represent all Spanish anarchists.¹³ Some – like the Montseny family running *La Revista Blanca* – interpreted the anarchist ideology of 'libertarian communism' differently and situated themselves apart from union activism, which they considered to be too connected to capitalist structures and exclusionary to those absent from workplaces; instead they prioritised prefigurative political lifestyles such as 'free love' or naturism.¹⁴ Concurrently, there were tensions within the anarchist movement between those who sought to actively trigger revolution through local insurrections and those who prioritised strengthening the movement numerically or (in *La Revista Blanca*'s case) through propagandistic and cultural efforts.¹⁵ Although these tensions were certainly not unimportant, there were spaces where anarchist affiliates with conflicting views interacted.¹⁶ Anarchist *ateneos* taught local people to read and write, hosted lectures, and offered young people a recreational space away from their parents.¹⁷ There were also formal rationalist schools, run by anarchist teachers (including Antonia Maymón, one of *La Revista Blanca*'s regular writers), and naturist excursion groups which provided trips to the countryside for city-dwelling anarchists (Federica Montseny joined one in the 1930s).¹⁸ 'Sedentary' anarchists based in political hubs like Barcelona corresponded with itinerant anarchists (often in exile) which widened the transnational web of knowledge exchange beyond Spain's borders.¹⁹ These anarchist networks not only called for social and economic revolution, but also politicised the personal.²⁰

There is therefore a rich corpus of historiography on Spanish anarchism adopting socio-cultural perspectives: histories of everyday life, of the family, and of sexuality.²¹ Despite the centrality of women as *objects* of such studies, however, it proves difficult to draw out female voices as *subjects*. There were few female anarchists in leadership roles, few who wrote frequently in the periodical press, and few who belonged to the network of anarchist medics intervening in discourse on gender

Counter-Revolution in Barcelona, 1898–1937 (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2010) on the twentieth century; and, for a more general overview, see Francisco J. Romero Salvadó, *Political Comedy and Social Tragedy: Spain, a Laboratory of Social Conflict, 1892–1921* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2020).

¹² For discussion of Spanish exceptionalism in the field of anarchist studies, see Danny Evans and James Michael Yeoman, 'New Approaches to Spanish Anarchism', *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 29, 3 (2016), 199–200.

¹³ Lucía Prieto Borrego, 'Las Mujeres en el Anarquismo Andaluz: Cultura y Movilización en la Primera Mitad del Siglo XX', *Arenal*, 19, 1 (2012), 49.

¹⁴ Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 23. For a more detailed explanation of 'libertarian communist' anarchism, see La Redacción, '¿Qué es el Comunismo Libertario?', *La Revista Blanca*, No.293, Barcelona, 31 Aug. 1934, 668.

¹⁵ This came to a head in 1932; for more thorough discussion of these divisions see Daniel Evans, *The Conscience of the Spanish Revolution: Anarchist Opposition to State Collaboration in 1937*, PhD thesis (2016), 11, 21–6.

¹⁶ Jorge Molero-Mesa, Isabel Jiménez-Lucena, and Carlos Tabernero-Holgado, 'Neomalthusianismo y Eugenesia en un Contexto de Lucha por el Significado en la Prensa Anarquista Española, 1900–1936', *História, Ciències, Saúde*, 25 (2018), 119.

¹⁷ Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 60–1.

¹⁸ On rationalist schools and Antonia Maymón: Prieto Borrego, 'Las Mujeres en el Anarquismo Andaluz', 52–3. On excursionist groups and Federica Montseny: Tavera, *Federica Montseny*, 116–17.

¹⁹ On anarchist transnational network-building, see Bantman and Berry, 'Introduction', 2; Bantman and Altena, 'Introduction', 7. On the transnationality of 'sedentary' anarchists, see Raymond Craib, 'Sedentary Anarchists', in Constance Bantman and Bert Altena, eds., *Reassessing the Transnational Turn: Scales of Analysis in Anarchist and Syndicalist Studies*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 140.

²⁰ On the myriad stances on sexuality within Spanish anarchism, and the particular emphasis placed on sexual revolution by anarcho-individualists (libertarians), see Navarro Navarro, 'La Revista Orto', 2.

²¹ On everyday anarchist practices see for example Carmen Cubero Izquierdo, *La Pérdida del Pudor: El Naturismo Libertario Español (1900–1936)* (Madrid: LaMalatesta Editorial, 2015). On family, see for example Antonio Prado, *Matrimonio, Familia y Estado: Escritoras Anarco-Feministas en La Revista Blanca (1898–1936)* (Madrid: Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo, 2011). On sexuality, see Richard Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex: Eugenics in Eastern Spain, 1900–1937* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000); Lora Medina, 'Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad'; Alejandro Lora Medina, 'El Amor Libre y Las Relaciones Sentimentales en el Anarquismo Español (1930–1939)', *Historia Contemporánea*, 60 (2019).

and sexuality.²² For these reasons it is all the more remarkable that so many of the queries sent to *La Revista Blanca*'s advice columns came from women. Either using their own names or employing pseudonyms such as 'One of the Libertarian Youth' or 'A Young Woman', they belonged to a range of age groups and wrote from all over Spain. The anarchists' revolution in sexual morality would incorporate new conceptions of gender and new stances on reproductive autonomy, placing women's bodies at their centre. In writing this history it is thus imperative to access women's own voices.²³

One woman whose contribution to Spanish anarchism is exceptionally well-documented is Federica Montseny (1905–94), the daughter of *La Revista Blanca*'s co-founders and one of its most prominent writers from the age of eighteen.²⁴ When the Second Republic (1931–6) replaced Primo de Rivera's dictatorship (1923–30), female suffrage was granted which made political participation more possible for women. In this context she began writing for *Solidaridad Obrera*, the organ of the CNT, and these connections led her to be chosen from among Spain's leading anarchists for the role of Minister of Health and Social Care in 1936. In her first year in office, she oversaw the legalisation of abortion and contraception, as well as promotion of sex education and research into sexual science.²⁵ She and *La Revista Blanca* had intervened into anarchist debates about gender and sexuality for years prior to these reforms, yet on these matters this anarchist periodical has attracted somewhat less historical attention than others such as *Estudios* or *Iniciales* which were more singularly committed to sex-reform content.

The present article platforms a much broader range of female perspectives than that accomplished by Antonio Prado in the one existing book dedicated to *La Revista Blanca*, published in 2011. Prado's book presents an excellent introduction to the periodical and its foremost contributors, and how they tackled topics pertaining to marriage and family, but it does not adequately problematise Spanish anarchist 'feminism' and its limitations or explore contributions by women other than Federica Montseny, her mother, and Antonia Maymón.²⁶ By narrowing in on women's submissions to *La Revista Blanca*'s advice columns, the present article builds a more comprehensive, complex, and nuanced picture.²⁷

So, what was *anarchist* about the Spanish anarchists' sexual revolution? Anarchism was in theory best-placed to achieve gender equality compared to other radical political movements since it called for the abolition of all hierarchies – not only capitalism but also patriarchy.²⁸ However, Spanish anarchism was plagued by contradictions when it came to women's emancipation and sexual morality. The achievement of greater freedoms by women often curtailed the corresponding freedoms of men, who were accustomed to enjoying the privileges that came with patriarchy. Martha Ackelsberg and Mary Nash have drawn attention to the 1936 formation of *Mujeres Libres*: an anarcho-feminist

²² The few well-researched Spanish anarchist women include Federica Montseny, her mother, and Antonia Maymón, discussed in Prado, *Matrimonio, Familia y Estado* and the founders of the organisation *Mujeres Libres* such as Lucía Sánchez Saornil and Amparo Poch y Gascón, brought to light in Ackelsberg, *Free Women*.

²³ To explore similar attempts by historians of other European nations to access marginalised female voices in order to complicate narratives about the interwar politics of gender, see for instance Marti Lybeck, 'The Return of the New Woman and Other Subjects of Weimar Gender History', *Contemporary European History*, 24, 1 (2015), 127–37 and Caroline Campbell, 'Gender and Politics in Interwar and Vichy France', *Contemporary European History*, 27, 3 (2018), 482–99.

²⁴ Sympathetic biographies of Federica Montseny include: Tavera, *Federica Montseny* and Cruz-Cámara, *La Mujer Moderna en los Escritos de Federica Montseny* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2015). A more critical interpretation of her politics is found in: Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 30, 175–6.

²⁵ On these reforms, and the involvement of other anarchists in their design, see Mary Nash, 'Género, Cambio Social y la Problemática del Aborto', *Historia Social*, 2 (1988), 27–32.

²⁶ Prado, *Matrimonio, Familia y Estado*, 11, 17.

²⁷ Lucía Prieto Borrego has extolled the virtues of seeking out lesser-known anarchist women's voices: Prieto Borrego, 'Las Mujeres en el Anarquismo Andaluz', 53–4.

²⁸ Prieto Borrego, 'Las Mujeres en el Anarquismo Andaluz', 48; Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 13. For comparison, see Ana Aguado's appraisal of the socialist gender equality agenda in Ana Aguado, 'Citizenship and Gender Equality in the Second Spanish Republic: Representations and Practices in Socialist Culture (1931–1936)', *Contemporary European History*, 23, 1 (2014), 95–113.

organisation and journal that grew out of disillusionment among anarchist women.²⁹ Sharif Gemie and Alejandro Lora Medina concur that ‘anarcho-sexism’ – whereby anarchism reproduced sexist structures and attitudes learned in mainstream society – plagued many anarchist spaces.³⁰ These included political meetings and communes, where women were overlooked intellectually, relegated to auxiliary roles, and sexually exploited under the guise of ‘free love’. However, investigating self-defined ‘feminist’ organisations cannot tell us all we need to know about anarchism’s relationship to ‘women’s emancipation’ in Spain. *Mujeres Libres* offers limited insight into how anarchists conceived of gender relations, sexual morality, and bodily autonomy ahead of the 1936 sex reforms because their periodical never discussed contraception or abortion and, in any case, it was founded shortly before the reforms happened.³¹ Moreover, dividing the cause by splitting off into a separate ‘women’s’ movement was by no means uncontroversial; it was criticised by many, not least by Federica Montseny.³² This article, by drawing on *La Revista Blanca*, instead sheds light on the evolution of gender and sexuality discourse in a mixed-gender, non-feminist space. There, tension between the core, diametric anarchist tenets of individual, libertarian autonomy and collective, social struggle provoked discord between revolutionary idealism and lived experience.

In addition, *La Revista Blanca*’s sexual revolution was made distinctively anarchist by the way it appropriated contemporary scientific research. As veneration of science was central to how they contested and reconceived the ‘natural’ body and its evolution, anarchist discourse was intimately connected with interwar Western psychological, medical, and sexological currents.³³ The anarchist press discussed not only the works of anarchist-sympathising doctors such as Javier Serrano Coello, Félix Martí Ibáñez or Isaac Puente, but also those of non-anarchists like Sigmund Freud, Havelock Ellis, Charles Darwin, and Spain’s Gregorio Marañón.³⁴ Interwar anarchist conceptions of gender and inheritance were grounded in eugenic thought, albeit engineered to serve the political ends of the revolution rather than those of other contemporary political causes. As Jiménez-Lucena and Molero-Mesa have noted, the need to be ‘born well’ and ‘live well’ in a eugenic sense – to maximise the ‘quality’ of the human population – was central to the anarchists’ reasoning for focusing so much on sexuality as an integral part of the social revolution.³⁵ Degenerationist panic about declining male virility and neo-Lamarckian theories of inheritance were shared across the Western political spectrum, but the Spanish anarchists reconceptualised the eugenic ‘solution’ to make it compatible with

²⁹ Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 64; Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver: Arden Press, 1995), 79. On such studies of women-only spaces representing turning points in the feminist history of Spain: Victoria Lorée Enders and Pamela Beth Radcliff, ‘Contesting Identities/Contesting Categories’, in Victoria Lorée Enders and Pamela Beth Radcliff, eds., *Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 2–3.

³⁰ Sharif Gemie, ‘Anarchism and Feminism: A Historical Survey’, *Women’s History Review*, 5, 3 (1996), 417–18, 429–34; Alejandro Lora Medina ‘La Visión Ontológica de la Mujer y el Hombre en el Anarquismo Español de los Años Treinta: Identidad y Género a Debate’, *Brocar*, 41 (2017), 171, 175; Lora Medina, ‘Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad’, 821.

³¹ Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, 91, 166; Mary Nash, ‘Un/Contested Identities: Motherhood, Sex Reform and the Modernization of Gender Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Spain’, in Enders and Radcliff, eds., *Constructing Spanish Womanhood*, 39.

³² Montseny had been sceptical of the usefulness of ‘feminism’ within anarchism since the 1920s, shown in: Federica Montseny, ‘Lecturas’, *La Revista Blanca*, No. 114, Barcelona, 15 Feb. 1928, 570–1. She was therefore not immediately won over to the *Mujeres Libres* project: Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 95, although she was later persuaded to speak at a *Mujeres Libres* conference in 1937: Antonia Rodrigo, *Una Mujer Libre: Amparo Poch y Gascón, Médica y Anarquista* (Barcelona: Flor del Viento Ediciones, 2002), 204.

³³ Some great research has been done to draw out these connections, such as: Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex*.

³⁴ On international campaigns for birth control in this period, see Richard Sonn, ‘“Your Body is Yours”: Anarchism, Birth Control, and Eugenics in Interwar France’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14, 4 (2005), 417–18; Alison Sinclair, *Sex and Society in Early Twentieth Century Spain: Hildegart Rodríguez and the World League for Sexual Reform* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

³⁵ Isabel Jiménez-Lucena and Jorge Molero-Mesa, ‘Good Birth and Good Living: The (De)medicalizing Key to Sexual Reform in the Anarchist Media of Inter-War Spain’, *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 24, 3 (2011), 224–5.

anti-authoritarian libertarianism.³⁶ Indeed, Campbell's recent survey of scholarship on interwar eugenics highlights that gender and race, not the political left or right, were what defined eugenics in this period.³⁷ The Spanish anarchists integrated eugenics with neo-Malthusianism – a related intellectual current derived from the work of British economist and demographer Thomas Malthus which encouraged contraception to prevent impoverishment due to family growth and to limit population size in line with global resources.³⁸ Although elsewhere eugenics was pronatalist, in Spain many anarchists – who preferred voluntary birth control over state-led eugenic programmes – reconciled eugenic discourse on (un)desirable inherited characteristics with neo-Malthusian birth control.³⁹ They contended that children conceived deliberately by 'healthy' parents in loving relationships would be more 'advanced' than those conceived accidentally or by 'defective' or 'unhealthy' parents. To control biological heredity was to control the direction of the future, extending beyond mere Marxist economic change to encompass all aspects of life.⁴⁰ This fixation on evolutionary progress placed paradoxical limits on the sexual permissiveness of Spanish anarchism.

Motivated by the attitudes of the Montseny family and Doctor Klug, three central objectives were pursued in the periodical's advice columns: 1 – to sexually empower and raise the moral consciences of readers; 2 – to provide medical care to those who felt let down by Establishment medicine, could not afford ordinary treatment, or sought anonymity; 3 – to educate readers about the latest research into gender, sexuality, birth control and eugenics, paying particular attention to instilling good habits in young people. The legislative overhaul of reproductive rights and principles achieved under Federica Montseny's Ministry of Health and Social Care and its anarchist advisors could not have occurred without a more fundamental revolution in attitudes towards sexuality. *La Revista Blanca's* advice columns stand out as a remarkable point of interaction between influential anarchist figures and grassroots affiliates (from a range of genders, social classes, and generations), not to mention the fact that they were a space where Montseny experienced her initiation into politics.

Sexual empowerment and the reframing of moral consciences would, from an anarchist perspective, challenge the exploitative grip that the Church held over popular mentalities. The importance of *pudor* (shame or modesty) to the normative Spanish experience of womanhood, in particular, was testament to this.⁴¹ A future archbishop, Isidoro Gomá y Tomás, wrote in a 1928 treatise that 'the woman, more than the man, perhaps because she was more sinful than the man, feels in her body the phenomenon of embarrassment and the law of natural shame'.⁴² It was common in Spanish households for women's bodies to be discursively constructed as asexual and innocent; lived experiences like sexual pleasure were not appropriate topics for discussion in couples or families as they could imply unnatural desires or morally inadmissible values.⁴³ Spanish anarchism – being a movement that drew inspiration from science and the 'natural' – offered a platform for the dismantling of 'irrational' taboos, especially those attributed to the Church, and so *La Revista Blanca* harnessed its advice columns to break these silences surrounding sexuality and love. By separating procreative sex from recreational sex, anarchist morality elevated pleasure as a self-empowering experience for women and men. In addition, they sought to instil mental fortitude in their followers – from casting off shame around their bodies to overcoming 'unhealthy' vices like masturbation.

³⁶ Molero-Mesa, Jiménez-Lucena and Tabernero-Holgado, 'Neomalthusianismo y Eugenesia', 118–21.

³⁷ Campbell, 'Gender and Politics', 490–2.

³⁸ Though not all anarchists subscribed to neo-Malthusianism, as shown in Lora Medina, 'Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad', 842; Sonn, 'Anarchism, Birth Control, and Eugenics', 431–2.

³⁹ Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex*, 219.

⁴⁰ Carolyn Burdett, 'The Hidden Romance of Sexual Science: Eugenics, the Nation and the Making of Modern Feminism', in Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds., *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 44.

⁴¹ Elizabeth A. Scarlett, *Under Construction: The Body in Spanish Novels* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 5.

⁴² Anna Pelka, 'Mujer e Ideología en la Posguerra Española: Feminidad, Cuerpo y Vestido', *Historia Social*, 79 (2014), 32.

⁴³ Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, 166–7.

The provision of medical care in *La Revista Blanca* was to a large extent shaped by the doctor whom the editorial team employed. Besides his work at the periodical, Javier Serrano Coello (Doctor Klug) was well-known for his advocacy around sex education, his treatment of poor patients for free, and his involvement in the Social Services Department of the Catalan Generalitat during the Spanish Civil War.⁴⁴ Motivated by concern over accessibility of care, Doctor Klug's treatments in *La Revista Blanca* were often holistic and lifestyle-based, and only used ingredients purchasable cheaply in chemists to avoid the fees charged by doctors and pharmacists.⁴⁵ *La Revista Blanca* received a large quantity of anonymous submissions, affording additional privacy to discuss intimate symptoms. It is also notable that several enquirers had already visited medical professionals but had either been misdiagnosed or left uncured. That *La Revista Blanca* provided an alternative to mainstream medical institutions through recruiting Doctor Klug reflected their anti-authoritarian ethos.

Both inside and outside anarchist circles, interwar Europe saw doctor-led campaigns advocating for sex education in the home and in schools.⁴⁶ These attitudes were connected to broader social hygienic discourses, concerned with the size and 'quality' of populations perceived to be undergoing decline and degeneration.⁴⁷ Human degeneration was blamed on the corruption of morality and corporeal decline, both of which were also concerns of 'bourgeois' eugenicists.⁴⁸ The roots of these discourses differed between nations and societies: in Spain, they were connected to a decline in natality and the crisis of national identity provoked by the loss of its last colonies in 1898.⁴⁹ Although most overt eugenic language disappeared from *La Revista Blanca* by the 1930s, as Hitler's Germany illustrated a catastrophic potential outcome, its ambition to physically and morally perfect the body through the improvement of reproductive health would endure. *La Revista Blanca's* advice columns made evident the gaps in popular knowledge surrounding bodies and sexuality. As a high proportion of Spain's population were illiterate, and Catholic and bourgeois morality limited the openness with which such matters could be discussed, there persisted many taboos, rumours, and ill-informed practices.⁵⁰ Doctor Klug and the editorial team sought to correct this in the advice columns by engaging directly with readers in a pedagogical capacity underpinned by eugenic motivations. In this sense, the advice columns of periodicals such as *La Revista Blanca* fitted into the anarchists' broader pedagogical project to provide rationalist (empirical, positivist, and non-religious) education to the masses – boys and girls, men and women – which concurrently took place in in-person spaces such as the libertarian *ateneos*.⁵¹

La Revista Blanca's new socio-sexual morality centred on gendered bodies, platformed discussion of birth control, and advocated 'free love'; the article will elaborate on each of those themes in turn. It will illustrate that the relationship between sexual revolution and 'women's emancipation' in the periodical was complex and replete with contradictions, and that as such it spoke to wider tensions in thought and praxis across early twentieth-century anarchism globally. In anarchism, the emancipation of one

⁴⁴ José Vicente Martí Boscà and Antonio Rey González, 'Javier Serrano Coello', *Diccionario Biográfico Electrónico*, Real Academia de la Historia, available at <http://dbe.rah.es/biografias/65471/javier-serrano-coello> (last visited June 2021).

⁴⁵ Ausin i Hervella and Calbet i Camarasa, 'Xavier Serrano Coello', 97.

⁴⁶ Lora Medina, 'Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad', 826–7.

⁴⁷ Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex*, 39–42. On concurrent intellectual connections between degeneration and scientific discourse in France, Italy, and England, see Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2–3.

⁴⁸ On the controversiality of eugenic projects in scientific circles, see Nash, 'Un/Contested Identities', 37. On the degeneration crisis and eugenics in France and Germany, for example, see Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García, *Los Invisibles: A History of Male Homosexuality in Spain, 1850–1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 270–1.

⁴⁹ Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex*, 39, 70. On the decline in natality, see Eduard Masjuan, *La Ecología Humana en el Anarquismo Ibérico* (Madrid: Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo, 2000), 205–6.

⁵⁰ Lora Medina, 'Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad', 824–5.

⁵¹ Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 60; Prieto Borrego, 'Las Mujeres en el Anarquismo Andaluz', 52–3; Javier Navarro Navarro, *A La Revolución por la Cultura: Prácticas Culturales y Sociabilidad Libertarias en el País Valenciano (1931–1939)* (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 2004), 68–124.

individual was considered possible only alongside the emancipation of all.⁵² In terms of gender and sexuality, this principle of shared struggle was what many anarchists, including Federica Montseny, called ‘humanism’ – in place of ‘feminism’.⁵³ When it came to sexual revolution, there was consequently tension in the discourse of the anarchist press between the individual, libertarian freedom from patriarchal oppression that women aspired to, and the expectation to connect that freedom to a collective, unified, genderless struggle for emancipation and evolutionary progress.⁵⁴ This tension shaped how *La Revista Blanca*’s editorial team and Doctor Klug handled their objectives of empowerment, medical care, and sex education.

Gendered Bodies

Interwar medical discourse was grounded in what has since been termed ‘compulsory heterosexuality’: male-female attraction was considered the human default state, so deviation from cisgender externalisation or heterosexual orientation was treated as a correctable social and biological abnormality.⁵⁵ This reductive ‘imaginary logic’ demanded that identification and desire be mutually exclusive, even though this unrealistically implied that there was only one type of masculinity and one type of femininity.⁵⁶ In the interwar period, people were categorised into ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ to protect the former from contamination by the latter.⁵⁷ Gregorio Marañón, whose research dominated interwar sexual science in Spain, pathologized sexual deviance by claiming that biological traits in ‘normal’ humans conditioned the ‘correct’ gendered behaviours for one’s sex.⁵⁸ Of course, the existence of intersexuality and more recent advances in gender theory illustrate that ‘sex’ is actually an ideal construction never able to fully materialise no matter how many regulatory norms are put in place by society.⁵⁹ Even though by the late 1920s some research found ‘female’ hormones in the endocrine systems of people with ‘male’ gonads and vice versa (illustrating that ‘sex’ was a continuum), this did little to ease popular concerns about gender inversion or sexual deviance.⁶⁰

Influenced by this binary definition of gender and sex, *La Revista Blanca*’s advice columns addressed the negative stereotyping of women raised in several submissions. The editorial team, in line with many interwar Spanish feminists, asserted that women and men were biologically distinct, with different capabilities, though complementary and equally valuable.⁶¹ This reflected that by the interwar period much of the anthropological research belittling women’s natural intelligence had been de-bunked, although the idea that women were more emotional and less rational than men endured.⁶² When asked, ‘why is the female gender weaker than the masculine one?’, they pointed

⁵² Lora Medina, ‘Identidad y Género a Debate’, 162.

⁵³ Federica Montseny, ‘Lecturas’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.114, Barcelona, 15 Feb. 1928, 570–2.

⁵⁴ This speaks to the pertinent point made by Victoria Harris, that in the context of sexual revolution or liberation ‘progress’ has always meant different things to different individuals. See Victoria Harris, ‘Histories of “Sex”, Histories of “Sexuality”’, *Contemporary European History*, 22, 2 (2013), 295.

⁵⁵ The term ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ denotes a concept in gender studies, stemming from the seminal research in Adrienne Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’, *Signs*, 5, 4 (1980), 631–60. Judith Butler also described the heterosexual imperative behind the construction of sex and gender in Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2011 [1993]), xii. The same term is used to describe Spanish anarchist attitudes towards homosexuality in Enrique Álvarez, ‘Man Un/Made, Male Homosocial and Homosexual Desire in Anarchist Culture of the Spanish Civil War’, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 18, 1 (2012), 17–18.

⁵⁶ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 183.

⁵⁷ Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex*, 37.

⁵⁸ Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García, *Hermaphroditism Medical Science and Sexual Identity in Spain, 1850–1960* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 126, 181; Lora Medina, ‘Identidad y Género a Debate’, 171–2.

⁵⁹ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, xii.

⁶⁰ On the research indicating that ‘sex’ was a continuum: Cleminson and Vázquez García, *Hermaphroditism*, 16.

⁶¹ On this trend among Spanish feminists: Nash, ‘Un/Contested Identities’, 30.

⁶² On the debunking of the inferior intelligence claims: Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, 13. On the psychological view of women as irrational and emotional: Nash, ‘Un/Contested Identities’, 27.

out that rural-dwelling women were often physically stronger than city-dwelling men, and contended that women's mental capacity was only lesser than men's because the former were denied a decent education.⁶³ Yet when asked, 'are women naturally more sensitive than men?', they replied, 'by nature . . . women feel sensations and emotions more strongly than men'.⁶⁴ Federica Montseny did not consider women inferior to men, though; she asserted that she was 'more inclined to see superiority in women than in men, because they love more and are more emotive'.⁶⁵ In these interactions with readers, the Montseny family did not accept that women were innately less strong or talented than men, but ultimately fell back on the socio-scientific orthodoxy that men and women's social values were connected to their 'biological' characteristics.⁶⁶ As a result, the periodical's empowerment of men and women was deeply gendered.

Pride in one's 'natural' male or female body was paramount in *La Revista Blanca*'s consciousness-raising efforts. To this end, nudism was considered by its anarchist practitioners to challenge the revulsion towards unclothedness perpetuated by the Church, and to be an egalitarian form of expression because clothing – a visual indication of social stratification – was cast aside.⁶⁷ Nudists across Europe, anarchist and non-anarchist alike, saw connection to one's own body as something genuine in an increasingly artificial world.⁶⁸ Although the editorial team expressed confidence in nudism's social value when asked about it in the advice column, this did not prompt them to foment what we would now call 'body-positivity'.⁶⁹ Rising public discussion of physical fitness and fashion at the turn of the century widened the gap between socially legitimate female bodies and real female bodies, leaving many women feeling 'dis-embodied' – unable to attain the corporeal perfection that society expected them to.⁷⁰ *La Revista Blanca*'s exacerbation of this problem likely contributed to the limited take-up of nudist practices.⁷¹ One advice column response discussing controversially short skirts concluded they were only recommendable to women with 'well-toned' legs, and when asked about whether hats were unhygienic the answer was that regardless of hygiene they were a good option for women who unattractively cut their hair short.⁷² They also chose to print a submission which seemingly advocated that women undergo cosmetic procedures to please their partners: 'I have a girlfriend – certainly very pretty – but made ugly by the hair on her face. What remedy is there to remove it?'⁷³ Western thought traditionally established a binary between nakedness, associated with embarrassment, and nudity, connoting artistic beauty.⁷⁴ *La Revista Blanca* aspired to replace the former mentality with the latter, but was restrictively grounded in a eugenic worldview that subjectively considered some bodies to be closer to perfection than others.

⁶³ La Redacción and Sabadell, 'Consultorio General', *Suplemento de La Revista Blanca*, No.289, Barcelona, 3 Aug. 1934, vii.

⁶⁴ La Redacción and M. Soria, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.332, Barcelona, 31 May 1935, 526.

⁶⁵ The respondent was not named, but since their comments echo an earlier article it is very likely that the author was Federica. Federica Montseny, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.266, Barcelona, 22 Feb. 1934, 239.

⁶⁶ Further to this, in articles Federica Montseny expressed concern about 'modern' or 'feminist' women adopting masculine behaviours, sartorial choices and habits which transgressed the boundaries of binary gender, such as Federica Montseny, 'La Mujer Nueva', *La Revista Blanca*, No.72, Barcelona, 15 May 1926, 25.

⁶⁷ On the Church's disdain towards nudity, see Cleminson, 'Anarchism and Feminism', *Women's History Review*, 7, 1 (1998), 136.

⁶⁸ George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 45.

⁶⁹ Support for nudism shown in La Redacción, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.348, Barcelona, 20 Sept. 1935, 911.

⁷⁰ Catharina Vallejo, 'La Mujer In-Corporada, La Educación Física de la Mujer en la España del Siglo XIX, o las Paradojas entre el Fundamento Teórico y la Realidad', *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 42, 1 (2017), 188.

⁷¹ Richard Cleminson estimates that a significant minority of anarchists were naturists (though not all of these were nudists) in Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex*, 167.

⁷² La Redacción, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.273, Barcelona, 12 Apr. 1934, 349.

⁷³ La Redacción and Floreal Casteñeda, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.345, Barcelona, 30 Aug. 1935, 837.

⁷⁴ Philippa Levine, 'States of Undress: Nakedness and the Colonial Imagination', *Victorian Studies*, 50, 2 (2008), 189–90.

By extension, Federica Montseny found the label ‘feminism’ to be problematic as it was associated with the Western ‘modern woman’ trope.⁷⁵ This was characterised by scandalous fashion, flirtatious dances and other rejections of feminine domesticity and docility that implied a desire to enjoy the same lifestyles as men.⁷⁶ In a 1924 article Montseny had employed sarcasm to convince readers that modern ‘feminist’ causes were laughably trivial: in response to a US company granting women the right to wear trousers at work, she quipped, ‘we, upon hearing the news, have become filled with immense jubilation, thinking about such a transcendental and revolutionary triumph’.⁷⁷ García-Maroto claims that anarchists disregarded these small feminist triumphs because they took ‘women’s emancipation’ too seriously.⁷⁸ But this overlooks the fact that androgynous gender-externalisations like wearing trousers also challenged *La Revista Blanca*’s binary ideal of femininity.⁷⁹ Montseny’s management of *La Revista Blanca*’s advice columns a decade later continued to reflect her fundamental belief that gender deviance, sartorial and otherwise, ran contrary to the eugenic aims of the anarchist movement and therefore contravened the cause of ‘women’s emancipation’.

This conditional empowerment of gendered bodies certainly injected tension into discussions of sexuality and childbearing. However, Doctor Klug was careful to avoid its contamination of discourse surrounding embodied traumas, such as miscarriage and menstrual complications, which he instead elevated as topics that warranted better public awareness and sympathetic medical care. Identifying mentions of miscarriage within *La Revista Blanca*’s advice columns is tricky as the noun ‘*aborto*’ in Spanish can signify either miscarriage or abortion, only distinguishable by interpreting context, and it is sometimes impossible to tell which is referred to.⁸⁰ Advice around those two female experiences therefore often overlapped, especially given that many of the after-effects on women’s bodies were similar. On one hand, the fact that abortions could be misinterpreted as miscarriages might have helped protect women and practitioners from legal confrontation, as until 1936 abortion was punishable by indefinite incarceration; on the other hand, the fact that miscarriages could be misinterpreted as abortions likely reinforced the stigmatisation of women who ‘lost’ their unborn children as Catholic morality viewed abortion as homicide.⁸¹ In this context, the frequent mention of miscarriage in the advice columns helped to validate and garner sympathy for this embodied trauma.

The queries on this topic tended to be asked anonymously, and usually asked for medical advice. One wrote in about a friend who after a miscarriage was experiencing haemorrhages two or three times a month, another described a woman feeling physically weak after a miscarriage, and a third reported that a friend had struggled to get pregnant again after miscarrying and that doctors had tried (and failed) to treat her with painful electric shocks on her ovaries.⁸² Doctor Klug advised the women in question to take ‘reconstitution’ medicines or warm baths, or provided medicinal recipes that the women could assemble themselves.⁸³ He also debunked some myths surrounding the causes

⁷⁵ On this trope in Europe, including how it caught on in Catalonia: Nash, ‘Un/Contested Identities’, 31–2.

⁷⁶ On anarchist women distancing themselves from the ‘feminist’ label: Espigado Tocino, ‘Las Mujeres en el Anarquismo Español (1869–1939)’, *Ayer*, 45 (2002), 42–4. On the ‘modern woman’: Nash, ‘Un/Contested Identities’, 31–2. On such women being accused of emulating men: Kate Lister, *A Curious History of Sex* (London: Unbound, 2020), 205.

⁷⁷ Hipatia, ‘Rodando por el Mundo’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.18, Sarrià de Noya-Barcelona, 15 Feb. 1924, 27.

⁷⁸ Ma. Angeles García-Maroto, *La Mujer en la Prensa Anarquista* (Madrid: Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo, 1996), 71.

⁷⁹ She was not alone, since in Spanish anarchism more widely unisex fashion only became popular in the Civil War. Shown in Frances Lannon, ‘Women and Images of Women in the Spanish Civil War’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 1 (1991), 216–17.

⁸⁰ For example in this advice column entry where the verb construction ‘*ha abortado*’ is used: Doctor Klug and Un Libertario, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.365, Barcelona, 15 Jan. 1936, 1269.

⁸¹ Lora Medina, ‘Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad’, 836–7.

⁸² On monthly bleeds, see Doctor Klug and A. Conesa, ‘Consultorio General’, *Suplemento de La Revista Blanca*, No.285, Barcelona, 6 July 1934, iv. On feeling very weak, see Doctor Klug and Roca, ‘Consultorio General’, *Suplemento de La Revista Blanca*, No.295, Barcelona, 14 Sept. 1934, iii. On electric shocks, see Doctor Klug and Uno, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.353, Barcelona, 25 Oct. 1935, 1028.

⁸³ For a ‘reconstitution’ recipe, see Doctor Klug, ‘Consultorio General’, *Suplemento de La Revista Blanca*, No.295, Barcelona, 14 Sept. 1934, iii. Another recipe was detailed in Doctor Klug, ‘Consultorio General’, *Suplemento de La Revista Blanca*, No.285, Barcelona, 6 July 1934, iv. Warm baths were recommended in Doctor Klug, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.353, Barcelona, 25 Oct. 1935, 1028.

of miscarriages, overturning any agnotological ignorance surrounding female physiology. One reader asked if their sister-in-law's miscarriage might have been caused by eating ice cream or using machines; Doctor Klug suggested that the machine, not the ice cream, might have been a valid cause but also that syphilis was a possibility.⁸⁴ To other readers, he explained that many illnesses aside from venereal disease could provoke miscarriages, which contributed to disassociating miscarriage from dirtiness or irresponsibility.⁸⁵ In responding to a more general question about the relative responsibility of men and women in fertility, Doctor Klug emphasised that 'to blame does not seem fair to me, because no one is to blame for their nature nor their health'.⁸⁶ All these sympathetic responses from Doctor Klug normalised and destigmatised female bodily dysfunctionality, even though anarchist and mainstream society alike hoped women would be perfect child-bearers.⁸⁷

Another theme which *La Revista Blanca* destigmatised was menstruation; between 1934 and 1936 almost every issue included at least one advice column entry relating to it. To some extent, *La Revista Blanca's* choice to publish the queries of dozens of women surrounding menstruation stemmed from eugenic concerns: if a woman menstruated healthily, she was more likely to have frequent and healthy pregnancies. Aside from this motive, though, the periodical gave insight into the workings of the menstrual cycle, only just becoming understood in scientific research, and offered women reassurance that any anxieties or difficulties they faced relating to this 'private' embodied experience were shared by many others. The periodical gave women medical advice and tackled rumours that had long stigmatised them – for instance that washing while on one's period was dangerous or that menstruating women had sinister supernatural power.⁸⁸ By platforming this topic, Doctor Klug not only dismantled misinformation but also once again normalised bodily dysfunctionality.

Early on, Doctor Klug explained the biological process of the menstrual cycle to the extent that it was known by scientists at the time. Experiments on mice to determine the role of hormones in menstruation only began in the 1920s so this was a brand new field.⁸⁹ He emphasised that the day when eggs are released into the uterus is variable, which offered women insight into the relative normalcy of their own experiences.⁹⁰ Several women wrote in after experiencing multiple bleeds per month, to which Doctor Klug typically advised taking either the synthetic 'ovarian hormone' Sistomensina or the 'thyroid hormone' Tiroidina or both.⁹¹ Other women's queries surrounded the absence of menstruation: that their period was delayed in commencing, or that it had ceased entirely.⁹² Acute period

⁸⁴ Doctor Klug and Silla, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.347, Barcelona, 13 Sept. 1935, 884.

⁸⁵ Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *Suplemento de La Revista Blanca*, No.289, Barcelona, 3 Aug. 1934, vi; Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.304, Barcelona, 16 Nov. 1934, 916.

⁸⁶ Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *Suplemento de La Revista Blanca*, No.295, Barcelona, 14 Sept. 1934, iii.

⁸⁷ On the importance of including dysfunctionality in studies of bodies, see Cleminson, 'Making Sense of the Body: Anarchism, Nudism and Subjective Experience', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 81, 6 (2004), 697–8; Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, 'Introduction: Bodies, Empires, and World Histories', in Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 7.

⁸⁸ Doctor Klug and un Lector de *La Revista Blanca*, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.298, Barcelona, 5 Oct. 1934, 773; Doctor Klug and F. Tomás, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.325, Barcelona, 5 Apr. 1935, 331. On wider European beliefs in similar superstitions relating to periods, see Glenda Lewin Hufnagel, *A History of Women's Menstruation from Ancient Greece to the Twenty-first Century: Psychological, Social, Medical, Religious, and Educational Issues* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), 51–2.

⁸⁹ Hufnagel, *History of Women's Menstruation*, 60.

⁹⁰ Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.272, Barcelona, 6 Apr. 1934, 355. Further details given in Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.336, Barcelona, 28 June 1935, 622.

⁹¹ Doctor Klug and Una Joven, 'Consultorio General', *Suplemento de La Revista Blanca*, No.291, 17 Aug. 1934, V; Doctor Klug and Sin Nombre, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.298, Barcelona, 5 Oct. 1934, 772; Doctor Klug and Teresa Casanovas, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.323, Barcelona, 29 Mar. 1935, 307; Doctor Klug and Conchita Pi, 'Consultorio Médico', *La Revista Blanca*, No.383, Barcelona, 22 May 1936, 426.

⁹² Doctor Klug and Una Lectora, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.300, Barcelona, 19 Oct. 1934, 819; Doctor Klug and Una Libertaria, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.323, Barcelona, 29 Mar. 1935, 308; Doctor Klug and XV, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.361, Barcelona, 20 Dec. 1935, 1190.

pain also featured frequently in these conversations between anarchist women and Doctor Klug, so the burden of bodily trauma was shared and validated. Female readers wrote in to describe symptoms which in many cases were very severe, including cramps, changes in appetite, inexplicable crying, breast pain, backaches, headaches, vomiting, and even fainting.⁹³ Often these women emphasised that they were otherwise healthy; many were in their late teens or early twenties, and some had enjoyed successful pregnancies in the past. In a 1934 advice column response to a question about the variability of menstrual cycles between women, Doctor Klug lamented: ‘research into this sexual topic is very unadvanced due to difficulties imposed by governments and bourgeois morality’.⁹⁴ In other words, lack of sponsorship of research into menstruation left doctors like him unable to deliver well-informed advice. Non-knowledge surrounding menstruation was socially, politically, and culturally constructed, as its rectification would not directly benefit men.⁹⁵

La Revista Blanca’s inclusion of menstruation in published advice column exchanges was radically subversive. As Kate Lister has explained, patriarchal societies consider menstruation to be proof of women’s biological function and their inherent irrationality that necessitates total supervision from men.⁹⁶ Thus, *La Revista Blanca*’s tackling of shame and taboos pertaining to this female embodied experience not only afforded it the medical attention it had long lacked, but also contributed to restoring dignity to female bodies and proving their capacity for autonomy. So long as they conformed to binary gender expression, male and female bodies were empowered, dignified, treated medically, and better understood as a result of advice column exchanges between anarchists. Here lay the tension between the anarchist individual and society: if one conformed, one was granted freedom.

Maternity and Birth Control

Central to the struggle for female bodily autonomy, which many anarchists considered an essential facet of sexual revolution, was a couple’s ability to control when they conceived. *La Revista Blanca* exalted the beauty and social value of raising a child, while at the same time contraception and abortion were discussed openly in pedagogical and medical exchanges. The periodical highlighted women’s maternal duty as the creators of the next generation, and emphasised women’s biologically ‘natural’ maternal instinct.⁹⁷ This was far from unique; even anarcho-feminists in *Mujeres Libres* elevated childcare as women’s most important role in life.⁹⁸ The anarchist press aspired to prepare readers for post-revolutionary society, which meant guiding the creation of future generations. At the same time, though, many anarchists also believed that childbearing should happen deliberately and on the mother’s terms. Famously Federica Montseny proclaimed in a 1927 article, ‘A woman without children is a tree without fruit’; however, she then continued by clarifying, ‘The question lies in knowing

⁹³ Doctor Klug and Maribel, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.333, Barcelona, 7 June 1935, 549; Doctor Klug and J.C.C., ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.342, Barcelona, 9 Aug. 1935, 766; Doctor Klug and Francisca Bernabel, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.345, Barcelona, 30 Aug. 1935, 838; Doctor Klug and Una Compañera, ‘Consultorio Médico’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.388, Barcelona, 15 Aug. 1936, 144; Doctor Klug and Una de las Juventudes Libertarias, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.374, Barcelona, 20 Mar. 1936, 237.

⁹⁴ Doctor Klug, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.280, Barcelona, 1 June 1934, 462.

⁹⁵ On the agnotological construction of non-knowledge, see Robert N. Proctor, ‘Agnotology: A Missing Term to Describe the Cultural Production of Ignorance (and Its Study)’, in Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, eds., *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 27; Cornel Zwierlein, ‘Introduction: Towards a History of Ignorance’, in Cornel Zwierlein, ed., *The Dark Side of Knowledge: Histories of Ignorance, 1400–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 3–4. On awareness of sexist knowledge production among feminists at the time, see Lesley A. Hall, ‘Feminist Reconfigurations of Heterosexuality in the 1920s’, in Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds., *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 138.

⁹⁶ Lister, *History of Sex*, 303.

⁹⁷ See for example Federica Montseny, ‘El Movimiento Femenino Internacional’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.6, Sardañola-Barcelona, 15 Aug., 1923, 3–5. On broader anarchist exaltation of maternity as a ‘natural’ instinct, see Lora Medina, ‘Identidad y Género a Debate’, 168–9.

⁹⁸ On *Mujeres Libres*, see Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, 91.

how to be a mother and to do so consciously and voluntarily'.⁹⁹ *La Revista Blanca's* advice columns raised readers' awareness of methods to control conception. Doctor Klug and the editorial team, adhering to libertarian principles, trod a fine line between letting couples do whatever suited them and suggesting why certain practices, eugenically speaking, were not in the interests of society as a whole.

Sex education was central to this 'conscious maternity'. However, although preventing venereal disease was considered essential, contraception for the purpose of preventing pregnancy was more controversial among anarchists.¹⁰⁰ Federica Montseny and many others were sceptical of 'unnatural' methods involving chemicals and insertion of foreign objects, so instead trusted in menstrual tracking. This strategy was thought to have been perfected by Austrian doctor Hermann Knaus in 1928, built on the belief that women are only fertile for a very small window each month.¹⁰¹ This widespread distrust in contraceptives was more complex than just a consequence of patriarchy, though. In interwar Spain contraceptives were hard to access, in some cases difficult to use, and their promotion attracted legal attention.¹⁰² Moreover, before the advent of hormonal contraception these methods carried personal risks; a woman might avoid contraceptive vaginal irrigations because she feared infection, not because she did not seek bodily autonomy. On the other hand, there had been intellectual interest in sexual science in Spain throughout the early twentieth century, shown by the establishment of Spain's first family planning clinic in 1906 in Barcelona and the Institute of Social Medicine in Madrid in 1919.¹⁰³ Anarchist birth control advocates like Doctor Isaac Puente argued that the medical and legal risks of contraceptives were offset by their diminishing of complications, like miscarriages or death in childbirth, that correlated to the number of pregnancies a woman endured.¹⁰⁴ Once the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera was replaced by the Second Republic in 1931, sex-reform legislation (including contraception provision) became a real possibility so discussion of this matter – within and without the anarchist movement – gained momentum.¹⁰⁵

Despite the Montseny family's personal views on the matter, they did publish a large number of questions about contraceptives in *La Revista Blanca's* advice columns for Doctor Klug to answer. In contravention of Mary Nash's claim that early-twentieth-century Spanish women – including anarchist women – did not publicly discuss contraception, in *La Revista Blanca* a mixture of men, women, and anonymous contributors asked questions on this theme, typically upon commencing their first sexual relationships.¹⁰⁶ Doctor Klug gave detailed advice. For example, when asked about the risks of the 'Fermita' pessary, he emphasised that it must only be worn during intercourse and upon removal the woman must rinse herself with a vaginal irrigation of water and vinegar or boric acid.¹⁰⁷ This method was dangerous; we now know that vaginal douching can cause infections and has been linked to cancer.¹⁰⁸ More typically, when asked for a general recommendation of a

⁹⁹ Montseny, 'La Mujer, Problema del Hombre', *La Revista Blanca*, No.94, Barcelona, 15 Apr. 1927, 682.

¹⁰⁰ Many advice column entries discussed the prevention and treatment of venereal diseases, for example Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *Suplemento de La Revista Blanca*, No.277, Barcelona, 11 May 1934, v; Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.280, Barcelona, 1 June 1934, 462; Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.316, Barcelona, 8 Feb. 1935, 138; Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.341, Barcelona, 2 Aug. 1935, 741; Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.349, Barcelona, 27 Sept. 1935, 933.

¹⁰¹ On discussion of Knaus's method in the anarchist periodical *Estudios*, see Lora Medina, 'Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad', 832–3.

¹⁰² Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex*, 142–3; Lora Medina, 'Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad', 831. On the dangers of those contraceptive methods that involved douching, see Lister, *History of Sex*, 256–7.

¹⁰³ Masjuan, *La Ecología Humana*, 266–7; Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex*, 83.

¹⁰⁴ Lora Medina, 'Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad', 829–30.

¹⁰⁵ Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex*, 80.

¹⁰⁶ Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, 166; Nash, 'Un/Contested Identities', 37. A similarly significant level of engagement by women in questions of sexuality has been found in the anarchist magazine *Estudios*, as analysed in Jiménez-Lucena and Molero-Mesa, 'Good Birth and Good Living', 225.

¹⁰⁷ Doctor Klug and V Bayón, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.280, Barcelona, 1 June 1934, 462.

¹⁰⁸ Lister, *History of Sex*, 256.

contraceptive method he suggested condoms, irrigations of lemon or vinegar, or the medication 'Blenocol Curi'.¹⁰⁹ Latex condoms, cheaper and much more comfortable than their rubber predecessors, had been invented in the 1920s.¹¹⁰ Doctor Klug often emphasised contraception's fallibility, and thus he typically advised readers to use two methods at once.¹¹¹ He also once recommended the illustrated safe-sex manual *L'Education Sexuelle* by French anarchist Jean Marestan, and the work of Swiss Auguste Forel, both of whom were involved in networks which debated eugenics and neo-Malthusianism.¹¹² That being said, Doctor Klug appeared reluctant to endorse overdependence on contraceptives and only enthusiastically encouraged their use on one occasion: when a reader described his partner's worries about passing on an inherited illness.¹¹³ This suggested that he had a more eugenic view of contraception than a neo-Malthusian one – that a couple's decision to not conceive should be based on social utility rather than free will. The scale of real-world contraceptive use among anarchists is disputed by historians: García-Maroto claims that their use was widespread, whereas Nash suggests that there were too many barriers preventing working-class access to them.¹¹⁴ *La Revista Blanca's* advice columns, though they cannot offer an answer, do indicate that at the very least there was curiosity around contraception and willingness on the part of anarchist medical experts to provide birth control advice. Engaging anonymously with the anarchist press in this way allowed men and women to become educated discreetly about safe sex.

Discretion through anonymity was also used in enquiries pertaining to abortion, typically asking for abortifacient recommendations. Although we cannot be sure, it would make sense that many of these came from the pregnant women themselves.¹¹⁵ In a message directed to those women, Doctor Klug emphasised that 'abortion is a consequence of lack of care in avoiding fertilisation and it is dangerous', concluding 'one should not attempt it'.¹¹⁶ Notably, though, he used the reflexive form of the verb 'attempt', which indicated that he took issue particularly with abortions which were self-inflicted, that is to say, homemade abortifacients. Abortions were illegal, which forced them to be performed clandestinely, but this should not be taken to signify that all possible abortion procedures in the interwar period were dangerous. In a 1934 answer, Doctor Serrano (writing under his real name this once) warned against home remedies used to induce abortion, such as intrauterine irrigations of soapy water or the insertion of a probe into the uterus, as they frequently caused haemorrhages or infections which could become fatal.¹¹⁷ However, when asked whether medically safe abortion was possible, he explained that doctors could perform abortions via a ten-minute, 'almost painless' operation after dilution of the cervix, 'without losing a drop of blood and without danger'.¹¹⁸ Some doctors already used this technique in extreme circumstances.¹¹⁹ He concluded that personally he disagreed with abortion because with proper use of multiple contraceptives it was unnecessary.¹²⁰

¹⁰⁹ Condom recommendations given in Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.319, Barcelona, 1 Mar. 1935, 211; Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.344, Barcelona, 23 Aug. 1935, 813. Blenocol Curi and condom recommendation given in Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.322, Barcelona, 22 Mar. 1935, 283. Lemon and vinegar recommendation given in Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.328, Barcelona, 3 May 1935, 429; Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.388, Barcelona, 15 Aug. 1936, 114.

¹¹⁰ Lister, *History of Sex*, 273–4.

¹¹¹ Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.326, Barcelona, 19 Apr. 1935, 380–1; Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.291, Barcelona, 17 Aug. 1934, iv.

¹¹² Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.387, Barcelona, 15 June 1936, 107. On Marestan's book, see Sonn, 'Anarchism, Birth Control, and Eugenics', 423–4.

¹¹³ Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.344, Barcelona, 23 Aug. 1935, 813.

¹¹⁴ García-Maroto, *La Mujer en la Prensa Anarquista*, 150–1; Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, 171.

¹¹⁵ Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.315, Barcelona, 1 Feb. 1935, 116.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Doctor Serrano, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.270, Barcelona, 23 Mar. 1934, 303.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

Nonetheless, in response to a question about the dangers of abortions, Doctor Klug used the unemotional medicalised terms ‘embryo’ and ‘foetus’ rather than ‘baby’ or ‘child’, which suggested that he was comfortable raising awareness of safe abortions in his professional capacity.¹²¹ Other anarchist doctors, like Isaac Puente, much more firmly defended abortion as a tool for women to control their own bodies, though he too warned against unsafe methods.¹²² Doctor Klug evidently took issue not with abortion itself but with its widespread practice in conditions lacking medical knowledge or hygiene. These exchanges in the advice columns helped those considering the possibility of legalising abortion to envision what medically regulated, hygienic, safe procedures could and should look like, and challenged those who claimed that abortion always harmed women.

However, even as discussions of contraceptives and abortion gained momentum in *La Revista Blanca*’s advice columns right up until 1936, they continued to be published alongside consciousness-raising and pedagogy that exalted parenthood and promoted lifestyle changes with childbearing in mind. Elsewhere in the magazine’s pages there were, for example, prints of paintings with captions such as ‘What profound and moving beauty this painting has, in which the sensitivity of the mother and the artist has expressed the happiness of young and healthy maternity!’¹²³ Furthermore, Doctor Klug’s insistence about the virtues of ‘naturist’ practices such as vegetarianism stemmed from his belief, shared by likeminded anarchists such as Antonia Maymón, that they aided reproductive health as well as strengthening the genetic traits of future generations.¹²⁴ As Maymón asserted in a 1925 article, ‘the anarchist must evolve in a progressive sense, because a healthy organism works more and better towards human perfection and because, upon bestowing upon his descendants a deteriorated organism, he obstructs the progressive march of humankind’.¹²⁵ In anarcho-naturism, one’s entire lifestyle had to be geared towards the perfection of one’s future children. The implications of this worldview were most blatant in *La Revista Blanca*’s advice surrounding love and relationships.

The Limits of ‘Free Love’

Birth control through accessible contraception and safe, legal abortion would enable the anarchist sexual revolution’s central tenet to take shape: the separation of recreational sex from reproductive sex. As a 1936 article remarked: ‘Perhaps we are living through one of the most intimate phases of the human revolution: the revolution of sex. The conversion of coitus into a pleasure for free people and not into an intercourse that’s often mechanical, indifferent and even painful’.¹²⁶ In this revolution, the formation of sexual partnerships would be overhauled too: *La Revista Blanca* was one of many anarchist publications that imagined a future society built on ‘free love’.

In its advice columns, Doctor Klug and the editorial team advocated for ‘free unions’ to replace marriages. These involved ceremonies akin to weddings except secular, not based on material wealth, and without any legal expectation to keep one’s vows for life.¹²⁷ Although divorce was legalised in Spain in 1932, ‘free unions’ were presented as a means to avoid marriage in the first place.¹²⁸ This was ‘not only to dispense with the judge and the priest’, in line with their antiauthoritarian principles,

¹²¹ Doctor Klug, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.370, Barcelona, 21 Feb. 1936, 157.

¹²² Lora Medina, ‘Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad’, 838.

¹²³ La Redacción, ‘La Joven Madre’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.202, Barcelona, 15 Oct. 1931, 296. For a similar example, see La Redacción, ‘Madre’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.208, Barcelona, 15 Jan. 1932, 510.

¹²⁴ Examples of encouraging vegetarianism included Doctor Klug, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.304, Barcelona, 16 Nov. 1934, 916; Doctor Klug, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.314, Barcelona, 25 Jan. 1935, 92; Doctor Klug, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.317, Barcelona, 15 Feb. 1935, 166.

¹²⁵ Antonia Maymón, ‘Anarquismo y Naturismo’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.56, Barcelona, 15 Sept. 1925, 12.

¹²⁶ J Santana Calero, ‘La Tragedia de los Sexos’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.384, Barcelona, 29 May, 1936, 438. On the prevalence of this attitude across the anarchist movement more broadly, see Prieto Borrego, ‘Las Mujeres en el Anarquismo Andaluz’, 50–1.

¹²⁷ Explained in La Redacción, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.320, Barcelona, 8 Mar. 1935, 235. Also discussed in Alejandro Lora Medina, ‘Amor Libre’, 590.

¹²⁸ On the legalisation of divorce not satisfying anarchists and on ‘free unions’ being a compromise, see Lora Medina, ‘El Amor Libre’, 592–4.

but because they believed firmly that ‘one falls in love multiple times’ in life, and therefore committing to only one relationship was senseless.¹²⁹ The editorial team were aware that at present economic uncertainty – disproportionately felt by women – made living in such freedom difficult, but promised this issue would be resolved in the post-revolutionary anarchist society.¹³⁰ Men were often reminded of this gendered burden: when a man wrote that he regretted marrying his wife, he was urged to ‘bear in mind that poor women do not receive social assistance or sufficient economic means to be able to do the same things as men. It’s not acceptable to take advantage of them!’¹³¹ *Pluralidad amorosa* (having more than one monogamous relationship in one’s lifetime) was advocated in other anarchist periodicals too, by individuals like Frenchman Han Ryner and Brazilian Maria Lacerda de Moura.¹³² Federica Montseny herself entered into a ‘free union’ in 1930 with the anarchist Germinal Esgleas, with whom she would raise three children.¹³³ ‘Free love’ in theory offered individuals the liberty to enjoy sexual partnerships with whomever they chose, for however long they saw fit.

However, despite this emphasis on individual freedom, anarchist socio-sexual morality demanded that these relationships be heterosexual.¹³⁴ Machismo, rule-following ingrained in local Catholic culture, and the ‘menace of homoeroticism’ prevented anarchist men from comfortably subverting gender norms.¹³⁵ This was all the more heightened by the ‘cult of virility’ pervading Europe in the early twentieth century – a leading motivator of eugenics.¹³⁶ Words like ‘invert’ were used by anarchists to derogatorily label their opponents like clergymen or politicians, because it insinuated their poor virility and consequent weak masculinity.¹³⁷ For these reasons, Enrique Álvarez regards interwar Spanish anarchism as homophobic, arguing convincingly that although the term is anachronistic it is important to recognise the role of homophobic masculinity in anarchists’ lived experiences.¹³⁸ Homophobia was expressed explicitly on several occasions in *La Revista Blanca*’s advice columns. Summarising the editorial team’s views, an advice column response in 1935 read: ‘To us in matters of love and sexual relationships between men and women nothing surprises or shocks us. The only thing that we condemn, because it disgusts us, is sexual behaviour between two men or two women’.¹³⁹ Same-sex attraction between women, just like that between men, was medicalised and pathologised. Two months later, a male anarchist wrote in asking if a lesbian woman could love men after having loved women, to which Doctor Klug replied that it is only possible ‘when the sickness is not from birth, that is to say when it is not a sickness but a vice’.¹⁴⁰ When a woman wrote in the same year to ask what the editors thought of a young woman ‘being madly in love with another woman’, they replied that: ‘We would consider her to be sick, that she should undergo treatment, to normalise the function of her sexual organs, so that her feelings wouldn’t be directed against nature’.¹⁴¹ These attitudes reflected turn-of-the-century sexological research from Europe and the United States which alleged that homosexuality was an atavism, a rare evolutionary error whereby gender differentiation had not been fully achieved in an individual.¹⁴²

¹²⁹ La Redacción, ‘Consultorio General’, *Suplemento de La Revista Blanca*, No.274, Barcelona, 19 Apr. 1934, iii. Corroborated in La Redacción, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.271, Barcelona, 30 Mar. 1934, 317–18.

¹³⁰ La Redacción, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.271, Barcelona, 30 Mar. 1934, 317–18.

¹³¹ La Redacción, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.269, Barcelona, 15 Mar. 1934, 286–7.

¹³² García-Maroto, *La Mujer en la Prensa Anarquista*, 132.

¹³³ Tavera, *Federica Montseny*, 114–6.

¹³⁴ Even though evidence suggests that at least one of *Mujeres Libres*’s founders was a lesbian, as pointed out by Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, 91–2. On homophobia, see Gemie, ‘Anarchism and Feminism’, 431–2; Cleminson, ‘Anarchism and Feminism’, 136–7; Álvarez, ‘Man Un/Made’, 19; Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 27–8.

¹³⁵ Cleminson, ‘Anarchism and Feminism’, 136–7.

¹³⁶ Lora Medina, ‘Identidad y Género a Debate’, 173.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 173–4.

¹³⁸ Álvarez, ‘Man Un/Made’, 19.

¹³⁹ La Redacción, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.316, Barcelona, 8 Feb. 1935, 140.

¹⁴⁰ Doctor Klug, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.326, Barcelona, 19 Apr. 1935, 380.

¹⁴¹ La Redacción and Una Anarquista, ‘Consultorio General’, *La Revista Blanca*, No.352, Barcelona, 18 Oct. 1935, 1007.

¹⁴² Cleminson and Vásquez García, *Hermaphroditism*, 9.

Although restoring dignity and autonomy to women was considered necessary in the realms of sex and pleasure, Spain's anarchists nonetheless delineated clear circumstances in which sexual pleasure was morally and hygienically acceptable. Female sex workers, in particular, continued to be associated with dirtiness and disease, even though they were simultaneously pitied by the anarchists as the ultimate representatives of social victimhood and exploitation.¹⁴³ In *La Revista Blanca*'s advice columns, the editorial team urged men not to visit sex workers. On multiple occasions male readers wrote in seeking advice about their sexual dilemmas: they struggled to find girlfriends, but also felt morally uncomfortable about visiting brothels.¹⁴⁴ The replies emphasised that visiting sex workers contributed to social injustice and reassured the men that they would find love eventually.¹⁴⁵ They believed that 'resorting to prostitution is just as degrading to the man as it is to the woman'.¹⁴⁶ The association between sex work and indignity in the interwar period did not only pertain to venereal disease but also to spermatorrhea: a (now disproven) illness characterised by excessive loss of semen.¹⁴⁷ Seminal loss had been a key concern of doctors in Europe and the United States since the nineteenth century; some even invented special devices that they claimed would inhibit 'nocturnal emissions'.¹⁴⁸ Men who engaged in sexual intercourse too often and with too many women, as well as those who masturbated, were thought likely to fall prey to this illness, which could apparently cause symptoms such as erectile dysfunction, infertility, and decline in intelligence.¹⁴⁹ Particularly worrying to many early twentieth century Spanish doctors was the seemingly 'psychic' nature of this illness, which connected it to a more fundamental loss of masculinity in the patient.¹⁵⁰ Many men sought medical advice from Doctor Klug through *La Revista Blanca* to treat their spermatorrhea.¹⁵¹ They were told that by swearing off masturbation and visits to sex workers and seeking stable relationships, they could avoid this medical affliction.¹⁵² The advice columns of *La Revista Blanca* evidently did not advocate for total sexual freedom, but for a specific model of sexual morality that aspired to safeguard the reproductive health of all

¹⁴³ For example, see Eugenio Villacampa, 'A la Juventud: El Peligro de los Prostíbulos', *La Revista Blanca*, No.322, Barcelona, 22 Mar. 1935, 280. He also reiterated this attitude in Eugenio Villacampa, 'A la Juventud: Educación Sexual de la Juventud', *La Revista Blanca*, No.340, Barcelona, 26 July 1935, 706–7.

¹⁴⁴ La Redacción, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.336, Barcelona, 28 June 1935, 624; La Redacción, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.319, Barcelona, 1 Mar. 1935, 212.

¹⁴⁵ La Redacción, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.336, Barcelona, 28 June 1935, 624; La Redacción, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.319, Barcelona, 1 Mar. 1935, 212.

¹⁴⁶ La Redacción, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.334, Barcelona, 14 June 1935, 575.

¹⁴⁷ Cleminson and Vásquez García, *Los Invisibles*, 193–4.

¹⁴⁸ Lister, *History of Sex*, 107–13.

¹⁴⁹ Nocturnal emissions blamed on masturbation in Doctor Klug and I. Lázaro, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.257, Barcelona, 21 Dec. 1933, 95. Erectile dysfunction blamed on masturbation in Doctor Klug and J.P., 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.280, Barcelona, 1 June 1934, 462; Dr Klug and B.B., 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.374, Barcelona, 20 Mar. 1936, 237. Impotence blamed on masturbation in Doctor Klug and Uno Que Desea Aprender, 'Consultorio Médico', *La Revista Blanca*, No.388, Barcelona, 30 July, 1936, 145. Masturbation named as a leading cause of spermatorrhea in Doctor Klug and Pajarín, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.329, Barcelona, 10 May 1935, 453. Masturbation connected to decline in intelligence in Doctor Klug and J. Alrom, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.297, Barcelona, 28 Sept. 1934, 748. This was a somewhat contentious stance by the early twentieth century; germ theory came to dominate understandings of disease so some doctors now doubted if masturbation actually caused organic diseases or whether its profound dangers were only moral – this is discussed in Thomas W. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 370.

¹⁵⁰ Cleminson and Vásquez García, *Los Invisibles*, 193–4.

¹⁵¹ Doctor Klug and I. Lázaro, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.257, Barcelona, 21 Dec. 1933, 95; Doctor Klug, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.321, Barcelona, 15 Mar. 1935, 260; Doctor Klug and M. N., 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.348, Barcelona, 20 Sept. 1935, 910; Doctor Klug and B.B., 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.374, Barcelona, 20 Mar. 1936, 237; Doctor Klug and Un Lector de La Revista Blanca, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.357, Barcelona, 22 Nov. 1935, 1109; Doctor Klug and Un Obrero, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.365, Barcelona, 15 Jan. 1936, 1270.

¹⁵² A reader who was unable to abstain from masturbation was advised to form a 'free union' in Doctor Klug and Un Anarquista, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.340, Barcelona, 26 July 1935, 718.

anarchists. The advice columns did not berate sex workers for their loss of virginity because many of *La Revista Blanca*'s writers saw 'virginity' as an oppressive, unnatural construct invented by the Catholic Church.¹⁵³ Indeed, the editorial team emphasised in one advice column response that former sex workers should be free to shake off that stigma once they walked away from the profession (contrary to prevailing social attitudes at the time).¹⁵⁴ However, reconception of sex work as a legitimate, dignified profession was never an option, because the apparent risk it posed to fertility via venereal disease or spermatorrhea was too great.

Evidently, the relationship advice provided by *La Revista Blanca*'s advice columns placed myriad limits on the sexual 'freedom' promised by the anarchist revolution and its prefigurative practices. Alejandro Lora Medina has accordingly argued that, in reality, very little change in mentalities was aspired to, let alone achieved, in their movement.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, *Mujeres Libres*'s Lucía Sánchez Saornil criticised 'free unions', conducted under the auspices of trade unions, for merely replacing the Church and state with a new form of authority that held couples to account.¹⁵⁶ However, at the same time as delineating the limits of 'free love' in practice, *La Revista Blanca* did also work towards notable mentality shifts. As this article has illustrated, it conversed directly with readers in its advice columns to raise awareness of gendered bodies' physiologies and potential traumas, ascribe dignity to enjoyment of sex, and intervene in contemporary movements for reproductive autonomy. Employing a three-pronged approach encompassing empowerment, medical care, and pedagogy, the periodical's editorial team and Doctor Klug involved grassroots anarchist affiliates from a range of classes, genders, and generations in the evolution of discourse and practice surrounding bodies, birth control, and free love. These advice columns negotiated the unstable intersection between individualist 'liberation' and obligation to collective prosperity – fundamental, yet diametric, anarchist principles.

Conclusion

Historians of sexuality often struggle to obtain personal testimony from everyday people about their experiences of sex.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, Chris Waters suggests that many such histories have ended up relying on the self-justifications of sexologists whose written record of the history of sexuality is more forthcoming.¹⁵⁸ *La Revista Blanca*'s advice columns, by contrast, presented testimonies surrounding gender and sexuality from lay perspectives – of all genders. Even accounting for the biases of the periodical's editors in selecting which queries to publish, this genre of material has much to offer historians.

The advice columns of *La Revista Blanca* represented a microcosm of the explosion of anarchist press attention devoted to sexual revolution in the interwar period. As a venue of political, medical, and cultural thought they platformed the voices of men and women from a range of social classes and generations, giving them the opportunity to feel empowered, obtain sex education and receive medical care, as well as adding their contributions to the ongoing evolution of radical discourse surrounding bodies, birth control, and free love. Responses to their queries, from the Montseny family or Doctor Javier Serrano Coello, on one hand destigmatised women's embodied traumas, instilled pride

¹⁵³ Camilo Brito, 'El Problema Sexual y la Religión', *La Revista Blanca*, No.314, Barcelona, 25 Jan. 1935, 90. For an example of how this was applied in the advice columns, see La Redacción, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.271, Barcelona, 30 Mar. 1934, 317. On how this inverted conceptions of purity and impurity in mainstream Spanish society, see Lora Medina, 'Sexualidad, Desnudismo y Moralidad', 825–6; Mary Vincent, 'Made Flesh? Gender and Doctrine in Religious Violence in Twentieth-Century Spain', *Gender and History*, 25 (2013), 671.

¹⁵⁴ La Redacción, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.281, Barcelona, 8 June 1934, 479; La Redacción, 'Consultorio General', *La Revista Blanca*, No.271, Barcelona, 30 Mar. 1934, 317. This was a view shared by the anarcho-feminist organisation *Mujeres Libres*, as discussed in Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, 163–5.

¹⁵⁵ Lora Medina, 'El Amor Libre', 613. Similar doubt about the achievements of the anarchists in this regard was expressed in Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex*, 163–5.

¹⁵⁶ Lora Medina, 'El Amor Libre', 608.

¹⁵⁷ Lister, *History of Sex*, 347.

¹⁵⁸ Chris Waters, 'Sexology', in Harry Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, eds., *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 53.

in readers' bodies, offered practicable guidance about reproductive hygiene and safety, and granted dignity to sexual pleasures outside of procreative marital sex. On the other hand, their advice was ever underpinned by eugenic motivations, concerned with the (subjective) evolutionary betterment of the human species, which placed significant limits on the permissiveness of the sexual revolution that they envisioned and prefigured. The obligation to serve a collective revolutionary struggle was forever in tension with the impetus to 'free' oneself as an autonomous individual.¹⁵⁹

Spain's anarchist sexual revolution was intimately bound up in the broader history of the interwar period. The Spanish Civil War propelled the anarchists into government where they finally (albeit for a short time) were able to make sex reform a reality, and in this context revolutionary anarchist hubs like Barcelona saw record numbers of 'free unions'.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, despite anarchism's firm rejection of state-led eugenic programmes, we cannot entirely detach the interwar Spanish anarchist press from concurrent eugenic movements across Europe and the Americas – regions whose own diverse anarchist movements were in direct communication with that of Spain.¹⁶¹ Indeed, further investigation is needed into the involvement of anarchist women in the construction of these interwar transnational networks, as many of those active in Spain had connections and lived experience abroad and it was *women's* bodily autonomy that constituted the centre of the anarchist sexual revolution. Constance Bantman has outlined several methodological approaches which may be of use here, such as focusing on 'hubs' of anarchist networks, 'informal internationalism', or the personal networks and intercultural connections of individual anarchists.¹⁶²

The relationship between anarchism and feminism was complicated, especially when it came to fighting for a utopian vision of love and family. Spain's anarchists could vehemently criticise what contemporary 'feminism' stood for, yet at the same time empower women to achieve economic independence, bestow dignity on sexual exploration, and advocate for birth control access. The case of interwar Spanish anarchism therefore provides further evidence to support Lucy Delap's contention, in her recent pluralising study of global 'feminisms', that categorisation of such movements into a series of increasingly progressive 'waves' is unhelpful.¹⁶³ The interwar Spanish anarchists' interactions through print media demonstrated that the politicisation of the personal, via campaigns for reproductive autonomy and sexual revolution, pre-dated Europe's post-war era.

¹⁵⁹ There was a similar tension faced by many UK and US avant-garde feminists in the early twentieth century, as Lucy Delap has explored in Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 102–32.

¹⁶⁰ Lora Medina, 'El Amor Libre', 613.

¹⁶¹ This extends Helen Graham's call for a Europeanisation of the Spanish Civil War to encompass the politico-ideological roots of the war including anarchism – see Helen Graham, 'On Historicising the War in Spain', *Contemporary European History*, 29, 3 (2020), 268–71. It also speaks to Giuliana Chamedes's incorporation of Spanish political history into broader European trends in Giuliana Chamedes, 'Transnationalising the Spanish Civil War', *Contemporary European History*, 29 (2020), 261–3. Transnationalisation was a key theme of the 2020 Roundtable on the Spanish Civil War – see David Brydan, 'Roundtable on the Spanish Civil War: Introduction', *Contemporary European History*, 29 (2020), 255–6.

¹⁶² Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880–1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalisation* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 9–12. See also her co-authored introductions to these edited volumes: Bantman and Berry, 'Introduction'; Bantman and Altana, 'Introduction'. Another model of studying Spain's radical left networks is provided by Alison Sinclair, *Trafficking Knowledge in Early Twentieth-Century Spain: Centres of Exchange and Cultural Imaginaries* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2009).

¹⁶³ Lucy Delap, *Feminisms: A Global History* (London: Penguin, 2020), 5, 343–4. This oversimplistic narrative has also been criticised in Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 48–9.