Youth, Gender and the Creation of Prototypes for a ‘New Generation’ in Republican Spain

Micaela Pattison

University of Sydney

The Second Republic was declared in a Spain whose intellectual elite had become thoroughly captivated by the idea that each generation came to the world with a specific purpose or destiny.¹ In interwar Europe, generation—a term previously used to refer to the act of producing offspring, or to the parent-child relationship—became widely accepted as a social category, and theorised by sociological thinkers—perhaps most notably, José Ortega y Gasset. The emergence of the category coincided with the consolidation—in the West—of the conception of youth as a social category and politically mobilised group.² In political formations desperate to modernise and eager to break with the politics and elites of the Restoration, youth became a potent metaphor for social change.³ Meanwhile, self-identified ‘youth’ became increasingly visible in public life. At the dawn of the Republic, young writers and activists of diverse liberal and radical persuasions began identifying—in an assortment of Enlightenment principles, radical political concepts, and modernist responses to the ‘social question’—the seeds from which a new culture would grow to form the Republican nation. As young Spaniards engaged in this search began to identify as members of a generation, they also began imagining what the generation cultivated within a new culture and new moral universe might look like.

The archive of the ill-fated adolescent writer and propagandist Hildegart (1914-1933) offers a captivating case study for examination of the progressive desire to create and elevate models for a ‘new generation’ of Spanish citizens.⁴ This communication provides an introduction—by no means exhaustive—to Hildegart’s trajectory and interventions in public debate about the roles of youth in the new regime. It argues that her archive—understood here as her writing and all that which was written about her—is a valuable resource for the study of youth in the Spain of

¹ This was not least because the key theorist of the concept of generation was Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, who proclaimed it “el concepto más importante de la historia […] y el gozne sobre que está ejecuta sus movimientos”. José Ortega y Gasset, El tema de nuestro tiempo. El ocaso de las revoluciones en el sentido histórico de la teoría de Einstein, Madrid, Calpe, 1923, p. 20.
the interwar period. It invites the historian to question generalisations about the ascent of this social category in the interwar and analyse the gendered processes by which youth were utilised as a metaphor for social change. It also encourages us to consider the structural relationship between distinct ‘branches’ of the study of youth.

Hildegart’s public life began when she was a child living under the Primo Dictatorship. A participant in campaigns for animal protection and hygiene reform, she was presented to audiences as an extraordinary child prodigy and evidence of the potential of modern secular education. By the primer bienio of the Second Republic, the adolescent had established her public profile as an ‘intelectual moderna’ and representative of the generation of youths often credited with helping bring forth the new regime. She contributed to public debate in a wide range of capacities: as intellectual, student activist, feminist, political radical, social educator, and lawyer. She adapted her tone, style and orientation according to the audience, oscillating between middle-class respectability and irreverent radicalism. She was best known for her public interventions and publication on the subjects of hygiene, sex education and eugenics.

Hildegart’s preoccupation with the social roles of women, youth and workers—and with their health and education—shaped the vision for a new generation of rebellious youth that developed in her professional writing, in the years that followed. She anticipated a new Spanish citizenry, built from scratch by a generation of healthy, cultured and rebellious youth. Conscious of its distinctiveness as a social group, the ‘generación mozo’, or ‘generación consciente’, was prepared to embrace a ‘new morality’ as its members actively cultivated their minds and bodies, and offered their physical and intellectual skills to the service of the pueblo. Her vision of the new generation—which evolved as her professional activities and political allegiances shifted—derived from a concrete set of ideas about health, education and laicidad. It was firmly rooted in the ideological conflicts that had long hindered efforts to modernise education and social legislation relating to children and youth.

Hildegart’s professional trajectory was thoroughly atypical. Nevertheless, the record of her short but extraordinary career is evidence of a potent utopian vision of the potential for secular education, science, cultural renewal, hygiene reform, and new political ideologies to affect a radical remaking of Spanish culture and social life. The interest her ideas and public persona generated tells us much about Spain’s Second Republic and the desire of progressives to remake the nation, State and citizen. As Hildegart journeyed between a range of liberal and revolutionary spaces, including youth political organisations, progressive women’s groups and hygiene reform campaigns, she presented herself, and was introduced to her audiences by others, as a prototype for a generation historically destined to construct a new culture atop the ruins of a society that she believed was mired by ignorance and degeneracy.

1. Primo Dictatorship’s and the Creation of the ‘Generación rebelde’

Santos Juliá suggests that a new generation of Spanish intellectuals took shape between 1925 and 1930. This generation was distinguished above all by its rejection of interpretations put forth by its predecessors—the Generation of ’98, the Generation of ’14, or the post-war generation that capitulated to the charms of Primo de Rivera—of the intellectual’s relationship to society and the masses. Many associated with intellectual opposition to Primo’s Dictatorship began to feel “lanzados por instinto, como dicen unos, por una fuerza superior, como señalan otros, en medio de la crisis general que sacude a la Monarquía, al encuentro del pueblo.” However, opinion varied regarding the nature of this ‘encuentro’ and how it could be achieved. The influence of Ortega y Gasset’s vision for a cultivated elite charged with educating, penetrating and inspiring the masses, lingered on. The evolution of the new generation’s idea of itself, and of its social and political functions, shaped both the call for youth mobilisation, and the ways in which a generation of Spanish youth began to think about its own place in a rapidly changing society. Politically militant youths—including the adolescent Hildegarth—mythologised youth rebellion against the dictatorship and the monarchy, idealising it as a baptism by fire for a new generation of youths who would now summon their compañeros de generación to join them in safeguarding the new Spain.

The Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera had alienated the Spanish intelligentsia and the rapidly expanding student population by restricting academic freedoms and chastising respected public intellectuals. Student opposition to Primo’s rule was formalised in January 1927, with the establishment of the powerful student union, the Federación Universitaria Escolar (FUE). The Federation’s activities escalated in the spring of 1928 when students and scholars, fed up with state meddling in academic affairs, were further incensed by the suspension of academic Luis Jiménez de Asúa following a public lecture about birth control, and a series of further breaches upon the intellectual’s right of to engage with the community. The unrest was inextricably bound to the central ideological battle regarding the role of the Church in education. From 1928, student protest focused on the supposedly ‘anti-juvenile’ proposal for university reform, presented by Primo’s Minister for Public Instruction. Students and teachers went on strike and the Central University was forced to close as support from

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8 José Ortega y Gasset, El tema de nuestro tiempo. El ocaso de las revoluciones en el sentido histórico de la teoría de Einstein. Madrid, Calpe, 1923, p. 20.
10 One such attack on academic freedom was the 1928 suspension of the El primer curso eugénico, an event that Hildegarth, an avid supporter of eugenics, would mythologise in her writing during the Republic. See: Hildegarth, “Historia de movimiento internacional y español de Reforma Sexual,” Sexus, no. 1, pp. 104-115.
beyond the academy grew, bringing civil unrest to the streets of Madrid. And, when the Dictator called for the dissolution of the FUE in January 1930, the universities shut down in protest. The national strike of 22 January was supported by the trade unions. Six days later, Primo resigned.\(^{11}\)

In the final year of the Dictatorship, a strong emotional bond flourished between Spanish youth and the patriarchs of anti-dictatorial resistance—intellectuals such as Gregorio Marañón, Luis de Zulueta and Luis Jiménez de Asúa.\(^{12}\) Radical positions of opposition to the dictatorship and the monarchy became increasingly palatable to Spain’s middle classes, amid calls by these distinguished intellectuals, for liberal and socialist youth to recognise that it was their historical mission to lead the rebellion.\(^{13}\) Within this context, young people ascended the public stage, addressing audiences as representatives of either the mobilized working youth, the radicalised student body of Madrid’s Central University, or, the generation of young intellectual women that was quickly becoming the face of Spanish feminism. As youth became a powerful metaphor for social change, and efforts to forge links were made by members of these diverse groups, the notion—advanced by Ortega—that a shift of ‘sensibilidad vital’ would produce a new generation with its own historic mission, seemed surer than ever. Hildegart’s professional life can be understood in this context and her writing demonstrates the loyalty and deference that students and young intellectuals displayed toward the more senior intellectuals opposed to the Dictatorship. She dedicated her first full-length book—published on the eve of the Second Republic—to Gregorio Marañón, from: “Una joven estudiante, de las milicias estudiantiles que formamos esa F.U.E que tiene para usted, maestro, un cariño filial.”\(^{14}\) In the months that followed, she mythologized her early years as a member of this ‘militia’, writing herself into an account of an epic struggle against the Dictatorship. In doing so, she highlighted the great camaraderie that flourished among ‘la generación mozo’.\(^{15}\)

Six months after the declaration of the Republic, Hildegart published a second monograph, *La rebelión sexual de la juventud* (The Sexual Rebellion of Youth). This time, she dedicated the work to “los mozos de la FUE, valientes cadetes de la causa de la libertad, revolucionarios ‘de veras’ de los que aspiran a destruirlo todo y llevan en sus manos y en su inteligencia los sillares sobre que cimentar el nuevo edificio.” In particular, she was grateful to her comrades from the FUE de Derecho y Medicina,

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\(^{11}\) González Calleja and Souto, “De la Dictadura a la República,” p. 85.


\(^{14}\) Hildegart, *El problema sexual visto por una mujer española*, Madrid, Morata, 1931.

\(^{15}\) In correspondence with Catalan exile Avenir Rosell, who she addressed as a ‘compañero de generación’, she explained that she had commenced her studies in the epicenter of unrest, in the year of the ‘los disturbios estudiantiles que vivi en toda su intensidad. No fui a la cárcel, porque no tuve más que catorce años’ Hildegart to Avenir Rosell, 30 August 1931, Hildegart Rodríguez Papers (1931-1933), International Institute of Social History (HRP).
“abogados y médicos, que son ya hoy, y serán casa de más, los ejes de la sociedad, muchachos desligados de prejuicios ancestrales que miran cara a cara a la vida.” She proclaimed this group—of which she was a member—“los renovadores del presente, los firmes orientadores del futuro.”16 Ortega wrote of the generation as the “nuevo cuerpo social íntegro” with “su minoría y su muchedumbre”. Hildegarth’s writing demonstrates her lingering attachment to his notion that it was the role of an elite intellectual class—in the case of her generation, the radical students of Law and medicine at Spain’s most prestigious university—to penetrate and inspire the masses.17

Hildegarth claimed a deep sense of affection and solidarity with fellow students from the Universidad Central’s Faculty of Law, irrespective of political differences. In a letter to a friend in Montevideo, she explained: “Aquí tengo una pena de buenas camaradas, de los más diversas matizes, de los socialistas la mayoría, ya algunos de ellos hasta conservadores y casi monárquicos, pero a quienes aprecio muy de veras. Muchos nos hemos conocido en la Universidad, hemos empezado juntos el Bachillerato y la carrera, y tenemos una larga amistad y el afán de ver a donde llegamos cada uno de nosotros.”18 In both private and public writing, she emphasised the extent to which the new generation of Spanish youth was a social group of its own, conscious of its distinctiveness and specific interests, and bound by the shared experience of persecution by a regime that denied it’s right to enlightenment through universal secular education. She expressed her desire for greater unity among progressive youth, lamenting that her comrades in the socialist youth movement often found themselves in fistfights with their camaradas de generación from anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist groups.19 Generally, she was optimistic: “Creo que será muy fácil que los mozos de esta nueva generación aprendamos a convivir a pesar de nuestras divergencias de ideas”.20

The record of Hildegarth’s trajectory offers a window onto the process by which a younger generation of students and thinkers, emboldened by their growing strength, began casting off their association with liberal intellectuals, articulating new arguments about what it meant to be part of the new generation and attempting at all costs to cut ties with any association to bourgeois liberalism. Hildegarth’s professional career flourished as the primer bienio progressed, in a moment when attaching oneself to the likes of Marañón or Jiménez de Asúa—intellectuals associated with “liberalismo al modo de la minoría selecta y socialismo al modo reformista”—was no longer an expedient way for a youth activist to be understood as radical or innovative.21 She suggested that, while Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa’s pioneering

16 Hildegarth, La rebeldia sexual de la juventud, Madrid, Morata, 1931.
17 Ortega y Gasset, El tema de nuestro tiempo, p. 20.
18 Hildegarth to Avení Rosell, 29 November 1931, HRP.
19 Hildegarth to Avení Rosell, 30 August 1931, HRP.
20 Hildegarth to Avení Rosell, 30 August 1931, HRP.
21 Santos Juliá, “Ser intelectual y ser joven”, p. 774. Juliá cites Ramón J. Sender, who declared in 1932 that by the time the Republic arrived, nobody wanted to be a Marañón, a Jiménez de Asúa or an
work to rebuild Spain was undoubtedly important, their objectives were “flojas”. Products of a generation who received their education and training under the colossal weight of centuries of Christianity, they were simply unable to comprehend that: “El criterio de la generación moza, aunque no quieren reconocerlo, es muy diferente del de la generación madura.” From late 1931 until her death in June 1933, Hildegart would adopt a language of generational conflict to present herself as ‘more modern’ than the liberal intellectuals with whom she collaborated in the sexual reform movement, and ‘more revolutionary’ than the leaders of the Socialist movement that she left behind in late 1932, forging a new career as a radical muckraker of the extreme left.

2. Intellectual commitment and youth at the vanguard in the Juventudes Socialistas

In February 1929, fourteen-year-old Hildegart was no longer a child. Publicly, and with remarkable self-awareness, she became a member of the juventud. In an open letter published in El Socialista, she explained that she had always intended to join the socialist movement. However, “estaba determinada a esperar hasta los catorce años, edad que actualmente se marca como mínimo para el trabajo de mujeres y niños, y que yo adopté también con objeto de empezar desde esa fecha a laborar asimismo en beneficio de un ideal”. She would do so as a committed member of the Juventudes Socialistas and the Union General de Trabajadores (UGT). Having recently commenced her studies at the Universidad Central, Hildegart also became an activist in the increasingly radicalised Federación Universitaria Escolar (FUE), and the newly established Asociación de Mujeres Universitarias (AMU). She further pursued her aim to ‘labor in service of an ideal’ by participating in the intellectual life of the capital. The same week that she published her open letter in El Socialista, she delivered her debut speech to the Ateneo Divulgación Social; rumination on the subject of youth as a social category and what it meant to be a young person in modern society. Hildegart had a clear sense that it was her designated role, within the Socialist movement, to reflect on the place of youth in political mobilization and the workers’ movement.

Upon joining the Socialist organisations, Hildegart identified herself as una intelectual and una obrera del pensamiento, eager to fight for political change using

Hildegart to Avenir Rosell, 30 August 1931, HRP. In her letter to Havelock Ellis of 23 October 1931, Hildegart writes that the pioneering men maintained reactionary attitudes, in particular, with regard to marriage and family. “My position is thus a revolutionary one”. Hildegart to Ellis, 23 October 1931, Havelock Ellis Papers (vol. XIX) (HEP vol. XIX), British Library, Manuscripts Collection, f. 2.
Hildegart, “Carta abierta.Para Victoria Herrero” El Socialista, 24 February 1929, p. 2. The minimum age for entry into the workforce was raised from 10 years to 14 years under the Código de Trabajo of 23 August 1926.
Her speech – titled, Orientaciones – examined “las deficiencias en el sistema de enseñanza” and analysed “la influencia social del elemento joven en la sociedad moderna.” “En el Ateneo de Divulgación Social” El Socialista, 26 February, 1929, p. 4.
la fuerza de sus ideas.\textsuperscript{25} She made clear to her audiences that she possessed the skills and training necessary to deliberate on issues including the nature of youth rebellion, the role of women in society, and the place of intellectuals in the movement.\textsuperscript{26} It is important to acknowledge here that she was briefly aligned with the Socialist Party’s most prominent intellectual: Julián Besteiro. Indeed, Hildegarde’s celebrity flourished at a crucial junction in the history of the PSOE, when her public profile was elevated in order to offer a youthful face to besteirismo.\textsuperscript{27} In the weeks leading up to the UGT and Socialist National Committee meetings of 16 and 18 October 1930, the gradualist faction attempted to capitalise on interest generated by Hildegarde’s recent publications on eugenics and birth control, by inviting her to speak at a series of high profile rallies alongside Besteiro, Andrés Saborit and prominent intellectuals including the psychiatrist José Sanchis Banús and pedagogue Rodolfo Llopis.

At a rally held in the Cinema Europa on 23 September 1930, Saborit spoke of the need to use Socialist culture to develop a ‘nueva conciencia’ among Spanish women and cultivate socialist ideals in the minds of youth. The Party secretary pointed to Hildegarde, remarking how marvellous it was to hear from a comrade who was “una joven, una mujer y una estudiante”. He proclaimed: “Hay que decir a los estudiantes que entre nosotros, no hay hostilidad, que tienen que venir a nuestro campo a trabajar y no ser instrumento de la burguesía. Hace falta intelectualidad para orientarnos y adoctrinarnos... [a la gran masa socialista].”\textsuperscript{28} Saborit’s remarks were closely tied to the key function of Hildegarde’s participation in the Besteiro camp’s campaign: to distinguish the socialist vision of a Republic from that of bourgeois republicans. She was presented to audiences as proof that the authentic role of students and intellectuals in the movement was to enrich Socialist culture and to help guide the masses.\textsuperscript{29}

Hildegarde was held up as a model for rational ‘third way’ for youth militancy, amid the twin threats of exodus to the republican camp, and youth radicalization in the wake of CNT and communist unruliness in strike actions during the summer of 1930. During this period, she urged caution and restraint in working youth, arguing that “las Juventudes no han de ser, como algunos aseguran, vanguardias de nuestro movimiento, de nuestra acción, sino verdaderas escuelas de orientación y aprendizaje”.\textsuperscript{30} Her calls for prudence eventually landed her in a public quarrel with Santiago Carrillo who had previously expressed admiration for Hildegarde, noting that,
“de las estudiantes que ha habido en la Juventud, [es] una de las muy pocas que han sabido librarse del morbo del seudo-intelectualismo”\textsuperscript{31} In early 1931, in the pages of \textit{El Socialista}, the two fifteen-year-olds fiercely debated the role of youth and intellectuals in the movement. The controversy came after Hildegar suggested that the youth movement was engulfed in a spiritual crisis and could benefit from the establishment of a governing body of youth intellectuals.\textsuperscript{32} Her ideas about the role of intellectuals were unacceptable to Carrillo. Loyal to the union-wing, Carrillo explained that “la esencia socialista” is not sealed in the brains of an elite few; young people learn to be socialists \textit{organically} through day-to-day militancy in the union movement, “más que elaborada en la mente de una joven socialista”, he wrote, “[esa idea] parece elaborarada en el cerebro de una persona de edad, temerosa de los desmanes en que el radicalismo juvenil pudiera incurrir.”\textsuperscript{33}

Following the rise of her public profile in late 1930, Hildegar became the principal female contributor to a reorganised and reinvigorated youth organ, \textit{Renovación}. Her articles for the publication primarily addressed the subject of feminism and the rights and responsibilities of women in an epoch of change and enlightenment.\textsuperscript{34} She became a prolific propagandist, travelling the country on propaganda tours. She reported on her experiences and observations from rural Spain for \textit{El Socialista}, where her by-line appeared almost weekly from October 1930.\textsuperscript{35} Her celebrity was consolidated beyond the Socialist movement after respected editor Javier Morata published the first of three full-length books on sexual morality. Her photograph began to appear in popular magazines, alongside starlets of the stage and prominent women of letters.\textsuperscript{36} A writer for the magazine, \textit{Crónica}, referred to her as a leading figure of Spanish feminism and “un símbolo de la evolución que han realizado nuestras juventudes.”\textsuperscript{37} From late 1931, her professional activities took place increasingly \textit{outside} the Socialist organisations, until September 1932, when she abandoned the movement, entirely.

Hildegar marked her exit from the Socialist organization with a ‘\textit{J’Accuse}’ that functioned as a vehicle for the reinvention of her public image in the final year of

\textsuperscript{32} Hildegar, “¡Alerta...!” \textit{El Socialista}, 1 February 1931, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{33} Santiago Carrillo, “Alarums infundidas” \textit{El Socialista}, 5 February 1931, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{34} During this period, Hildegar was the feminine voice of Renovación and the editions in which she published rarely contained articles by other women. Previously, Angeles Vázquez was the voice of female members of the \textit{Juventudes} represented in \textit{Renovación}. After Hildegar’s presence faded, Vázquez reappeared in the publication along with Basque woman, Astrea Barrios, though their articles \textit{never appeared} in the same edition.
\textsuperscript{36} For example, in October 1931, she appeared alongside eminent female intellectuals (Dr. Elisa Soriano, Concha Espina and Carmen de Burgos) and popular entertainers, canvassed about who they would vote for if there were elections the following day. “Si mañana hubiese elecciones ¿a quién votarían las mujeres?”, \textit{Estampa}, 17 October 1931, pp. 3-4.
\textsuperscript{37} Matilde Muñoz, “¿Cuál debe ser la labor de la mujer en la Segunda República?,” \textit{Crónica}, 21 June 1931, p. 9.
her life. In a 300 page book on Marxism and an 11-part memoir published in Madrid daily, *La Tierra*, Hildegart denounced her former comrades and rewrote the history of her militancy in the ranks of the Juventudes Socialistas.\(^{38}\) She had decamped to the extreme left minority factions gathered around *La Tierra* and was now actively remaking herself as a radical-left revolutionary and a muckraking journalist.\(^{39}\) Despite having previously defended the record of the Socialist organisations under the dictatorship, she now denounced the FJS membership for failing to fulfill the historical destiny of its generation, while the Federation of University Students (FUE) took the lead in effectively toppling the regime.\(^{40}\) She labored to cultivate her image as an irreverent intellectual critic of the Party leadership. She claimed to have been on this path since 1929, when the Law Faculty’s revolutionary FUE members gathered around prominent agitator Graco Marsá, initiated her to political militancy.\(^{41}\)

Former Socialist Party member Graco Marsá represented an image of young intellectual commitment to revolution that Hildegart wished to project upon herself in 1932. A strident opponent of the Primo Dictatorship, Marsá had caused waved in the youth movement by attacking the Federation’s president in 1928. He argued that reformist Ricardo Alba’s presence at the helm signaled a “falta de vitalidad” in the youth movement.\(^{42}\) Marsá also responded to what he perceived as a woeful doctrinal deficiency within the Spanish Socialist organisations, by establishing Marxist publishing house, Editorial Cenit.\(^{43}\) In doing so, he forged strong ties with communists and dissident Marxists, and became part of an emerging literary culture positioned in opposition to the dominant liberal culture personified in Ortega.\(^{44}\) Marsá was expelled from the Socialist organisations in 1930 for speaking out against UGT and Socialist Party strategy.\(^{45}\) A proportion of the Madrid section of the *Juventudes*

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\(^{39}\) She became committed to *La Tierra*’s project of denouncing the Socialist Party and the *Alianza Republicana* for betraying the ‘December Revolution’ of 1930, and the memory of the young soldiers—symbols of youthful vigor and their generation’s commitment to revolution—who gave their lives.

\(^{40}\) In the first week of the Second Republic, she had written of the FJS: “Mientras otros callaban bajo el Poder del dictador, nosotros, con opresiones y con luces, con suspensiones y con cenizas, hemos continuado propagando nuestro ideal, arrojando a manos llenas, a voleo, la semilla de rebeldía que germinaba en las tierras ávidas de la España agraria”. Hildegart, “Por la nueva República”, *Renovación* 20 April 1931, p. 3.

\(^{41}\) “Cuatro años de militante socialista! La marcha interna de un partido ‘obrero’” *La Tierra*, 23 September, 1932, p. 4. While it is entirely likely given that they were both FUE members and students in the Law Faculty, I have found no actual evidence of an association between Graco Marsá and Hildegart.


\(^{43}\) It was during their six-month stint in the Cárcel Modelo prison in 1928 that Marsá and Giménez Siles united with the Trotskyist Juan Andrade to form the popular Marxist publishing house, Editorial Cenit.

\(^{44}\) Marsá’s publishing partner Rafael Giménez Siles was codirector—together with José Antonio Balbontín—of the revolutionary leftist review *Post-Guerra* and, later, the publishing house *Ediciones Oriente*.

rallied around him and exited the Socialist movement, eventually establishing the
dissident revolutionary Marxist Grupo Socialista de Izquierda. In 1931, Marsá
joined César Falcón’s Izquierda Revolucionaria y Imperialista (IRyA), one of several
extreme left minority groups that found support in La Tierra. His trajectory and image
as a radical intellectual fit perfectly with Hildegart’s mythologised accounts of her
own activities as a student activist and ambition to start anew as a radical journalist
and revolutionary theorist. Records of Hildegart’s and Marsá’s confrontation with
comrades and eventual exit from the Juventudes Socialistas demonstrate the
widespread anxiety that socialist youth was failing to fulfill its generation’s destiny.
Th anxieties shaped their interventions in debate within the socialist movement, and
their justifications for abandoning it.

3. Feminism, citizenship and the ‘redeemed generation’

By the declaration of the Second Republic, Hildegart’s participation in Madrid’s
vibrant student community ensured that she was recognized across Spain as the
youngest member of a new generation of modern and politically engaged intellectual
women of privilege. Many such women shared the commitment of the Asociación
Universitaria Femenina to: “entregar el espíritu y la voluntad a la defensa y
mejoramiento de todas las mujeres, sus hermanas.” In the dedication of a 1931
pamphlet on sex education, Hildegart declared: “Que las inteligencias de los que por
el Destino hemos sido elegidos para recibir directamente los dones de la ilustración
sin ulteriores preocupaciones, sirvan de vehiculo transmisor a los cientos de mentes
populares, ansiosos de saber y de admirar”. The self-proclaimed ‘obrera del
pensamiento’ presented herself as part of an enlightened minority of intellectuals with
a commitment to the redemption of women, young people, and the poor. Mary Nash
explains that the ‘ideal’ of redemption was a central element in the development of an
important strain of socialist feminism in the 1920s and 1930s. Though it is clear that
Hildegart embodied less a form of Marxist feminism, than a fusion of free thought,

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46 Associated with the radical wing of the FUE, they called themselves ‘los 35’ and published a
manifesto declaring that it was impossible to create a vanguard and combat the bourgeoisie from within
the FJS. Their manifesto is reproduced in right-wing publication El Siglo Futuro. Fray Juniper, “Mesa
revuelta” El Siglo Futuro 15 September 1930, p. 1.

47 Hildegart presented her resignation from the Socialist Party and the UGT in the form of a 300 page

48 On the eve of the Republic, a writer in Melilla celebrated “la gran campaña de reivindicación de la
mujer, que realizan en España jóvenes privilegiadas como Hildegart Rodríguez y Victoria Kent.” Luis
Bonet, El Popular de Melilla, 23 March 1931. Reproduced in María Ángeles Sánchez Suárez, Mujeres en


50 Hildegar, Educación Sexual, Madrid, Gráfica Socialista, 1931.

51 Mary Nash, “Ideas of Redemption” Socialism and Women on the left in Spain” in Helmut Gniber and Pamela Graves (eds.),
Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women: Europe Between the Two World Wars (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 1998), pp. 348- 380. See also: Ana Agudo,
“Cultura socialista, ciudadanía y feminismo en la España de los años veinte y treinta” Historia Social, no. 67, 2010, pp.131-153.
socialism and feminism. Like fellow intellectuals Carmen de Burgos, María Lejárraga and Margarita Nelken, she called for concrete legislative reforms regarding divorce, paternity testing and prostitution, while emphasising at all times the overarching importance of *redemption through education* as the precondition for a new Spanish woman and citizen.

Hildegart’s writing about feminism and its relation to socialism derived from an understanding that the under-representation of Spanish women in political life was the result of their submersion in an historical state of paralysis. She argued that there were particular cultural and historical explanations for the backwardness of Spanish women; but, with the social and political changes underway, the new generation of Spanish woman could be redeemed and a distinctively Spanish form of feminism would emerge to rectify gender inequality. Perhaps the most distinctive element of Hildegart’s feminist writing was her *biologisation* of the social problems facing women. She argued that the racial stock of Spanish women had been corrupted over the centuries as religious hegemony sucked the blood and vitality from Spain, and that “los frutos femeninos se han malogrado”. In a nation that had experienced neither a religious reformation, nor a French revolution, the Spanish woman languished in ignorance and remained insulated from the world. Hildegart lamented that her countrywomen were generally ignorant of the conquests of democracy and equality that had taken place beyond Spain’s borders, and oblivious to a new and thriving ‘rebellious feminism’ which had emerged out of the European War.

Heralding the creation of a new generation of Spanish women, Hildegart suggested that loose seeds of a ‘nobler Spanish stock’ had survived the destructive reign of Christianity. She pointed to the martyred Mariana Pineda, and other prominent women, including Spain’s first female university graduate, Concepción Arenal, and the writers Emilia Pardo Bazán and Carolina Coronado, as the sprouting seeds of a new feminism. “Pequeña es aún nuestra falange, que cada día se aumenta con las muchachas que, saliendo unas de la aulas universitarias, y otras de los miserables hogares, han aprendido juntas la misma humana lección de rebeldía”. Proletarian and intellectual women were learning the lessons of rebellion together. It was time for them to unite with the rebellious peasant women who was herself living proof that the seeds of a noble and rebellious form of Spanish womanhood had survived the assault

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upon the race. She exalted the courageous peasant women who historically defended their interests, and was now driving an upswell of courage among Spanish women under the new regime. She rejoiced that women of all classes were no longer fearful of the idea of revolution and were emboldened to join in public protest.

In the early months of the Second Republic, Hildegart called upon Spain’s ‘new feminists’ to join their male comrades in the key project of their time: “engendrar una sociedad justa y no oligárquica, democrática y no absolutista, laica e independiente y no religiosa.” She reminded women that their labour was only just beginning. For the Spanish woman to truly be able to truly cry “¡viva la República!” it was necessary for her to genuinely feel and behave like a citizen. Hildegart participated in public debate about how female citizenship should be defined and exercised under a constitutional democracy, and the roles women might play in governance. She was firmly of the view that the issues facing the Government were far too serious to be left in the hands of those who were still only training in the art of democratic citizenship. She insisted that unprepared women should be prevented from putting the regime in jeopardy until their husbands, brothers, and sons had worked together with the minority of ‘conscious women’ to win Spain’s women over to the side of ‘culture.’ Educated, progressive women anxious for the right to vote needed to wait for the majority of their sisters to catch up, and do what they could to speed along the process.

Hildegart insisted that socialist feminism was not about suffrage, but about social and sexual reform. “Las muchachas socialistas vamos a pedir algo más práctico, más real, más necesario. No necesitamos voto para pedir. No necesitamos tener derechos políticos para opinar. Y vamos a pedir como suprema reivindicación para la mujer que por la ley, por el Código, por la Constitución si preciso fuera, se borre para el porvenir toda distinción entre hijos legítimos e ilegítimos.” Divorce was already a guaranteed victory, but the time had come to demand the total freedom in marriage, love and paternity that would allow Spanish women to find genuine equality. Hildegart maintained that the aim of socialist feminism was to achieve liberty for men and women; a liberty she believed would emerge organically through the sexual

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58 Hildegart, “La mujer ante el socialismo” Renovación, 30 March 1931, p. 3.
59 Hildegart, “La mujer y el movimiento político” Renovación, 10 March 1931, p. 2.
60 “Nos hemos decidido también a luchar, no frente al hombre, sino al lado de él, en todo cuanto tienda a hacernos a todos más libres y más capaces para engendrar una sociedad justa y no oligárquica, democrática y no absolutista, laica e independiente y no religiosa”. Hildegart, “Nuevo feminismo” Renovación, 20 February 1931, p. 2.
61 Hildegart, “Por la República” Renovación, 20 April 1931, p. 3.
63 Hildegart, “El voto y la mujer” Renovación, 10 August 1931, p. 4.
64 Hildegart, “A vuestro puesto” Renovación, 25 June 1931, p. 3.
65 Hildegart “Feminismo: Nuestros protegidos” Renovación, 31 August 1931, p. 3.
66 Hildegart “Feminismo: Nuestros protegidos”, p. 3.
revolution that would take place as soon as scientific rationality supplanted religiosity, once and for all.\(^67\)

Hildegart explained that in Europe’s ‘more advanced nations’ the scientific revolution yielded the ‘seeds of redemption,’ revolutionising relationships between men and women by shaking the sexual and moral values of Western society, and then its legal and political foundations. The Great War rapidly accelerated this process and republics replaced monarchies and laicism supplanted religiosity at a quicker pace than ever. As modern Europe began to redeem itself, Russia stood at the vanguard.\(^68\) She argued that, although the Russian Revolution was “misguided in political and economic terms,” it had produced the most advanced systems of pedagogy and morality in all of Europe.\(^69\) She followed Alexandra Kollontai in arguing that equality between the sexes would emerge when relationships rooted in ‘proletarian morality’ finally supplanted the “all embracing and exclusive marital love of bourgeois culture.”\(^70\) The time had come to do away with traditional marriage, the ‘commodification of love’ and female submission. Hildegart—who, in the final years of her life was an avowed internationalist—looked to Kollontai, Swedish intellectual Ellen Key, British sexologist Havelock Ellis, and a range of radical authors from Britain and the United States, to provide models for what ‘freedom in love’ might look like, for a new generation freed from the burden of tradition.

The ‘sexual revolution’ that Hildegart demanded would propel the young men and women of the new generation forward, to seize the sexual knowledge that had long been kept from them.\(^71\) ‘Sexual rebellion’ meant having the courage to cast away one’s anxiety about the indecency of speaking publicly about uncomfortable but urgent matters of sexual health. Explaining her activities in the field of sexual reform to her Montevideo-based friend, Avenir Rosell, she explained: “Usted no puede imaginar lo difícil que es aquí en España emprender una campaña de esta naturaleza, aquí, donde todos están dominados por los privilegios clericales, donde la mujer aún no ha osado liberar y donde aun las muchachas más radicales y avanzadas se asustan de hablar de estas cosas y creen que no pueden hablar con limpieza y serena actitud de ellas in [sic] rebajar a la prostitución.”\(^72\) As she cultivated a career based upon her public image as a modern woman, utterly removed from traditional images of Spanish womanhood, she drew attention to the ways in which she was distinctive from and more radical than her contemporaries. This distinctiveness permitted her to garner

\(^{68}\) Hildegart, El problema sexual, p. 37.
\(^{69}\) Hildegart, El problema sexual, pp. 37-38.
\(^{70}\) She called on Spanish youth to embrace the three principles that Kollontai laid out as the basis for a new proletarian morality. Hildegart, La rebeldía sexual de la juventud, pp. 60-62. She knotes extensively from Kollontai: Alexandra Kollontai, Selected writings of Alexandra Kollontai (Westport, Conn: L. Hill, 1977), p. 291.
\(^{71}\) She suggested that the sexual revolution was already well underway abroad, in countries where there were fewer legal controls on the dissemination of propaganda and sex education. Hildegart, La revolución sexual, pp. 3-4.
\(^{72}\) Hildegart to Avenir Rosell, 30 August 1931, HRP.
considerable prestige as an activist for reform and gain access to platforms and public fora from which the ‘traditional Spanish woman’ would typically find herself excluded. An ‘exotic figure’ to her admirers, Hildegart was viewed by at least one critic as a crass peddler of ideas from “Rusia, Hottentotlandia o Marte.” It is clear that she was viewed, both at home and abroad, as something quite apart from traditional Spanish womanhood.

4. The New Generation: A Biological Category

A key contention of Hildegart’s writing about health, human reproduction, women, and the characteristics of the ‘new generation’ was that the child should be ‘conceived in the mind’ before it is conceived in the womb. Across her work, she called for ‘conscious maternity’, a concept about which she wrote in several different ways: as the practice of limiting births, the application of rational hygiene and heredity to reproduction; and, as the mother’s moral compulsion to craft and cultivate the spirit of her offspring. However, the most important aim of conscious maternity was to create the generación consciente (‘conscious generation’). A tool for social reform and for the creation of a regenerated modern society, ‘conscious maternity’ was not simply a matter of controlling reproduction. It was a moral imperative, framed in eugenic terms. As surely as Hildegart was captivated by the biologisation of social relations represented conceptualisation of the ‘generation’ as a social category, she was equally attracted to the biologisation of identity through eugenic doctrine.

Hildegart presented the doctrines of neo-Malthusianism and Galtonian eugenics as key strategies for population amelioration and social regeneration. In a 1931 pamphlet titled Paternidad consciente, she explained the difference between Francis Galton’s eugenic doctrine and Thomas Robert Malthus’s economic theories about population growth. She reproduced a table that compared the distinct origins, objectives, means and ends of the ‘two schools’. The table demonstrates that while Malthusianism aimed to cultivate economic wealth, and Galtonian eugenics aspired to

73 While, in a glowing review of her book El problema sexual, Rafael Cansino-Assens called her “una figura exótica en nuestro paisaje, como una mujer llegada de Escandinavia o Sovietlandia”; a commentator in right-wing newspaper, El Siglo Futuro, accused her of seeking to restructure Spain on models derived from “Russia, Hottentotland and Mars”. R. Cansinos Assens, “Crítica literaria” La Libertad, 13 September 1931, p. 9; Fray Juniper, El Siglo Futuro, 3 March 1932, p. 3.

74 Like Hildegart, the anarchist physican Isaac Puente defined ‘conscious maternity’ in these terms. Isaac Puente, “Conciencia Maternal,” Estudios, no. 102, February, 1932, p. 9.

75 Hildegart, La limitación de la prole: Un deber del proletariado consciente (Madrid: Gráfica Socialista, 1930) Hildegart, “Maternidad Consciente” in Enrique Noguera and Luis Huerta (eds) Genética, engenesis y pedagogía sexual. Libro de las primeras jornadas eugenésicas españolas (Madrid: Javier Morata, 1934), pp. 203-244. ‘Conscious maternity’, understood in these terms, underpinned Hildegart’s private writing about her own conception and upbringing, and her professional writing about reproduction and population.

76 Hildegart wrote about ‘voluntary parenthood’ and ‘Paternidad Consciente’ in Paternidad voluntaria, Profilaxis anticoncepcional. (Valencia: Ediciones Orto, 1931) and “Maternidad Consciente” in Noguera and Huerta (eds) Genética, engenesis y pedagogía sexual, pp. 203-244.

77 The table was first presented by the pedagogue and supporter of eugenics, Luis Huerta, in an article published in an anarchist cultural review earlier that year. Luis Huerta, “El Malthusianismo no es el Eugenismo”, Estudios, no. 77, January 1930, pp. 36-43.
improve biological health, they shared a common ideal: the creation of a generación consciente (conscious generation). Hildegart’s writing about the generación consciente reflects the polysemy of both the ideal of ‘conscious maternity’ and the concept of eugenics, which has been variably understood as a scientific discipline, a doctrine or a theory, an ideology and creed, and a strategic system of reform.  

As much as eugenics, as understood in interwar Europe, was a biological theory of human improvement, it was “a social and cultural philosophy of identity predicated upon modern concepts of purification and rejuvenation of both human body and the larger national community.” It was less a fixed doctrine than a cluster of scientific narratives and an expression of modernity, which—as Franz Dikötter observes—“belonged to the political vocabulary of almost every single modernising force between the wars.” The reformers and revolutionaries of Republican Spain were no exception and Hildegart was far from alone in offering eugenics as an essential tool for the making of a new culture and morality in Republican Spain.

Popular engagement with eugenics in Spain reached its apogee in the reform period of the Second Republic. During this period, Hildegart took the stage alongside some of the nation’s most eminent medical doctors and jurists, to present eugenics to the Spanish public as a tool for progressive social reform. Shortly before her June 1933 death, she participated in Spain’s Primeras Jornadas Eugénicas Españolas. The event was supported by the Ministry of Public Instruction, with the Minister, Fernando de los Ríos, inaugurating the proceedings alongside esteemed international guest, Dr. Norman Haire; the London-based President of the World League for Sexual Reform whose visit Hildegart arranged in her capacity as secretary of the League’s Spanish chapter. Prime Minister Manuel Azaña officiated at the closing formalities, and participants from the worlds of science, culture and politics converged on the Universidad Central’s Faculty of Medicine. The conference perhaps marked the moment that Francis Galton’s Spanish disciples came closest to establishing a ‘national eugenics movement.’

In Hildegart’s writing, the ‘new generation’ was interchangeably presented as the motor for eugenic reform and its end goal. While it was the new generation—a generation of intellectuals, understood in Ortega’s terms—that would push for eugenic reform, the new generation as a biological category would be its result. Hildegart presented herself as a prototype for both. She began a December 1931 letter to renowned British sexologist, Havelock Ellis, with a brief autobiography: Naci el

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78 In a pamphlet published in the Socialist press she describes it as an ideology, born—like Socialism—as a collective response to the injustice of Capital. Hildegart, El problema eugenico. Punto de vista de una mujer moderna (Madrid: Gráfica Socialista, 1930), p. 3. Elsewhere, she called it a religion or “the creed of the future”.


dia 9 de Diciembre de 1914, y soy una hija eugenica, eso es, no inconsciente”. She explained that she had been ‘consciously-conceived,’ before laying out a series of anecdotes illustrating the efficacy of her mother’s ‘eugenic plan’ and strategies for ‘scientific child-rearing’. As Hildegart built a career as a social reformer, she often shared stories about her birth and upbringing that illustrated her inherent exceptionality, and the centrality of modern ideas about heredity and childrearing in the nurturing she received as an infant and child. That she had been shaped—physically and intellectually—by these modern ideas, seemed to make her uniquely qualified to engage publicly with controversial knowledge about sex and the body that was otherwise understood as the terrain of the medical profession. It also enabled her to present the idea that she was a prototype for the ‘new generation’ as scientific fact.

5. Conclusion

Hildegart proclaimed that the new generation had an obligation to redeem itself through the quest for knowledge about the human world, and to commit to the redemption of the rest of society by participating in the social education of the groups most oppressed and stunted by Christian morality and capitalist exploitation: women, young people, and the worker. This generation would liberate itself from religion to embrace modern science and its application to the alleviation of poverty and poor health in a revolutionary remaking of the the Spanish State and nation. Hildegart’s intellectual development was in its infancy when she was murdered in June 1933. Her ruminations on the ‘new generation’ and writing about revolution, sexuality, science and politics were laden with contradictions, errors and signs of intellectual immaturity. It is therefore all the more astounding that the adolescent female was invited to share public platforms with leading figures in the political, cultural and intellectual life of Republican Madrid in the primer bienio, and taken seriously by key actors in the international movement for sexual reform. She was able to do, in part, because the ‘new generation’ that she purported to represent had become a potent symbol of the hopes for a new Spain.

Hildegart was remarkably self-aware of her identity as a member of the juventud. She had distinct ideas about what this meant, and how its meaning had changed in recent history. She presented herself as una joven intelectual, writing and speaking extensively about the social role of youth, the historical destiny of her generation and the place of the intellectual in the remaking of Spanish society. Given

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81 Hildegart to Ellis, 2 December, 1931, Havelock Ellis Papers (vol. XIX) (HEP vol. XIX), British Library, Manuscripts Collection, ff. 8-10.
82 Ellis was astonished and delighted to learn about Hildegart and the remarkable woman who had raised her. In a profile on Hildegart for The Adelphi, he noted that the remarkable child’s mother was evidently among those whom he liked to refer to as “the ‘New Mothers’ of today. “Havelock Ellis, “The Red Virgin,” The Adelphi, June 1933, p. 175.
83 I have argued elsewhere that it is far more useful to take as an historical source Hildegart’s archive, which is made from the records of her trajectory, than focus upon the ‘biographical personality’. Micaela Pattison, “In Search of Hildegart: Tracking a Body and a Biography over a Century,” Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research, vol. 21, no. 2, 2015, pp. 258-270.
her tragic death at age eighteen, her ruminations about youth and her own generation are unmediated by the passage of time and determined by a specific set of conditions and issues relevant to youth activists at the birth of the Republic and during the primer bienio. Hildegart did not bear witness to a string of events that would become—often too simplistically—recognised as benchmarks for the study of youth in Spain and Europe: the Nazi Party victory and corresponding rise of antifascism, the October 1934 uprising in Spain, and the Civil War of 1936-1939. The history of these events remains primarily a story about the mobilisation of young men into social and political movements. The record of the Hildegart’s professional activities provides a rich source for “el análisis cruzado entre juventud, género y compromiso” in the history of Spanish social movements. The circumstances of her life and activities also encourage the historian to draw upon diverse fields of inquiry associated with the history of youth; the histories of childhood, education, science and psychology, analysing the structural relation between them and tracking the points of correspondence with gender history.

84 Recently, significant efforts have been made to redress this tendency, most notably in the recent dossier: Mónica Moreno Seco y Bárbara Ortuño Martínez (eds.) Género, Juventud y Compromiso, Aver, vol. 100, no. 4 (2015), pp. 13-147; and in Sandra Souto Kustrin, Sandra Souto Kustrin, Paso a la juventud. Movilización democrática, estalinismo y revolución, Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 2013.  