



“Joyous and Deliberate Motherhood,
A Sure Light in Our Racial Darkness:”
Feminist-Eugenics in the Marie Stopes
Mothers’ Clinics
1900-1945

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Introduction

In a pamphlet for her Mothers' Clinic, Marie Stopes, the British birth control pioneer, declared:

In this clinic, healthy mothers will obtain the key to *personal* security and development, to *united* happiness and success with their husbands in marriage to *voluntary and joyous motherhood*. Birth control knowledge will be given not in the crude repressive form it is advocated in some quarters, but as the keystone in the arch of progress toward racial health and happiness.¹

This passage encapsulates the complicated and oftentimes contradictory identity of its author: both a eugenics advocate and feminist icon. Here we see Stopes attempting to describe female empowerment and the female obtainment of “personal security and development” in the language of eugenics. In it, the pamphlet encourages women to take control of their bodies by utilizing contraceptive technologies, but then takes a sinister eugenic turn as Stopes expounds upon the clinic’s racial mission. While striving to promote women’s personal agency, Stopes eerily explains that the advantages of women choosing to use contraception and enter “voluntary and joyous motherhood” lie in their power to help civilization “progress toward racial health and happiness.”

The provision of birth control is regarded today by an influential majority of doctors as the most important development in preventative medicine and a major achievement of the early twentieth-century English birth control movement.² Marie Stopes was the leading advocate of the movement, and throughout her career authored canonical feminist works, established the first birth control clinic and society in Britain, and successfully introduced birth control into

¹ “The History of the Mothers’ Clinic,” p.4, 1921-1922, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

² John Peel, “Contraception and the Medical Profession,” *Population Studies*, 18, no.2 (1964).

respectable public discourse. But Stopes' seemingly perfect feminist identity is complicated by her lifelong devotion to eugenics.

Since becoming an icon for the birth control movement in Britain and beyond, Dr. Marie Stopes has presented a challenge to historians who attempt to categorize her. While she certainly paved the way for future generations of sexual health and feminist activists, it is impossible to divorce her contributions to the arena of women's rights from her allegiance to the discriminatory ideologies of eugenics. Marie Stopes' steadfast loyalty to eugenics, a reaction to British degeneration theory, manifested itself in her writings and in the actions she took in the founding and administration of the Mothers' Clinic (1921), the first birth control clinic in the United Kingdom.³

Though much has already been written on Stopes' connection with the eugenics movement, little has been written about their contentious relationship or the underlying causes of their discord. Through a thorough examination of correspondences between Stopes and leaders of the mainstream eugenics movement, embodied by the Eugenics Education Society, I will demonstrate the movement's skepticism of Stopes' work. Through further analysis of correspondences between Stopes and the nurses and midwives she employed in her clinics, I will illustrate that the Eugenics Education Society's mistrust of Stopes was rooted in the Mothers' Clinics' employment of an exclusively female staff, that was willing to compromise on the Clinic's eugenic tenets in treating a socially diverse constituency of patients.

This thesis adds to the rich scholarship on the life and work of Marie Stopes as it further complicates the respective narratives that labels Stopes an ardent eugenicist or a women's rights

³ "The History of the Mothers' Clinic," p.12, 1921-1922, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

³ Ruth Hall, *Marie Stopes: A Biography*, (Andre' Deutsch Limited, London, 1977), p. 91.

pioneer.⁴ Her two identities, one feminist and the other eugenicist, did not peacefully coexist; rather, they had an antagonistic relationship in which pursuit of one often came at the cost of the other. Stopes never succeeded in combining feminism with eugenics in a manner that was entirely palatable to British eugenicists, which led to their ultimate rejection of her work and of her as an individual.

Chapter One situates Marie Stopes within British history and contextualizes her against the culture of her period. I will convey what it was about her cultural surrounds that both encouraged and discouraged Stopes from emerging as a controversial public figure. Chapter Two will follow the development of Marie Stopes' feminist and eugenicist identities and the beginnings of her career as a birth controller. I will examine a series of sources that point to institutional discomfort with Stopes' propositions of female fulfillment as a means of achieving eugenic goals. Chapter Three will focus on the nurses and midwives Stopes employed in the Mothers' Clinics and illustrate their key role in executing Stopes' contradictory mission; providing *all* women with fulfillment, while producing results that are beneficial to the fitness of the British race.

Historiography

The main sources of information on Marie Stopes are biographies. I made particular use of Aylmer Maude's *The Authorized Life of Marie Carmichael Stopes*, published in 1924, Ruth Hall's 1977 book, *Marie Stopes*, and June Rose's *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*

⁴ Prorace' cervical cap, London, England, 1920-1950' by Science Museum, London. Credit: Science Museum, London. CC BY. One of Stopes' many pioneering ventures includes the 'Prorace' brand of contraceptives. They were contraceptive devices distributed by the Mothers' Clinic. The Prorace Cap sits across the top of the vagina and acts as a barrier to sperm entering the uterus."

published in 1992.⁵ Maude's perspective as Stope's personal biographer and at times, lodger, renders his biography a subjective telling of Stopes' narrative and a lens through which I gained access to Stopes' methods of rationalization. As the first author to read through what was then the uncatalogued collection of the Stopes' papers, Hall's work is revered in the scholarship on Stopes. Ruth Hall's biography paints a detailed portrait of Marie Stopes which includes her controversial character and notoriously polarizing views on race and class. However, Hall attributes too much of the Mothers' Clinics' success to Stopes and neglects to mention the midwives and nurses who were the backbone of the operation.⁶ June Rose's biography encouraged me to consider alternative conceptions of Stopes that vary from that portrayed in the historical literature. Rose introduces the idea that Marie Stopes deliberately constructed a renegade identity to garner the recognition she desired. She also argues that Stopes was an outlier rather than a product of her times. While I disagree with Rose's idea of Stopes' capacity to create herself, her thesis influenced me to contemplate a nuanced portrayal of Dr. Marie Stopes.

To place Stopes' ideologies in context, I turned to a number of secondary sources that captured the essence of the turn of the twentieth century. In my studies on the origins of eugenics and degeneration theory, I utilized the works of Daniel Pick, Nancy Stepan, and Richard Soloway, all of whom shed light on different aspects of the cultural panic that enabled eugenics to flourish.⁷ To acquire background on women's position in society I immersed myself in the

⁵ Aylmer Maude, *The Authorized Life of Marie C. Stopes*. (Williams & Norgate, London, 1924); Ruth Hall, *Marie Stopes: A Biography*, (Andre' Deutsch Limited, London, 1977); June Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution* (Farber & Farber, London, 1992).

⁶ But then again, Hall did not have access to the wealth of organized archival sources available to historians today which allowed me to emphasize the crucial role of Stopes' female staff in executing feminist-eugenics.

⁷ Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918*, (Cambridge University Press, London, 1993); Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1900-1960*, (Springers, Houndmills, Hampshire, 1987); Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (UNC Press Books, 2014).

works of women's history such as Martha Vicinus' books *Independent Women* and *A Widening Sphere* as well as Kathryn Gleadle's *British Women in the Nineteenth Century*, each work provided me with detail on the progress and setbacks experienced by women of varying classes as they entered the twentieth-century.⁸ Lastly, as I researched the professionalization of nurses and midwives, I turned to the works of Jean Donnison and M. Jeanne Peterson, historians who both explore the transformation of the medical profession at the turn of the twentieth century.⁹

Most of the primary source evidence for my thesis was found in archives of the British Library and the Wellcome Trust. Unfortunately, I was limited to a mere four days in both archives, but I nonetheless gathered rich source material that enabled me to develop my argument. The British Library houses a series of folios including original documents and correspondences from monumental moments in Stopes' career progression. The Wellcome Trust's archives houses similar documents but has a far stronger collection of correspondences between the Clinics' staff and Stopes. The Wellcome Trust also stores the collections of the Eugenics Society which proved to be significant in describing its tense relationship with Marie Stopes. I consulted a wide range of these documents including, letters, pamphlets, journal and newspaper articles, meeting minutes and public announcements.

How do we situate Marie Stopes? Was she a liberator of suffering mothers worldwide? Was she a sex fanatic obsessed with sexual pleasure? Was she a rabid eugenicist and racist? This thesis will discuss Stopes' attempts to reconcile her clashing identities and underscore the many instances where her feminist and eugenicist principles came into conflict- instances where her

⁸ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850- 1920*, (University of Chicago Press, 1985); *A Widening Spheres*, ed. Martha Vicinus, (Methuen & Co., Ltd, London, 1980); Kathryn Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century*, (Palgrave, New York, 2001).

⁹ Jean Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men: A History of Inter-Professional Rivalries and Women's Rights* (Hienemen Education Books, London, 1977); M. Jeanne Peterson, *The Medical Profession in Mid-Victorian London*, (University of California Press, 1978).

classist and racist perspectives clashed with her feminine passion for motherhood and aiding women across the social stratum. And I will demonstrate how from these moments emerged the uneasy compound of feminist eugenics, whose unstable bonds came apart as Dr. Marie Stopes and her staff treated women in her Mothers' Clinics.

Chapter 1: Situating Stopes

“Jeanie, Jeanie full of hopes
 Read a book by Marie Stopes
 But to judge from her condition
 She must have read the wrong edition”
 -Early twentieth-century British nursery rhyme

To reconcile Marie Stopes’ conflicting ideologies it is essential to place her in the context of the period in which she lived. She was unique in her renegade tendencies that motivated her to enter domains which no woman had before. She abandoned Victorian notions of domesticated womanhood and established herself as a public figure. However, not as unique was her loyalty to the eugenics movement. Stopes lived in a society that was gripped by skepticism on the declining quality of the human stock and the horrors of degeneration theory. As she developed her scientific career in the early twentieth century, it comes as no surprise that Stopes subscribed to the eugenic movement that took hold of the British scientific community.

The introduction of birth control into British public discourse took place in the early twentieth-century under the auspices of Marie Stopes. Stopes was a paleobotanist by training and notably educated and accomplished for a woman of the early twentieth century.¹ She completed her undergraduate degree in two years before pursuing her doctorate in paleobotany in 1904. Sparked by her “sex ignorance,” a consequence of her sheltered upbringing, Stopes wrote the famed sex manual, *Married Love*, in 1914.² Stopes’ work gained critical acclaim in the years following its publishing, and so she continued writing dozens of books on matters relating to sexual health. In 1921, Stopes along with her husband Humphrey Verdon Roe established the

¹ Ruth Hall, *Marie Stopes: A Biography*, (Andre’ Deutsch Limited, London, 1977). Paleobotany is the study of plant fossils and remains.

² Rose, *Marie Stopes*, p. 73.

Mothers Clinic in London, the first birth control clinic in the United Kingdom.³ Marie Stopes, envisioned a new method of approaching birth control to make it more palatable and attempted to reform it into a respectable and scientific practice.⁴ She worked tirelessly to advocate for birth control's acceptance among eugenicists and to prove that contraceptive technology had eugenic benefits.

Her personality, described as “provocative and flamboyant,” motivated Stopes to push against the normative social current of her period.⁵ Three broad developments enabled Stopes to pursue her goals and allowed her to attain the extraordinary reputation she is remembered for. Most of Stopes' work was at the intersection of these historical currents: the mainstream eugenic current of the period, the upbringing of women in late-Victorian society, and the development of an esteemed midwife-nursing profession. A unique confluence of these events provided Stopes with the necessary platform to emerge as a renegade of her time.

This chapter contextualizes my thesis, an investigation of the intersection of social, economic, medical and women's history as Marie Stopes' birth control movement came into conflict with the normative eugenics establishment through her employment of newly professionalized midwives and nurses. First, I will frame Stopes' feminist and eugenicist identities against the background of the period and define where she sat on the spectrum of societal norms. Then, I will focus on the driving force behind Stopes' birth control work, and I will provide detail on the transformation of the identity of the nursing and midwife professions in this period.

³ The History of the Mothers' Clinic,” p.12, 1921-1922, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

⁴ During this period, eugenics was “respectable and scientific practice.”

⁵ Mary Stocks & Baroness Stocks. *Still More commonplace*, (P. Davies, London, 1973), p. 163.

Degeneracy Theory and the British Desire to Re-Strengthen Society

While her eugenic beliefs are somewhat alarming to the modern day reader, Marie Stopes lived in a period plagued by doubt on the superiority of the British population. For a woman of her class and educational success, it was expected that Stopes would promote what was believed to be the most cutting edge social science of the times. Degeneration theory was a powerful force that affected sensibilities across the European continent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The assimilation of Darwinian theories of evolution into popular culture, as well as the growing curiosity surrounding urban pathology, gave rise to the ubiquity of degeneration theory and growing skepticism on the physical quality of the new generation. As France became fascinated with the ancestry and atavism of the crowd in the works of Emile Zola and Gustave le Bon, and Italy obsessed over the criminal anthropology propounded in Lombroso's *Criminal Man*, England developed its own means of understanding degeneration through emphasizing the individual's role in sustaining society's vigor.⁶

The birth rate of the imperial nation, whose golden age was slowly fading, was in a drastic decline. The annual birth rate of about 35-36 births per 1,000 individuals, which was kept constant throughout the nineteenth century, suddenly began to drop in the years between 1880 and 1900. During that period, the birth rate declined almost 21 percent to a new low of 28.5 births per 1,000 individuals.⁷ However, the declining birth rate was not universal. The upper-class members of society began to curb their family size while the members of the lower- and

⁶ Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918*, (Cambridge University Press, London, 1993) p. 43; Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, (T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1895).; Emile Zola and Roger Pearson, *La Bête Humaine*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996), (originally published in 1890); Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, (Duke University Press, Durham, 2007), (originally published 1876).

⁷ Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (UNC Press Books, 2014), p. 5.

working-classes continued to reproduce at a high rate. Angus McLaren notes that in the 1911 census, the ratios of births per 1000 married males were 119 for upper- and middle-class men; 153 for skilled workmen; and 213 for unskilled workmen.⁸ The numbers shocked the British scientific community, which attempted to explain this phenomenon.

While the statistics certainly provided the public with a reason to rally around the terrifying reality of degeneration, the discussion surrounding it came as a reaction to the British Military's poor performance in South Africa in the Boer War between 1899 and 1902. The British defeated the Boers in 1902, but as phrased by eugenicist Harold Laski, the British had conquered "by numbers alone."⁹ Britons were alarmed by their defeats and losses against a people who were meant to be "racially inferior."¹⁰ Historian Richard Soloway details the alarming 40 percent rejection rate of the British Military during the Boer War as yet another statistic that frightened the British public.¹¹ Other historians agree that members of Britain's middle-class believed that the shocking failures of Britain's Military, along with the upper class' decreasing birth rate, were due to the newly implemented state welfare system in Britain, which encouraged lower-class and feeble-minded individuals to procreate.

Social welfare programs and poor houses were a point of tension since their inception, but as the class divide in Britain's birth rate became a point of national concern, they received increased attention. While mental defectives became defined as the central eugenic threat facing the nation, Charles Darwin accused asylums of allowing "the weak members of Britain to propagate their kind." Darwin credited civilization as one of the leading causes in perpetuating breeding habits that were inherently dysgenic. He criticized asylums for encouraging the

⁸ Gleadle, *British Women the Nineteenth-Century*, p.131.

⁹ Laski, *The Scope of Eugenics*, p. 193.

¹⁰ Laski, *The Scope of Eugenics*, p. 2.

¹¹ Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, p. 42.

members of the lowest rungs of society to interbreed, and this he concluded, was “highly injurious to the race of man.”¹²

Eugenics, “Science” in the Language of Classical Liberalism

According to historian Nancy Stepan, in its essence, eugenics was both a science and national social program for racial improvement. Eugenics was proposed as part of the greater welfare movement of the period that promoted the social and economic well-being of the English populace, but was also a movement rooted in scientific theory. The term ‘eugenics’ was first coined by Victorian naturalist and cousin of Charles Darwin, Francis Galton, who defined it in 1883 as “the study of agencies under social control which may improve or impair the future quality of the race physically or mentally.”¹³ The movement’s primary organization, the Eugenics Education Society (EES), founded in 1908, strictly advocated for *positive eugenics*, or the encouragement of a selection of “the better stock” to become parents.¹⁴ Later eugenicists shifted their focus to *negative eugenics*, the creation of mechanisms meant to prevent the improvident lower classes from passing on their biological unfitness to future generations.¹⁵

“Differential birth rates” or “differential class fertility” were the terms eugenicists and degeneration theorists employed to describe the falling birth rate among the middle and working classes as it compared to the high fertility rates among the poorest and lowest classes of British society.¹⁶ The “poorest strata of society,” according to the EES’ President, Major Leonard Darwin, were multiplying at an unprecedented rate because they were “deficient in natural

¹² Cited in Thomson, *Mental Deficiency*, p. 20. Darwin, Charles, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, (Penguin, New York, 2003: initially published in 1871), p. 159.

¹³ Cited in Stepan, *The Idea of Race*, p. 111. Galton, Francis, *Memories of My Life*, (Methuen, London, 1909).

¹⁴ Rosanna Ledbetter, "A History of the Malthusian League 1877-1927," (1976), p.66.

¹⁵ Stepan, *The Idea of Race*, p. 125.

¹⁶ Thomson, *Mental Deficiency*, p. 22.

forethought” and economic responsibility.¹⁷ However, said Darwin, members of the upper class reproduced responsibly, and as incomes nationwide were dropping, they exercised prudence and refrained from excessive childbearing.

In the name of science and the investigation of human heredity, eugenicists analyzed statistical data on mental ability, fitness, character, and many other traits in the hope of offering solutions to repair the putatively deteriorating quality of the individual in Britain. Stepan attributes eugenics’ popularity to its ability to give ostensible scientific precision to concepts like “feeble-mindedness” and “idiocy,” which had long been part of social thought.¹⁸ Eugenics gained a following because of its claims in science, which appealed to the gamut of the British intellectual community, from the progressive economist John M. Keynes to conservative politician Sir Arthur Balfour.¹⁹ Naturally, Dr. Marie Stopes too aligned herself with the popular science that attracted the likes of her contemporaries. What drew such intellectuals was eugenics’ connection to Darwinian evolution, a groundbreaking theory that shaped social and intellectual history in the century following its emergence.²⁰

British middle-class citizens grew more and more interested in the movement as the society gained membership and began to disseminate its *Eugenics Review* in 1909. Membership of the EES rose steadily, and by 1914 over six hundred members and affiliated branches of the society were founded in cities outside of London.²¹

¹⁷ Major Leonard Darwin, “Eugenics During and After the War,” *Eugenics Review*, vol. VII, (1915), p. 93.

¹⁸ Stepan, *The Idea of Race*, p.113.

¹⁹ Stepan, *The Idea of Race*, p. 119.

²⁰ Cited in Stepan, *The Idea of Race*, p. 113. Galton in fact credits *The Origin of Species* as the work that inspired him to advocate for eugenic ideals and for the optimization of the British population through the regulation of parental fitness.

²¹ Stepan, *The Idea of Race*, p. 118.

Victorian Middle-Class Womanhood

Stopes' outspoken activism and comfort in the public sphere were unusual for a woman raised according to Victorian values. Equally unusual were her educational pedigree and willingness to address topics of sexuality. Growing up, Stopes was taught that the ideal middle-class married Victorian-era woman was one who valued self-sacrifice and philanthropy over any personal concerns or desires. Her appearance in the public sphere was limited and was only prompted by her role as caregiver to the poor and as the moral compass of society. She was discouraged from pursuing her own aspirations or from touting her personal accomplishments. Her primary existence was in the private sphere where she was tasked with childcare and domestic responsibilities.²²

The traditional picture of Victorian sexuality includes male dominance in the family, strict differentiation of sex roles, female sexual coldness in marriage, and general silence about sexual matters.²³ Throughout the nineteenth century, genteel reticence required the substitution of polite euphemisms for otherwise straightforward nouns or adjectives: “in an interesting condition” for pregnant, “nether limbs” for legs, or “private parts” for genitals. Women were also treated as unsexual beings in relation to men who were said to have insatiable sexual appetites. This idea was then internalized by the women of the day, who therefore had little by way of sexual education.²⁴

However, there did exist a cluster of rebellious authors who agreed in demanding a single standard of morality for both sexes and argued for joyous heterosexuality, for birth control, for

²² Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 18.

²³ Barry F. Smith, “Sexuality in Britain, 1800-1900,” in *A Widening Spheres*, ed. Martha Vicinus, (Methuen & Co., Ltd, London, 1980). p. 182.

²⁴ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 17.

more lenient marriage laws, and in some case for promiscuity.²⁵ Much of the feminist literature written in the mid and later 1800s emerged from neo-Malthusians who wrote from an economic perspective. Authors including, Dr. Charles Drysdale, president of the Malthusian Society, outwardly discussed female contraceptives and the triviality of celibacy. Women, he said, have the right to have sex without the fear of pregnancy looming over them.²⁶ Others wrote from a more feminist lens. Marie Stopes' *Married Love* was written to empower women; she believed that marriage should be an equal partnership between spouses. She also made the case for increased conversation surrounding female sexuality and the use of contraceptive technology.²⁷

At the same time, at the turn of the century, advances took place in middle-and upper-class women's education, both at the secondary and tertiary levels.²⁸ Secondary schools for girls were developed and tertiary institutions began to accept women. One of the first institutions to formally accept women was the University of London in 1878, where Marie Stopes received her undergraduate degree just two decades later.²⁹ While feminist agitation was certainly instrumental in improving girls' education, the new schooling institutions themselves clung to the conservative and gendered culture of British society. Most adhered to what Gleadle later dubbed a 'double conformity:' they felt obliged to achieve the educational standards reached in boys' schools, and simultaneously conform to prevailing ideas of femininity.³⁰ Despite the universities' official acceptance of women, female students themselves faced considerable problems assimilating into university life. There were strict regulations surrounding their contact

²⁵ Smith, "Sexuality in Britain," p. 188.

²⁶ Charles Drysdale, *The Elements of Social Science; or, Physical, Sexual and Natural Religion*, (E. Truelove, London, 1876).

²⁷ Marie Stopes, *Married Love*, (Critic and Guide Company, New York, 1918).

²⁸ Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth-Century*, p. 139.

²⁹ Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth-Century*, p. 141.

³⁰ Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth-Century*, p. 140.

with male students and they were chaperoned constantly. In co-ed environments, male students exhibited hostility towards female students, while exclusively female institutions remained poorly resourced and managed.³¹ Women struggled to graduate as they encountered hardships throughout their university years. Against this background, when women were actively discouraged from pursuing academic disciplines, specifically in the sciences, it is all the more impressive that Stopes established herself as an eminent scientist.

The single middle-class woman was also encouraged to remain at home throughout her adulthood and participate in domestic life. Her immensely vague role at home, where she was neither a mother nor a wife, compounded with her constricted role in public, where she was barred from participating in male political and social spheres, left her drastically limited.³² Frustrated from her ambiguous role, she sought a new reality where she could tackle her marginal status in Victorian culture. However, the single woman at mid-century was forbidden to search outside the walls of her home for a solution to her dissatisfaction. But, as illustrated by women's historian Martha Vicinus, to escape the confines of their prescribed roles, single women led the fight to professionalize their feminine and giving nature by carrying the private sphere into the public.³³

Vicinus' thesis of the "New Woman" is perhaps most evident in the development of modern nursing, accredited to Florence Nightingale.³⁴ Nightingale's unmarried independence, vitality, and self-confidence set a new paradigm for both single and married women who were on a quest to enter the public sphere yet retain their femininity.

³¹ Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth-Century*, p. 141.

³² Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 10-12.

³³ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 15.

³⁴ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 11. In 1856 women across Britain sang the praises of Florence Nightingale who had just returned along with small band of nurses from the Crimean War. It was there that she gained further inspiration for her famous work, *Notes on Nursing* (1859).

In this tapestry, Stopes was then seen as a radical, but nevertheless someone who had a place. Seizing the sentiments taught by Nightingale through challenging the status quo, but staying within the classical idea of womanhood, Stopes found her niche. Despite negative reactions from contemporaries, she assumed a novel position for a woman of her time- making her a radical and a firebrand in many senses, but like Nightingale, someone who was able to have a voice.

The Professionalization of Feminine Moral Superiority among Nurses and Midwives

As eugenics presented itself as a viable solution to the horrors of degeneration and an answer to the doubts of British society, eugenicists, namely Marie Stopes, found agents for their mission in the emerging midwife and nursing profession. Nursing and midwifery both emerged in the early twentieth century as well structured and established career options for women of higher social classes. Of course, the professionalization of medical occupations was symptomatic of urbanization, the rise of the middle class, and formation of group identities within the metropolis. But it also was a result of the state's renewed interest in the physical health of the British citizen.

The nurse and midwife occupations of the first half of the nineteenth century primarily consisted of lower-class and single women. Nursing was seen as the lowest form of domestic service, as nurses cleaned and fed the most vulnerable and contagious in society, and was often carried out by elderly drunken spinsters from lower-class backgrounds.³⁵ During this period, nursing remained on the cusp between philanthropic and professional activities. From the 1830s, Anglican sisterhoods had begun sparking middle and upper-class interest in nursing and

³⁵ Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth-Century*, p. 20.

midwifery, but, it was not until the excitement surrounding Florence Nightingale that such professions gained significant recognition.³⁶

Simultaneously, the medical profession was witnessing immense change. Before the 1858 Medical Act and the formation of the General Medical Council (GMC), Britain's medical profession was hardly a profession at all. Medicine was a conglomeration of nineteen separate licensing bodies, and the rules governing their recognition were ambiguous and contradictory.³⁷ Throughout the 1800s, England bore witness to the growth of a centralized hospital system that did not merely act as a charity for the needy, aged, and sick. New hospitals including Charing Cross Hospital, University College Hospital, King's College Hospital, and St. Mary's Hospital, became centers of medical teaching in London and focal points for the unification of the medical profession.³⁸ Medical students began to share the same basic educational training and experiences that aided the development of a sense of group membership and blurred the lines that previously separated them into distinct categories. This cultural shift promoted the establishment of the 1858 Medical Act which brought unity to the community of medical professionals by establishing the GMC.³⁹

As the GMC began to shape the new identity of medical professionals, nurses and midwives were forced to question their role in the new healthcare hierarchy. Both midwives and nurses immediately reacted to the uncertainty facing their professions by drafting legislation that would outline the responsibilities of the nurse or midwife as it complemented the general practitioner.

³⁶ Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth-Century*, p. 54.

³⁷ Peterson, *The Medical Profession*, p. 5.

³⁸ Peterson, *The Medical Profession*, p. 13.

³⁹ Peterson, *The Medical Profession*, p.15.

Beginning in the 1890s, a series of Midwife Bills were introduced in the House of Commons. Historian Jean Donnison argues that these bills were attempts to reconcile the conflicting roles between the Midwives' Institute and the Council of the Obstetrical Society, made up of male physicians. The effort to professionalize midwifery also illustrated the desire of midwives to eradicate the Sarah Gamp and Mother Midnight stereotypes associated with the profession (i.e., fictional midwives that were usually drunk, sloppy, and unqualified) since the start of the century.⁴⁰ While both parties agreed on the need to provide better child delivery services for the poorer classes of England, the medical men belonging to the Obstetrical Society hoped to diminish the role of the midwife to a mere subordinate of medical practitioners. Members of the Midwives Institute, however, sought to establish a registry for midwives in order to attract educated women to the work and aid in the greater fight to improve the national birth rate.⁴¹

After gaining traction in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a well-rounded Midwives Act was nearing its establishment by the Midwives Institute. The act would grant midwives independence from the Obstetrics Council and the greater GMC, both supervised by medical men who seldom considered the thoughts of a female midwife. A fierce debate ensued between Pro and Anti-Registrationists over the benefits of midwife registration. Pro-Registrationists sought to debunk the common myth that "all respectable" women could afford a physician and allow women the choice of a qualified midwife to tend their births. Dr. Greda Jacobi, an advocate for midwives, insisted that unlike medical men, midwives were accessible and affordable by even the poorest women in society.⁴² Many women looked beyond financial

⁴⁰ Alison Nuttal, "Midwifery, 1800-1920: The Journey to Registration" in *Nursing & Midwifery in Britain Since 1700*, ed. Anne Borsay & Billie Hunter (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2012), p. 138.

⁴¹ Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men*, p. 117.

⁴² Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men*, p. 160.

considerations and, as Dr. Jacobi noted, resisted medical attendance by a male practitioner for purely gendered reasons. For years, men belonging to the GMC set restrictions and guidelines supervising the powers of midwives thereby making safe birthing inaccessible to poorer women.

As seen in the Swanscombe Case of 1901, medical men refused to attend to midwives' cases even when the patient was at risk of mortality. The event included a patient who was treated by a midwife who required medical assistance from a physician in delivering the complex case. The husband of the patient requested the assistance of three separate doctors, all of whom resisted. The woman then died in childbirth. Medical men refused to 'follow' midwives and cover their cases when skilled attention was necessary because they feared that the GMC would charge them for covering an "unqualified practitioner."⁴³ While Anti-Registrationists were impressed with those physicians who stood their ground, Pro-Registrationists saw this as a call for immediate reform.

In response to the Swanscombe Case and the dire consequences resulting from the GMC's control over midwives, the 1902 Midwives Act proposed that the Central Midwives Board (CMB) exist completely independent of the GMC. After its passing in the House of Commons, the bill was aggressively attacked in the medical press. The *Lancet* criticized the bill as "a distinct blow" to the medical profession as it gave "semi-educated" women an unparalleled amount of power.⁴⁴ On a similar note, *The British Medical Journal* resisted the removal of midwives from the jurisdiction of the GMC in fear that it would create a superior midwife who would cheat medical men by claiming his financially stable patients. Despite the public dismay in

⁴³ Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men*, p. 160.

⁴⁴ Anonymous, "The Midwives Bill," *The Lancet*, March 22nd 1902, Volume 1 for 1902, p. 831.

reaction to its establishment, the CMB signified a monumental shift for the midwife profession and propelled it into the new era of medical professionalism.⁴⁵

Although the Nurses Registration Act was not passed until December 1919, when World War I demonstrated the essential role of nurses in times of war and crisis, the long fight to registration shaped the nursing field. Contrary to The Midwives Act of 1902, The Nurses Registration Act limited the profession from self-regulation and effectively placed power in the hands of the government. Though advocates of Nurses Registration did not achieve what they had hoped, and felt they had little to celebrate in 1919, the debate over registration allowed nursing to gain popularity and legitimacy in the early twentieth century.⁴⁶

Both bills' acceptance after years of disapproval came as a result of the previously mentioned political climate. The fear for the future of the race was an increasing concern and led many to look for solutions in the unborn citizens of Britain. Woman's roles as wife and mother were reinforced by the notion that women were "the mothers of the race" and the vehicles of a strong generation.⁴⁷ As the nation embarked on a quest for 'national efficiency,' Marie Stopes emerged as the primary voice of the birth control movement in Britain, a movement that fused the ideals of eugenics with the rapidly changing midwife and nursing professions.

⁴⁵ W.J Sinclair, "The Midwives Bill, 1902." *British Medical Journal*, June 7th 1902, p. 1451.

⁴⁶ Hallet, "Nursing," p. 64.

⁴⁷ Susan Bruley, *Women in Britain Since 1900* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1999) p.13.

Chapter 2: The Cost of Coffins

Upon hearing of her son Harry's engagement to Marry Wallis, Marie Stopes lamented to her husband and wrote: "[Harry's] marrying her is a crime against this country- which increasingly needs fine and perfect people. Mary, has an inherited physical defect and morally should never bear children."¹ That "physical defect" was in fact the all too common impairment of myopia, or nearsightedness, which required Mary to wear eyeglasses. As the author of many parenting books, preaching "joyous and deliberate motherhood," Stopes prided herself as a model parent who could responsibly divert her own son from making any decisions he may come to regret. Her defiant response to any slight threat to her convictions not only failed to reinforce them but also went against her own interests. As seen here, her eugenic views stifled her judgement and resulted in a hysteric reaction that would do irreparable damage to Stopes' relationship with her only child.²

Since 1924, when Aylmer Maude published the first biography of Dr. Marie Stopes, historians have been faced with the challenge of accurately depicting and remembering Stopes' complicated character. Most famous for her contributions to the birth control movement of early twentieth-century, Stopes is often memorialized today as a feminist hero, one who allowed British women a new control over their bodies and lives. And yet, while historians still celebrate her feminist victories, they have spared no detail in proving Stopes' racism and her devotion to the eugenic current of the period. Stopes' feminist-eugenicist dualism is evident in her writings as well as in her operation of the Mothers' Clinic. In her works, Stopes advocated for female autonomy and sexual freedom through deliberate motherhood while she simultaneously

¹ Cited in Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 301. The personal collection of Henry Verdon Roe.

² Six years after Harry's marriage to Mary, Stopes published a poem, "The Mother," bitterly reflecting on her son's poor choice. She never forgave Harry for the rest of her life and he was eventually cut out of her will.

promoted the use of birth control as a means of ensuring racial purity.³ But her identities came into more substantial conflict in the Mothers' Clinic, where Stopes often compromised on her pro-race stance in the interest of promoting her female patients' agency and general fulfillment.

Stopes' unorthodox notion of eugenics that paired female fulfillment with the science of controlled heredity kept her from conforming to the mainstream eugenic institutions of the period. In the following chapter, I will provide a brief biography of Stopes' early life, including the events that led to her development of a feminist and eugenic worldview. Then, I will discuss a series of sources that allude to her contentious relationship with the most notable eugenic establishments of the period, the Malthusian League and Eugenics Education Society (EES).⁴

Marie Charlotte Carmichael Stopes was born in 1880 in Edinburgh to architect Henry Stopes and Shakespearean scholar Charlotte Carmichael Stopes. Charlotte was a committed feminist and the first woman in Scotland to receive the University Certificate in Literature and Philosophy, despite the University's preference for male candidates. Charlotte Carmichael Stopes was also heavily involved in the suffragist movement, which was perhaps the reason that Marie Stopes initially rejected any involvement in the cause.⁵ Stopes had one sister, Winifred Stopes (1884-1923), about whom little is known, other than that she never married and suffered ill health throughout her life.

As scholars themselves, Marie Stopes' parents pushed their daughter to strive for academic excellence and enrolled her in primary school in Edinburgh at the age of twelve. At the turn of the twentieth century, middle-class British women were not yet regularly attending

³ Marie Stopes, *Radiant Motherhood: A Book for Those Who Are Creating the Future*, (Putnam, London, 1921).

⁴ I will refer to the Eugenics Education Society as the EES from here on. Furthermore, in 1926 the Society changed its name to the Eugenics Society which will be reflected in my writing.

⁵ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 21.

formal schooling programs, which set Stopes apart from other girls her age.⁶ Following primary school, Stopes received a Bachelor of Science degree from University College of London with honors in botany and geology.⁷ Although her father was a professional architect, he was an amateur geologist and introduced Marie to fossils and earth sciences at a young age.

Her success in her undergraduate education, combined with her longtime interest in geology, led Stopes to pursue a doctorate in paleobotany, which she received from the University of Munich in 1904 at a time when women receiving doctorates were extremely rare.⁸ During her first term at the Botanical Institute of the University of Munich, Stopes was the only woman among 5000 men in her program.⁹ After receiving her PhD, Stopes became increasingly interested in coal and was appointed as an assistant professor of botany at the University of Manchester, making her the youngest doctor of science in England. Aside from her outstanding accomplishments as a woman in the field of science, Stopes' research received critical acclaim for its groundbreaking findings on coal and earned her the title "Mother of Coal Research."¹⁰

Following her education, Stopes began to find her voice as a feminist. After an arduous uphill climb toward receiving her doctorate, Stopes became increasingly familiar with the inequalities afflicting female scientists. Prompted by her feelings of isolation as the only British woman in the field of paleobotany, she started to contemplate women's disadvantaged position in society at large. Despite her unabashed ambition and passion to succeed in a male-dominated environment, she was subject to institutional sexism that impeded the trajectory of her career.¹¹

⁶ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 122.

⁷ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 33. Stopes initially applied to do an honors degree in chemistry, an exclusively male department. However, she was rejected and without hesitation switched to paleobotany.

⁸ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 35-36.

⁹ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 43.

¹⁰ R.J Rayner, "The Private and Public Life of a Paleobotanist," *South African Journal of Science*, 87, no. 10, (1991), p. 474-478.

¹¹ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 88.

But the event that truly and most clearly motivated Stopes' feminism was her disastrous marriage to Canadian scientist Reginald Ruggles Gates. In her marriage she encountered shock and disappointment, which she owed to her upbringing. Throughout her childhood she had been taught to believe that ignorance of sexual matters was synonymous with "innocence," a quality desirable in all genteel women.¹² Marie Stopes met Reginald Ruggles Gates, a eugenic-geneticist and botanist, at a dinner given by the Botanical Society in St. Louis in December of 1910. In fact, it was through Gates that Stopes grew fascinated with the EES and joined in 1912.¹³ The two became enamored with one another and married in March of 1911 in Montreal.¹⁴ Stopes did not take Gates' last name because her professional identity; at the time of her marriage, the name Dr. Stopes was recorded in thousands of card indexes and catalogues in universities all over the world. Stopes had wished that her name be recognized not by her marriage to Gates, but rather through her scientific achievements and independent research.¹⁵ Though she did not subscribe explicitly to any specific feminist ideologies, she certainly made feminist choices when it came to her personal recognition and the celebration of her achievements.

According to Aylmer Maude, Stopes' biographer with whom she had an affair toward the end of her marriage, Gates was a "passionate lover, but an incomplete husband," and after years of marriage, had left his wife a virgin.¹⁶ The annulment of her marriage to Reginald Ruggles Gates and the "sex ignorance" she blamed for her marriage's failure became the impetus for Stopes' feminist, turned feminist-eugenicist, writings in the 1910s. In the preface of her manifesto on sexual education and freedom for married women, *Married Love*, Stopes wrote, "in

¹² Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p.90.

¹³ Letter from Stopes to Secretary of the Eugenics Society, Nov 25th 1926, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers 1863-2008, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

¹⁴ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 91.

¹⁵ Maude, *The Authorized Life*. 70.

¹⁶ Maude, *The Authorized Life*, p. 72.

my own marriage I paid such a terrible price for sex-ignorance that I feel knowledge gained at such a cost should be placed at the service of humanity.”¹⁷ Marie Stopes wrote *Married Love* as a guide for young women to embrace sexual freedom and break ties with the Victorian-era view that women have no sexual drive or need for gratification.¹⁸

Following her completion of the *Married Love* manuscript, Stopes became close friends with American birth control pioneer Margaret Sanger, who had fled to England to seek the help of Europeans in her fight against reactionaries in America. Stopes wrote a letter with the support of a number of British literary scholars to President Wilson pleading that he support Sanger’s mission to teach birth control. In the letter, sent in September of 1915, historians can see the first inkling of Stopes’ bold defiance. The letter detailed the merits of birth control and the ultimate benefits of utilizing the contentious technology. Stopes wrote, “I pray that you sir [President Wilson]...will hasten a new era for the white race when it may escape the sapping of its strength and the diseases which are the results of too frequent child-birth by over-worn or horror stricken mothers.”¹⁹ While *Married Love* advocated for a wife’s entitlement to sexual satisfaction, Stopes’ genuine eugenic ideals only became evident to the public for the first time in this letter on behalf of Sanger in which she begged for the salvation of the white race.

Today, Stopes’ eugenic beliefs seem extreme, but when she joined the EES in 1912, ideas on the exceptionality of the white race were thought to be common sense. The language of heredity pervaded every aspect of daily life, the biographer Ruth Hall writes that women in this period even labeled their prospective suitors as “VGTBW” (very good to breed with).²⁰ Eugenics

¹⁷ Stopes, “Preface,” *Married Love*, (Critic and Guide Company, New York, 1918).

¹⁸ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p, 187.

¹⁹ “The History of the Mothers’ Clinic,” 1921-1922, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers 1863-2008, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

²⁰ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 112.

had a respectable basis, and throughout her educational career Stopes was steeped in Darwin, whose theory of natural selection came to be interpreted as the foundation of selective breeding. She also read Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin who coined the term eugenics and argued the existence of a natural elite among each species. Like most activists, Stopes was a product of her environment, and to succeed she had to familiarize herself with the prevailing ideologies of her peers. For a brilliant scientist who stood at the forefront of discovery and liberal discourse, it made perfect sense for Marie Stopes to subscribe to the most popular scientific social theory in Britain in the early twentieth-century. By linking her mission to provide women with control over their sexual health with eugenics, Stopes strengthened her movement by grounding it in an accepted form of social science.²¹ But by attaching eugenics to birth control, Stopes upset the EES, which at the time was extremely hostile to the use of contraceptive techniques.²²

Stopes did not publish *Married Love* after she completed it in 1914. Rather, she was forced to wait until she had secured the necessary financial assistance to send the manuscript to a publisher. Stopes also could not receive the support of any British publishing houses because of *Married Love's* controversial and radical content. In 1917, Binnie Dunlop, the secretary of the Malthusian League, wrote to Stopes mentioning that he had lent a manuscript of *Married Love* to the editor of *The Malthusian*, Dr. Drysdale. A later correspondence then detailed Dr. Drysdale's opinion that the book "would sell briskly," but that it would be wise for Stopes to consider the financial backing of "a rich young man who wishes to start a birth control clinic for poor women in Manchester."²³ After a meeting between Stopes and her future husband Humphrey Verdon Roe in 1918, Stopes secured the financial backing she required and proceeded to publish

²¹ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 113-114.

²² Searle, *Eugenics and Politics in Britain*, p.102.

²³ Letter from Binnie Dunlop to Marie C. Stopes, November 15th 1917, BL Add Mss 58564, Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

Married Love in March 1918. Ultimately the book was published by the Critic and Guide Company, a small publishing company based in New York.²⁴

Roe was a significant investor in the birth control movement and the catalyst who allowed Stopes' aspirations to come to fruition. As outlined in his official biography in the Clinic literature, Roe had left the army to lead an aviation business in one of the great industrial centers of the north. As an employer of laborers and as a resident of an industrial city, Roe became increasingly aware "that the pitiful miseries of the dwellers in the slum districts" were due to "the broken strength of the poor involuntary parents."²⁵ Roe saw an easy solution to the miseries of city dwellers in the power of birth control technologies, which he wished to distribute in a free clinic in Manchester. Although he never realized his birth control venture, whilst conducting research for it Roe met his future wife, Marie Stopes, with whom he would establish England's first birth control clinic.

The publication of *Married Love* certainly gave Stopes a controversial reputation and marked her transition into the world of sexual health. Although the book was received with some shock by the church and medical establishment, it sold more than one million copies and has been identified as one of the Twelve British books that changed the world.^{26, 27} In "The History of the Mothers' Clinic" published in 1921, the official clinic author reflects on the writing of

²⁴ Stopes, *Married Love*, 1918.

²⁵ "The History of the Mothers' Clinic," 1921-1922, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

²⁶ Anonymous, "The Books that Changed the World," *Daily Mail*, 2005, accessed April 14th 2018, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-361630/The-books-changed-world.html>.

²⁷ Halliday Gibson Sutherland, *Birth Control*, (Cecil Palmer, London, 1925). While I do not focus on this in my thesis, Marie Stopes clashed with the Catholic Church. In 1923 a Catholic doctor names Halliday Sutherland libeled Stopes in his book *Birth Control*. He argues that birth controllers were using the poor for scientific experimentation. Stopes sued Sutherland in court but then lost the case. The case gained an incredible amount of public attention. Throughout her career she was the subject of many diatribes by the Catholic church.

Married Love and its publishing in 1918 as the most pivotal moment in Stopes' career. The "incident" of her failed marriage is what the Clinic's official literature points to as the cause for her "conversion" from the field of paleobotany to the field of sexual health.²⁸ Moreover, it was her partnership with Humphrey Verdon Roe that led Stopes' in the direction of birth control advocacy.

Stopes' literary career took off after her publication of *Married Love*, which she followed with "A Letter to Working Class Women" (1919), *Wise Parenthood* (1919), and *Radiant Motherhood* (1920). In succession, each work became more controversial and written with a more defined feminist-eugenic lens. "A Letter to Working Class Women," while not a full form book, was a patriotic pamphlet on the nationalist merits of motherhood. In her work, Stopes instructs the reader in a condescending tone about her ability to bear "strong children" and prevent the birth of children she could not raise properly.²⁹ In *Wise Parenthood*, Stopes warns city-dwelling families of the horrors of unmitigated family planning, insisting that by resisting birth control, "parents as well as children will consequently suffer."³⁰ *Radiant Motherhood* expanded on the ideas presented in *Wise Parenthood* and was the work that contained the most racialized sentiment, outlining Stopes' belief that "babies have the right to be given a body untainted by any heritable disease, uncontaminated by any of the racial poisons."³¹

Radiant Motherhood: A Book for Those Who Are Creating the Future instructed readers to employ birth control techniques not only as a means of guaranteeing economic stability, but to ensure that middle- and upper-class women were the ones who took responsibility for Britain's

²⁸ "The History of the Mothers' Clinic," 1921-1922, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

²⁹ Marie Stopes, "A Letter to Working Class Women," (London, 1919).

³⁰ Marie Stopes, *Wise Parenthood*, (GP Putnam, London, 1919), p. 3.

³¹ Marie Stopes, *Radiant Motherhood: A Book for Those Who Are Creating the Future*, (Putnam, London, 1921), p. 172.

population growth. In *Radiant Motherhood*, Stopes dismissed the common assumption of the eugenics movement that healthy upper and middle-class white women should be expected to breed for Britain and argued that women themselves can determine how many children they wanted.³² She describes the merits of birth control through apocryphal chapters with titles such as “The Cost of Coffins,” in which she promises that birth control will “quell the stream of depraved, hopeless and wretched lives.”³³

The reviews that appeared in *The Eugenics Review* on Stopes’ writings reflect the tensions existing between institutional eugenics and the unique model of eugenic birth control Stopes promoted. *The Eugenics Review*’s 1919 review of *Wise Parenthood* was a scathing attack on Stopes’ attempt to provide “the ideal method” of birth control to readers. The publication accused Stopes of advocating on behalf of a dangerous method of birth control, namely the insertion of a small rubber cap to be fixed around the end of a woman’s womb. The review concludes with one short sentence asserting that “we [*The Eugenics Review*] think it a pity that this book has been published.”³⁴ This critical note deeply offended Stopes, who was invested in the publication’s reviews of her work and repeatedly sought affirmation from the EES.

Yet, the year following the publication of *The Eugenics Review*’s critique on *Wise Parenthood*, the *Review* published a complimentary review of the book. The contempt expressed for the work, according to *The Eugenics Review*, arose “from a serious misunderstanding of the social movement which have led up to birth control.”³⁵ The EES, led by a board of older men, was unable to keep abreast of the changing norms in the arena of women’s health and thus was

³² Marie Stopes, *Radiant Motherhood: A Book for Those Who Are Creating the Future*, (Putnam, London, 1921). P. 223.

³³ Stopes, *Radiant Motherhood*, p. 221.

³⁴ Anonymous, “Reviews of Recent Books: *Wise Parenthood*,” *The Eugenics Review*, 11, no.2, (1919), p. 81-82.

³⁵ Sir Archdall Reid, “Voluntary Parenthood,” *The Eugenics Review*, 12, no. 1, (1920), p. 29-31.

incapable of reacting properly to Stope's proposition that women should have agency over their choices and their bodies.

Marie Stopes' writings attained her the necessary recognition and fame that enabled her and her husband to become the leading birth control proponents of the early twentieth century. Three key developments that occurred between 1921 and 1925, including the opening of the Mothers' Clinic, the Queens Hall Meeting, and the establishment of the Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress (SCBC), gave Marie Stopes the platform to create significant change within the public health culture in Britain.



Photograph of the Waiting Room of the Mother's Clinic on Hollaway Road³⁷

The Mothers' Clinic opened its bright blue doors on March 17th 1921 on Hollaway Road in London. The entire operation was intended to provide free contraceptive advice to women in the poor low-income area of London. Despite patrons' desires to donate to the cause, Stopes and Roe remained loyal to their principles even if it entailed reprimanding staff members for accepting such donations.³⁶ The Clinic, furnished with plush arm chairs and delicate tables,

³⁶ Letter from Stopes to Nurse Hebbes, April 12th 1922, BL Add Mss 58596, Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

offered a noticeably homey and feminine environment meant to provide a welcoming private oasis away from the city's public domain. Each room was painted white with blue trim, with framed pastel portraits of babies adorning the walls, and flowerpots as well as statues of cherubs were scattered throughout the interior of the Clinic.³⁷ The feminine atmosphere was accentuated by Stopes' and Roe's choice to exclusively employ female physicians and midwives. As demonstrated by historian Deborah Cohen, the woman-to-woman contact seen in the Mothers' Clinic was the cornerstone of Stopes' philosophy.³⁸ Every patient, she asserted, should feel "when she is at the clinic that there is a kind heart there to listen... as well as give her the more technical instruction in birth control."³⁹ But aside from creating a warm environment, Stopes also chose to exclusively employ women because of her antagonism towards the male-dominated medical profession which, she felt, was constantly undermining her work.

The Clinic's opening was covered by many news sources, but of particular interest is its mention in *The British Journal of Nursing*. The *Journal's* coverage illustrates the newly-codified nursing profession's growing interest in birth control and in supervising a nationalist eugenic project. The décor, the *Journal* wrote, will allow mothers "to realize the friendly nature of the clinic" and will encourage them to "drift in and out quite naturally."⁴⁰

The Clinic's letterhead, which read "joyous and deliberate motherhood, a sure light in our racial darkness," explicitly spelled out the eugenic agenda of the Mother's Clinic.⁴¹ The lantern

³⁷ Photographs of the interior of the Mothers' Clinic on Holloway Road, 1921. BL Add Mss 58770, Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

³⁸ Deborah Cohen, "Private Lives in Public Spaces: Marie Stopes, the Mothers Clinics and the Practice of Contraception," *History Workshop Journal* 35, no.1. (1993), p. 99.

³⁹ Marie Stopes, Society for Constructive Birth Control meeting, November 22nd 1928, BL Add Mss 58589, Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁴⁰ Anonymous, "The Mothers' Clinic," *The British Journal of Nursing*, 66, no. 26, (1921), p. 179.

⁴¹ Image of Mothers' Clinic Correspondence, May 20th 1922, BL Add Mss 58596, Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

logo featured tiny font that read “birth control,” suggesting to patients that through the use of birth control they could aid in the recovery and illumination of the British race. According to marketing material distributed by the Clinic in its early days, the Mother’s Clinic intended to “save the babies” from being born to a life of disease, hopeless misery, overcrowded slums, and starvation. Stopes used phrases such as “save the country from infants’ coffins” to gain the attention of women who were already concerned with the degeneration of British society.⁴² Her alarmist marketing campaigns succeeded in attracting women to the Clinic, yet she still needed the support of the greater eugenics community to legitimize her clinic.



Image of the Mothers’ Clinic’s Letterhead, 1922

In order to gain the support required for her clinic’s acceptance among Britain’s mainstream scientific community, Stopes held the Queen’s Hall Meeting on Constructive Birth Control on May 31st 1921, shortly following the Clinic’s opening.⁴³ The goal of the meeting was to invite luminaries to discuss the respectability of birth control and prove that Stopes “was not a crank.”⁴⁴ The meeting was intended to transform birth control into a meaningful and acceptable

⁴²Mothers’ Clinic, “Save the Babies” flyer, 1922, BL Add Mss 58596, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁴³ Advertisement for the Queen’s Hall Meeting, May 1921, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers 1863-2008, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

⁴⁴ Rose, *Marie Stopes*, p. 153.

topic of conversation and to gain interest for what would become the Society for Constructive Birth Control (SCBC).

The original agenda for the meeting included a bare outline of the types of individuals Stopes and Roe had in mind to speak. The categories included a “woman speaker,” a “man speaker,” and “a medical man,” who would explain the burden of physically unfit individuals on the community.⁴⁵ By featuring a speaker in each from each of these categories, Stopes was confident she would gain the support of her notable audience filled with members of the EES. The speakers included Dr. Jane Hawthorne, the resident female physician at the Mothers’ Clinic, Stopes herself, Humphrey Verdon Roe, as well as other men belonging to the EES who believed in the vitality of birth control.⁴⁶ The event was regarded as a success, and in her speech Stopes emphasized that the Clinic did not exist only to prevent unwanted pregnancies, but also to assist individuals across all social classes who had difficulty conceiving.⁴⁷ By announcing the Clinic’s plan to aid infertile couples conceive, Stopes was publicly challenging members of both the Malthusian League and the EES; neo-Malthusians were repulsed by the horrors of deliberate population growth, while the EES rejected the notion of assisting lower- and working-class families expand.

The British Journal of Nursing reported on the meeting but mistakenly directed any inquiries to the Malthusian League.⁴⁸ Roe responded to this mistake in an October issue of the *Journal*, insisting that the Queens Hall Meeting was “not in any way associated with the

⁴⁵ Agenda for the Queens Hall Meeting, May 1921, BL Add Mss 58596, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁴⁶ Advertisement for the Queen’s Hall Meeting, May 1921, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers 1863-2008, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

⁴⁷ Transcription of Queens Hall Meeting speeches, May 31st 1921, BL Add Mss 58596, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁴⁸ Anonymous, “Coming Events,” *British Journal of Nursing*, May 28th 1921, 66, p. 329-330.

Malthusian League” and that both the idea and the phrase ‘Constructive Birth Control’ originated from his wife, Dr. Marie Stopes. Neo-Malthusianism, he stressed, differs in many ways from the political considerations of Constructive Birth Control.⁴⁹ The *Journal’s* mistake touched upon a particular nerve for Stopes and Roe and was yet another point of tension between the couple and the greater eugenics movement. Before the establishment of the Mothers’ Clinic, birth control existed in the domain of the Malthusian League. Rather than exclusively emphasize the perils of overpopulation as the neo-Malthusians had done, Stopes justified and advertised birth control on medical and eugenic grounds.⁵⁰ And unlike neo-Malthusian support for a total decreased birth rate, Stopes advocated for “babies in the right place.” She felt that control need not be “repressive” and that childless healthy married white women seeking to conceive should receive guidance.⁵¹ In the formation of the SCBC, Stopes was realizing the objectives of an abstract birth control movement which sought to eliminate dysgenic populations, improve women’s health, and decrease poverty in cities. By gaining the support of the scientific community at the Queens Hall Meeting, she pushed back against the norms of birth control and rescued contraception from the neo-Malthusian backwater where it had existed pre-World War I.

As Stopes became more passionate about the merits of birth control, she sought to exert more influence on the EES, to which she was “a lifelong member,” and direct them toward supporting her agenda.⁵² Through a close reading of a series of correspondences between Marie Stopes and the EES it is evident that Stopes sought for the society’s approval, yet was

⁴⁹ Anonymous, “Letters to the editor. Constructive Birth Control and Response,” *The British Journal of Nursing*, October 1st 1921, 67, p. 217.

⁵⁰ Cohen “Private Lives,” p. 100.

⁵¹ Manifesto of the Society for Constructive Birth Control, BL Add Mss 58596, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁵² Letter from Stopes to Secretary of the Eugenics Society, Nov 25th 1926, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers 1863-2008, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

continually rejected. A letter from May 1920 between Stopes and the Society illustrates Stopes' seemingly desperate desire to gain the Society's approval. In the letter, sent along with a proposition on birth control, she asked "would it be possible for the Society to have it [the proposition] typed and circulated among your members. It is essentially a eugenic proposition to protect the middle class against this iniquitous interference with their likelihood of having means to support children."⁵³ By presenting her birth control manifesto in eugenic language Stopes hoped to gain the support of the Society in order to launch her clinic and gain popular acceptance. She continued to seek approval for the Clinic, and in 1926 Stopes once again requested that the secretary of the EES give her new work "Sex and the Young" a "really good review" and further inquired if she would be able to preview the review before its publication.⁵⁴

Though her correspondences with the Society were consistently written with reverence for its leadership and with respect for its mission, the Society did not always reciprocate accordingly. In response to Stopes' request to deliver a lecture to the EES on the goals of the SCBC a year following its establishment, the EES claimed that "birth control is not one of the primary objects of our Society, and we do not wish that it should appear to be so."⁵⁵ Perhaps it was fear of the term *birth control* or the threat of a driven and vocal woman that turned them away from Stopes' offer because only two months prior to this correspondence the EES held a

⁵³ Letter from Stopes to Secretary of EES, May 4th 1920, Letter from Stopes to Secretary of the EES, Nov 25th 1926, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers 1863-2008, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

⁵⁴ Letter from Stopes to Secretary of Eugenics Society, March 30th 1926, Letter from Stopes to Secretary of the Eugenics Society, Nov 25th 1926, WC SA/EUG/ K.1, Eugenics Society Papers 1863-2008, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

⁵⁵ Letter from Roe to Secretary of the EES, May 3rd 1922, BL Add Mss 58644, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

lecture titled “The Reduction of the Birth Rate as a Necessary Instrument for the Improvement of the Race,” which followed an agenda that aligned with Stopes’ SCBC.⁵⁶

Major Leonard Darwin, the president of the Eugenics Society, saw Stopes’ goals a direct affront to the objectives of the society. Despite the fact that by 1926 the Eugenics Society welcomed an informal discussion of birth control and contraceptive techniques, Darwin remained skeptical of Stopes and her agenda. He wrote, “I know many on our council dislike greatly in any way being associated with her Society [The SCBC].” He enumerates the Council’s dislike based in several reasons, including the fact that the council members “won’t touch birth control,” others he said “dislike and distrust Dr. Stopes- as do I.” Some do not approve of her, according to Darwin, because “she is always rude to our Society at our meetings.” Furthermore he posits that Stopes remains part of the Eugenics Society because “she wants to prove that her society is not out in the cold,” but he refuses to “get dragged in.”⁵⁷

Darwin’s blunt criticism of Stopes is emblematic of the unstable relationship that existed between the SCBC, led by Stopes and Roe, and the Eugenics Society. Regardless of Stopes’ presence at the Society’s meetings or the distinct eugenic nature of her writings, the Society was suspicious of what took place behind the closed doors of the Mothers’ Clinic. Considering the Clinic’s entirely female staff as well as its “babies in the right place” approach to birth and population control, the Eugenics Society was skeptical of how closely their agendas lined up. Although the positive eugenics aspect of *constructive birth control* initially attracted eugenicists to her cause, Stopes’ feminist-eugenic policies eventually became antithetical to the most basic goals of the Eugenics Society.

⁵⁶ Society for Constructive Birth Control lecture announcement, March 14th 1922 BL Add Mss 58644, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁵⁷ Letter from Major Leonard Darwin to Secretary of the Eugenics Society, June 24 1927, WC SA/EUG/K.1, Eugenics Society Papers 1863-2008, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

Chapter 3: Midwives as Eugenists

“Midwives as Eugenists” read the headline across the cover of the *British Journal of Nursing Supplement* in October of 1913. After the passing of the Midwives Act of 1902 and the formal codification of a midwife profession, midwives were recruited to execute Britain’s nationalist eugenicist mission of the early twentieth-century. The article, published in the most esteemed nursing publication of the period, entrusted midwives with the responsibility of teaching British women accountability for their childbearing practices. The British nation, the anonymous author wrote, was in crisis and it was the duty of maternity nurses and midwives to educate mothers on the “progress of the race and the welfare of the individual.” Maternity nurses and midwives had to commit themselves to ensuring mothers saw the “beauty of parenthood” and their significant material contribution to the vigor of the nation.¹ Nurses and midwives became dependable sources of advice as women facing the hardships of repeated pregnancies and exhaustive family lives referred to them on matters of contraception and birth control.²

The daily administration of the Mothers’ Clinic was mainly handled by midwives and nurses who often compromised on the Clinic’s supposed eugenic agenda. In fact, Stopes had to fight to stay true to her eugenic tenets and yet simultaneously vest women with agency and fulfillment. Famous for her eugenic writings, Stopes was an ardent follower of the movement and campaigned for the betterment of the white race. Concurrently, she realized the potential independence birth control provided women and constantly advocated for female autonomy of her body. Throughout her time at the Clinic, Stopes was forced to compromise on her eugenic principles as she faced questions surrounding the administration of birth control to upper-class

¹ Anonymous, “Midwives as Eugenists,” *British Journal of Nursing Supplement*, 51, (October 11, 1913), p. 302.

² Letter to Nurse at Mothers’ Clinic, Feb 25th 1923, BL Add Mss 58596, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

healthy married women as well as those regarding working-class women's eligibility for fertility counselling. In doing so, she developed her own brand of feminist-eugenics, one that prioritized the agency and well-being of women over the greater improvement of the race.

Midwives and nurses alike represented the morality associated with motherhood and with femininity. By establishing a structured system for the registry of midwives and nurses, both groups witnessed the professionalization of altruism and kindness which featured structured exams and requirements that would allow one to enter the field of most intimate caring. Marie Stopes found the members of these newly established professions as the perfect employees for her clinic and, with them, created a warm and feminine environment that catered to the fulfillment and self-control of British women of all social classes.

By charging nurses and midwives with the running of the Clinic, Stopes sought to distance herself from the medical profession with which she had developed a contentious relationship. Stopes' experience birthing a stillborn baby at age thirty-eight is the first indication of her skepticism towards the medical profession. Throughout her pregnancy, Stopes' gynecologist expressed anxiety over Marie's heavy workload and refusal to stop working, as well as her insistence on undergoing "Twilight Sleep" for birth. A new and extremely fashionable analgesic for child-birth, "Twilight Sleep" involved the injection of a mixture of morphine and scopolamine. The room was then darkened, the woman's eyes bandaged, and her ears plugged to ensure complete tranquility.³ It was perceived by some members of the medical profession as quackery and had suffered from being written up by journalists possessing no knowledge of midwifery.⁴

³ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 152.

⁴ R.W Johnstone, *A Textbook of Midwifery for Students and Practitioners*. 5th edition. (A&C Black LTD, London, 1926).

A diary kept by Humphrey Verdon Roe throughout his wife's labor is quoted in both Hall's and Rose's biographies and details the dark moment the physician lost the fetal heartbeat.⁵ Both biographers claim that Stopes blamed the doctors for the death of her son. She requested to be delivered first kneeling, then on her back, but the doctors would not listen to her. "Every time I endeavored to get into such a position I was hauled round, my hands and wrists and finally my legs were held, till I felt like a trapped and frenzied creature wantonly tortured."⁶ Grief-stricken and appalled from the doctor's inability to communicate effectively, Stopes became increasingly cynical about the expertise of the physician. On the back of a photograph taken of the dead child was the inscription: "Henry Verdon, 12.15 a.m. 17 July, 1919, died just before birth, photograph taken 12 noon same day...would have been born alive but for the interference of the doctor."⁷ Marie would always remain convinced that the doctors had murdered her child.

Stopes' animosity towards the medical profession further comes to light in her correspondences with the Eugenics Society.⁸ As a doctor of paleobotany, she regularly felt marginalized by the medical community of the Society which excluded her from any discussion surrounding medical subjects. Upon receiving a request from the Eugenics Society to send along her ideas on birth control, Stopes responded that if the Society "wished to confine the medical discussion to medical practitioners only, I do not propose to send my ideas for them to discuss and distort without my being present, for though there are charming and honest medical men in

⁵ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p.153. Rose, *Marie Stopes*, p. 127.

⁶ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 153. Reference to Stopes' letter to Humphrey Verdon Roe on her account of the birth found in the Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁷ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, p. 154.

⁸ The Eugenics Society is the same organization as the Eugenics Education Society, the society changed its name in 1926. The organization was renamed the Galton Institute in 1989. It still operates today and aims to research all aspects of human heredity while rejecting its eugenic past. "The Galton Institute," "About," accessed April 17, 2018 www.Galtoninstitute.org.uk/about/.

the profession, there are too many of the other sort for me to trust to their intelligence or integrity in a discussion of my views.”⁹

The relationship between Stopes and medical profession was reciprocal; the medical men of the Society equally mistrusted Stopes and her desire to situate herself in the Eugenics Society. Responding to her attack, the physicians of the Society wrote that they are “unanimous on the question of inviting anyone who is not in the great hierarchy” and that an invitation for a discussion of birth control would not be extended to Stopes.¹⁰ Stopes’ unique breed of eugenics that focused on female fulfillment, paired with her disdain for the medical profession, made midwives a natural fit to conduct the mission of the Mothers’ Clinic. They were the embodiment and the manifestation of feminist eugenics.

The use of midwives as part of a woman-to-woman service has been described by Deborah Cohen as the “cornerstone of Stopes’ philosophy.”¹¹ To create the Clinic’s welcoming environment Stopes considered everything from the color of the walls to the physical appearance of the staff.¹² As for the character of her clinical staff, the ideal espoused by Stopes was to employ Central Midwives Board (CMB) certified midwives who were married with children and could relate to patients on a personal level. Stopes described the duty of the midwife-nurse she employed as to “listen to those sad tales of individual misery and to give help of the right sort.”¹³ The Mothers’ Clinic midwives were “married women, [who] understand

⁹ Letter from the Eugenics Society to Stopes, March 1st 1926, BL Add Mss 58596, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

¹⁰ Letter from the Eugenics Society to Stopes, March 27th 1926, BL Add Mss 58596, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

¹¹ Cohen, “Private Lives,” p. 99.

¹² Letter from Nurse Roberts to Stopes discussing the fact that applicant Nurse Scannell appears too young and may make it difficult for patients to relate to her, July 8th 1925. WC PP/MCS/C.4, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

¹³ Birth Control News, September 1922, WC PP/MCS/ C.50. Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

problems and are ready quietly to spend all the time necessary to help and instruct inquirers.”¹⁴

Stopes’ midwives were more than clinicians, they were counselors charged with promoting a pro-race agenda and simultaneously promoting female autonomy.

The midwives expressed their empathy towards patients by drawing on their own experiences with motherhood and marriage. As Stopes expanded her presence beyond London, her deliberate hiring of midwives and nurses who related to patients became increasingly evident. Nurse Rae of the Aberdeen clinic and a mother of four, wrote to Stopes: “I’m out for cases, and not only cases but to tell everyone the good of your Birth Control- I had a hard life- and I myself wish I had known of it.”¹⁵ The nurses and midwives at the Clinics were able to both commiserate and celebrate motherhood with their patients because of their familiarity with the matter. Medical men educated in the field of female health could have provided patients with advice nearly identical to suggestions given by Stopes’ midwives, however, the heightened sense of vulnerability felt by working-class women visiting the Clinic required those helping them to approach their treatment with warmth and sensitivity. “Furthermore,” Stopes pointed out, “the majority of normal healthy women do not need any medical assistance if you have a fully qualified midwife who has been specially trained in contraceptive details.”¹⁶ The midwives at the Mothers’ Clinics even claimed that many women neglected to seek contraceptive advice because they were afraid they might be examined by a man. One midwife wrote, “cases needing surgical attention still continue to come in and one patient said, “you don’t know what a relief it is to be asked to sit down and given plenty of time to tell what is wrong”” this woman continuously put

¹⁴ Marie Stopes, *Birth Control Today*, (London, 1934), p. 179.

¹⁵ Letter from Nurse Rae to Stopes, April 4th, 1935, BL Add Mss 58602, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

¹⁶ Letter from Stopes to Victor Roberts, December 12th, 1924, WC PP/MCS/C.15, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

off seeking medical attention because she was afraid to “tell a man.”¹⁷ By creating a clinical setting staffed by female employees, Stopes sought to create a welcoming environment for female patients who would otherwise be hesitant to visit a male physician.

Stopes obtained midwives through a job advertisement in the *Nursing Mirror*. The traits she was looking for in her employees was somewhat vague but Stopes did detail that her midwives should possess a CMB certificate.¹⁸ She also emphasized midwives’ personalities, claiming that they had to be sympathetic, kind, and persistent, not just to win their patients’ trust, but even to get correct findings. Throughout the history of the Clinic, Stopes advertised in the *Nursing Mirror* and received an abundance of responses from Nurses located throughout the United Kingdom.¹⁹

Nurse Maud Florence Hebbes was the first midwife employed by Stopes in 1921. According to the header featured on most official clinic documents, Nurse Hebbes was the “midwife in charge” between 1921 and 1925.²⁰ Hebbes claimed to be “extremely interested in the Birth Control question” in her application to Stopes, in which she also listed her work experience including four years as a general district maternity midwife, work as a private nurse for a female physician during “the suffrage agitation” before the war, and participating in suffragist infant welfare work in the East End of London during the war. In her application

¹⁷ Letter from Nurse Gordon to Stopes, June 17th 1938, BL Add MS 58625 and Letter from Nurse Rae to Stopes May 17th 1940, BL Add Mss 58613, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

¹⁸ Memorandum on SCBC training certificates, date unknown, WC PP/MCS/C.54, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

¹⁹ While doing archival research at BL and WC I came across many applications and responses to the *Nursing Mirror* advertisement from women across the Kingdom. Stopes extended her venture beyond London and opened clinics in Leeds in 1934, Aberdeen in 1934, Belfast in 1936, Cardiff in 1937, and Swansea in 1943.

²⁰ Memorandum from Mothers’ Clinic, May 20th 1922, BL Add Mss 58596, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

Hebbes professed her admiration for Stopes' feminist-eugenic books *Married Love* and *Wise Parenthood* and admitted that she wishes welfare clinics educated mothers more on the merits of birth control.²¹ Stopes was further impressed by Hebbes after reading a referral authored by A.V. Johnson, her officer at the East End welfare clinics. He certified that "she [Hebbes] was good at medical work and was devoted to the children and their mothers, never sparing herself in endeavoring to ameliorate their condition."²² Nurse Hebbes was the ideal employee for the Clinic and represented the feminist yet effeminate culture Stope strove to instill in the Mothers Clinic.²³

Although Stopes had the utmost confidence in Nurse Hebbes' CMB certification, Stopes nevertheless required the midwife in charge to meet with the "lady doctor" at the Clinic, Dr. Jane Hawthorne.²⁴ Dr. Hawthorne, along with a handful of other exclusively female doctors, comprised the Clinic's group of physicians who despite seldom visiting with patients, were part of the Clinic solely for the ceremonial purpose of attracting upper class women. Stopes elaborated on the role of the lady doctor, writing that if one feels uncomfortable and does not like to "take freely of the time of the staff that is intended for the poor" but knows the benefits of visiting the Mothers' Clinic, there is a physician "in a room of her own... [and] women who can pay a reasonable fee should make an appointment with the Lady Doctor."²⁵

²¹ Nurse Hebbes application to Mothers' Clinic, Feb 15th 1921, BL Add Mss 58596, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

²² A.V. Johnson recommendation letter for Hebbes, July 1920, found in both WC PP/MCS/C.4, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust and BL Add Mss 58596, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

²³ It is important to note that Hebbes was not married and therefore did not completely fulfill Stopes' requirements, but she was hired nevertheless due to her outstanding character.

²⁴ Correspondence between Stopes and Hebbes, February 19th 1921, WC PP/MCS/C.4, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

²⁵ Mothers' Clinic notice, date unknown, WC PP/MCS/C.4, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

Both Nurse Hebbes' desire to work at Mothers' Clinic and her admiration for Stopes' literature prove that she believed in the often contradictory mode of eugenics endorsed by the Clinic. An early member of the Society for Constructive Birth Control (SCBC), Hebbes was complicit in promoting the spread of Stopes' eugenic beliefs and yet concurrently catered to all women's desires regardless of social strata.²⁶ She was active in carrying out Stopes' feminist eugenic agenda within the Clinic but simultaneously worked to convey the Clinic's supposed orthodox agenda to the public.

Stopes, upon hearing that her mother's old friend was visiting the Clinic, turned to Hebbes to provide the "fussy old scotch lady" with a tour of the Clinic. Stopes was surprised the woman approved of the SCBC's work and therefore told Hebbes to "stress the line with her that it is really only the poor downtrodden mothers who come and 99 per cent of the people have already had children."²⁷ This fact, as previously demonstrated, is completely false. The Mothers' Clinic accepted women belonging to all social classes, and the SCBC even began to train traveling nurses who would provide care to women belonging to the upper-class who fancied treatment in the luxury of their own home.²⁸ Stopes' entrusted Nurse Hebbes with concealing the unorthodox feminist program of the Clinic in order to appease the likings of a woman who presumably aligned with Britain's mainstream eugenic mode of thought.

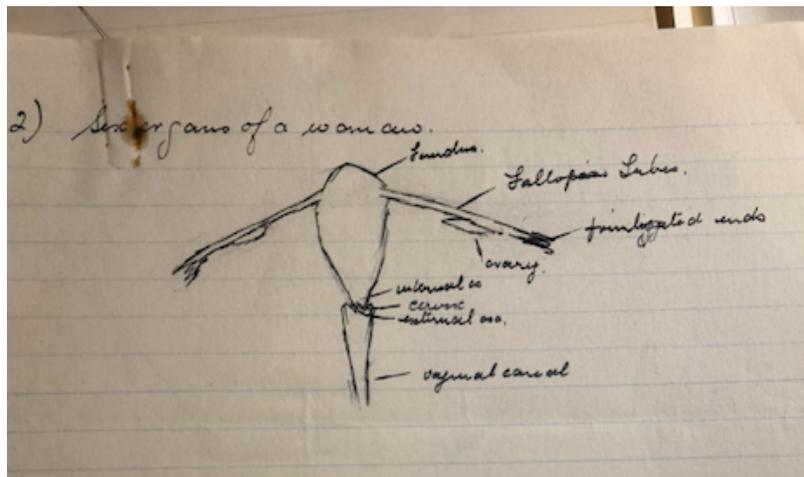
Beginning in 1922, under the authority of Stopes and Hebbes, the SCBC began to train midwife-nurses who would "visit ladies in their own homes" and make "the necessary

²⁶ Letter from Hebbes to Stopes, February 25th 1923, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

²⁷ Letter from Stopes to Hebbes, January 11th 1922, BL Add Mss 58596, Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

²⁸ Detailed explanation of travelling nurse position, date unknown, WC PP/MCS/C.4, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

examination and give advice on suitable contraceptives where the case proves to be normal.”²⁹ In order to gain SCBC certification, aspiring birth control nurses and midwives were required to take a two hour examination which tested them on female anatomy, knowledge of contraception, fluency in contraceptive technology, as well as ability to respond to those who challenged the moral basis of birth control.³⁰ Most curious are the theoretical objections to birth control which include: religious objections, “that it is immoral,” that it leads to sterility, and that “Dr. Stopes’ methods are no good.”³¹



Nurse Latter Drawing of Uterus, 1925

In their essays for the morality section of the SCBC exam, many nurses enthusiastically defended Stopes’ ideals and methods. Nurse Jones praised the use of the Prorace Cap in the Clinic while Nurse Latter claimed that anyone who stated Stopes’ work was ‘no good,’ “probably had neither read any of the books and the rest was hearsay, nor had they ever tried her methods.”³² By examining prospective SCBC nurses and midwives on their ability to rebut

²⁹ Memorandum from SCBC, date unknown, WC PP/MCS/C.4, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

³⁰ Nurse Latter Drawing of Uterus, 1925, WC PP/MCS/C.4, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

³¹ CBC Examination in Theory and Practice of Contraception, 1925, WC PP/MCS/C.4, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

³² Nurse Latter and Nurse Jones SCBC exam essays, 1925, WC PP/MCS/C.4, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

objections made by critics of birth control, Stopes was able to assess her staff's allegiance to her cause despite the disapproval of those around her.

The Mothers' Clinic staff supported Marie Stopes' feminist-eugenics and fought tirelessly to ensure security and agency for the women they served. Not only did they pledge themselves to her mission on paper, but also in their actions. Evidence from the Mothers' Clinics indicates that the nurse and midwives staffed at the clinics were often complicit in enabling babies to be born into the 'wrong' places. One of the first fertility patients at the Clinic was a tailoress from the East End of London who worked in the garment industry for twenty-five shillings a week.³³ According to members of the Eugenics Society, a considerable amount of the 'positive eugenics' cases advised at the Clinic were in fact dysgenic. At the Cardiff Clinic, the white wife of a black man received 'pro-baby' counselling from the midwives and nurses on staff.³⁴ It was reported to Stopes that with the help of the midwifery staff at the Swansea Clinic, an obese patient with a harelip and cleft palate became pregnant.³⁵ These cases reflect the Mothers' Clinic's violations of the "babies in the right places" principle championed by Stopes in *Wise Parenthood*. She clearly yearned for the fulfillment of her female patients, but as seen here, this came with the sacrifice of her pro-race stance. Marie Stopes was certainly a committed eugenicist but her consistency was questionable.

³³ Cohen, "Private Lives," p. 102.

³⁴ Letter from Gordon to Stopes, February 8th 1938, BL Add MS 58625 Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

³⁵ Letter from Gordon to Stopes, May 25th 1945, BL Add Mss 58633 Marie Stopes Papers 1880-1959, British Library Archives and Manuscripts.

Conclusion

Today, a web search of “Marie Stopes” leads you to the homepage of MarieStopesInternational.org. According to their website, Marie Stopes International “helps women to have children by choice, not chance,” they do this by “providing contraception and safe abortions to women in urban and rural communities all over the world.”³⁶ The image on the website’s header features three black women of varying ages, likely to be patients from one of the 16 African nations Marie Stopes International services. The organization has a presence in a total of 37 countries worldwide, where they run 52,000 outreach locations.³⁷

The Mothers’ Clinics were bequeathed to the Eugenics Society upon Stopes’ death in 1958, and shortly thereafter the organization went bankrupt and was reestablished as a non-profit by the name Marie Stopes International.³⁸ Marie Stopes International maintains its name because of Stopes’ “willingness to push boundaries” as she was “attacked by the medical establishment for being female, not medically qualified, and for employing nurses rather than doctors to consult with most of her clients.”³⁹ While this claim is valid and worthy of lauding, the website neglects to offer any mention of Stopes’ lifelong affiliation with the eugenics movement or the racist approach with which she approached the administration of contraceptives.

By disregarding her eugenic beliefs and idealizing Stopes’ birth control pioneering work, the organization recognizes itself as the bearer of Stopes’ feminist legacy. But their mission directly contradicts the one Stopes impressed in her clinics. In a period plagued by degeneration

³⁶ “Marie Stopes International,” “About Us,” accessed April 14, 2018, <https://www.mariestopes.org/about-us/>.

³⁷ “Marie Stopes International,” “Where We Work,” accessed April 14, 2018, <https://www.mariestopes.org/where-we-work/>.

³⁸ Minutes from the Eugenics Society’s reading of Marie Stopes’ will, WC SA/EUG/ K.46, Eugenics Society Papers 1863-2008, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

³⁹ “Marie Stopes International,” “Our History,” accessed April 14, 2018, <https://www.mariestopes.org/about-us/2018>.

theory and British exceptionalism, how would Stopes have reconciled supporting an institution whose poster women belong to what she might have called “savage races?” How would she have reacted to abortions, a procedure she found to be most egregious, being performed in her name?⁴⁰ Stopes’ legacy perplexes those who attempt to remember her and leaves us unsure how to accurately regard Stopes as a figure.⁴¹ As demonstrated in my thesis, Dr. Marie Stopes was a complicated figure, whose passion for both vesting women with agency over their bodies and the racial progress of Britain often came in conflict with one another and impeded her success. Through the employment of loyal midwives who pledged themselves to her mission, Stopes continuously attempted to merge the two strands of her identity but time and time again failed to successfully implement both feminism and eugenics simultaneously.

⁴⁰ Letter from Stopes to Hebbes, February 27th, 1921, WC PP/MCS/ C.4, Clinics and Society for Constructive Birth Control 1921-1960, Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Trust.

⁴¹ John Bingham, “Royal Mail Criticised for Stamp Honouring ‘Racist’ Marie Stopes,” *The Telegraph*, October 14 2008, accessed April 14, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/3194345/Royal-Mail-criticised-for-stamp-honouring-racist-Marie-Stopes.html>. In 2008 a controversy erupted surrounding the Royal Mail’s release of a stamp honoring Marie Stopes as part of a commemorative series celebrating women of achievement. Many felt she reflected feminism and the liberation of women, while others deemed this as an act of promoting racist ideals.

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