

Resettling Europe: Paul Robin, His Tribe, and Inter-Imperial Constructions of Whiteness in the 1890s and early 1900s

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“There was a large attendance of members at the annual meeting of the Société Française last night,” reported the *Press* of Canterbury, New Zealand, in February 1899. “Professor Paul Robin gave a very interesting lecture on education, which was highly appreciated by those present.”¹ Robin’s success with local journalists – who lauded him as “a veteran progressivist”² – stood in contrast to the ire he had provoked in the French press in the years preceding his departure from Paris in the summer of 1898. As Director of the Prévost orphanage in Cempuis from 1880, Robin had endured vociferous attacks from journalists of the moralistic new right, who objected to his theory of “integral education” and its practical application in a state institution. “Integral education,” Robin explained, aimed to unite “the three arbitrarily divided branches of physical, intellectual and moral instruction” with a view to developing a student’s “personal initiative”.³ Encouraging familial sentiment amongst his charges, and promoting coeducation, Robin attracted numerous critics. The scandal generated by the French press ultimately cost him his post at the orphanage, from which he was dismissed by the Minister of Education in 1894.⁴

While a number of scholars have studied Robin’s pedagogical approach and his relationship to the anarchist movement, few have examined his trip to New Zealand.⁵ For Nathalie Brémand, Robin’s departure is best understood as a reaction to his public disgrace: “a search for a quiet life”.⁶ Concerned to reinstate Robin’s reputation and underline his intellectual contribution, scholars have instead focused on how his activities anticipated both the transformation of anarchist praxis in the early twentieth century, and the sweeping reform of national education in later decades.⁷

For Angus McLaren, Robin’s trip to New Zealand not only served as an escape, but as an opportunity to gather information about contraception within the framework of neo-

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¹ “Meetings, Entertainments, etc.,” *Press*, Feb. 18, 1899.

² *Star*, “A Veteran Progressivist”, Jan. 18, 1899; *Lyttelton Times*, “A Veteran Progressivist”, Jan. 18, 1899.

³ “Notre publication”, *Education intégrale*, Feb. 1, 1895.

⁴ Demeulenaere-Douyère, “Un précurseur de la mixité”, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 125–32; Demeulenaere-Douyère, *Paul Robin*; Brémand, *Cempuis*; McLaren, “Revolution and Education”, 165–88, 317–35.

⁶ Brémand, *Cempuis*, 115.

⁷ Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London*, 191–92; Brémand, *Cempuis*, 120; Demeulenaere-Douyère, “Un précurseur de la mixité”.

Malthusian population planning. Robin's interest in such questions had developed during the 1870s in London, where he found himself in exile following his arrest for involvement with the International Working Men's Association. After quarrelling with both Bakunin and Marx, Robin turned his attention to neo-Malthusianism, and established contact with Charles Drysdale, President of the Malthusian League.⁸ Although Robin gave less attention to these questions during his directorship of the Cempuis orphanage, he maintained correspondence with Drysdale; it was this latter, the Parisian police surmised, that provided both funds and contacts for his trip to New Zealand.⁹ There he spent several months at the Wainoni residence of Alexander William Bickerton, Professor of Chemistry at Canterbury College and outspoken defender of marriage reform and birth control.¹⁰

This article argues that Robin's interaction with Bickerton did more than simply provide him with "additional information on contraception".¹¹ Spending time at Wainoni, on the outskirts of Christchurch, where Bickerton had established the colony's first intentional community,¹² allowed Robin to fuse elements of his thinking on integral education and population control, and more explicitly conceptualize his educational project as a form of racial improvement. McLaren notes that, prior even to his visit to New Zealand, Robin's "pedagogical views harmonized with his ideas on population," but only "insomuch as both were founded on the central belief in the rights of individual men *and women* to self-control."¹³ If this belief was affirmed by Robin's interaction with Bickerton, his understanding of race was significantly developed by exposure to the racial dynamics of the settler colony. Henceforth, the family he sought to radically reform was not the family of man, but the white man's family.

The family, as Damon Ieremia Salesa and Angela Wanhalla note, furnished a privileged setting for the expansion of settler colonial control in New Zealand.¹⁴ The intervention of the state in the intimate relationships of indigenous peoples and European settlers was central to the policy of "racial amalgamation" as conceptualized in the early decades of formal colonization, and aggressively pursued in the aftermath of the wars of the 1860s.¹⁵ This approach to race relations followed the eliminatory logic of settler colonialism, as theorized by Patrick Wolfe.¹⁶ For indigenous peoples in New Zealand, Salesa explains, "the terminus of amalgamation ... was a kind of tender obliteration, by means of racial crossing and civilization".¹⁷

By the time of Robin's voyage, intimate and social relations between European settlers and Māori were increasingly uncommon, with interracial marriage reconfigured as an assimilative project and disparaged by the settler public, especially in urban areas like Christchurch.¹⁸ While the principles and structures of the indigenous family endured, they did so in spite of the state, and at an increased distance from settler families.¹⁹ It is therefore unlikely that Robin had any exposure to or understanding of indigenous *whanaungtanga* – defined by Salesa as "family relationships, kinship, sense of family connection and responsibility"²⁰ – when, upon returning to Europe in 1899, he founded what he described as a "tribe" in Ghent,

⁸ McLaren, "Reproduction and Revolution", 166–67.

⁹ Archives de la préfecture de police (hereafter APP), BA1244, report by Legrand, Paris, May 12, 1898.

¹⁰ See the debates provoked by some of Bickerton's ideas in "The Morality of Marriage", *Lyttelton Times*, Mar. 6, 1899; "The Immorality of Marriage", *Lyttelton Times*, Mar. 10, 1899.

¹¹ McLaren, "Reproduction and Revolution", 167.

¹² Sargisson and Sargent, *Living in Utopia*, 21.

¹³ McLaren, "Reproduction and Revolution", 167.

¹⁴ Salesa, *Racial Crossings*; Wanhalla, *Matters of the Heart*.

¹⁵ Salesa, *Racial Crossings*, 170–75.

¹⁶ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 2.

¹⁷ Salesa, *Racial Crossings*, 95.

¹⁸ Wanhalla, *Matters of the Heart*, 73–76.

¹⁹ Salesa, *Racial Crossings*, 228–29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

Belgium. Here, he declared, members would undo the restrictive ties of the bourgeois family, and reset European civilization onto the path from which it had deviated as a result of capitalist industrialization.²¹

His appropriation of the tribal epithet to describe the social dynamics of this community revealed the particular eliminatory logic of settler colonialism in New Zealand, which, as Salesa explains, sought to efface indigenous peoples while leaving traces of racial difference, “enabling at the same time both the continued sorting by race and its disavowal”.²² In transposing this act of discursive violence from the colonial frontier to industrial Europe, moreover, Robin unlocked what Hamish Dalley refers to as “the frozen temporality of the settler-colonial narrative”,²³ bringing settler-colonial subjectivity out of a perpetual present, and reaffirming a possibility of white European regeneration untroubled by the destabilizing claims of dispossessed native populations. In so doing, he proposed a way to reinforce European imperialism through resettling Europe.

Investigating the spatial and temporal dimensions of Robin’s experiment contributes to the history of European empires in several ways. Scholars have viewed settler-colonial narratives as linear: for settlers, states Veracini, “no return is envisaged”.²⁴ Although Robin may have left France with the intention to settle in New Zealand, he ultimately returned to Europe, bringing with him elements of settler-colonial experience, and settler-colonial subjectivity. By examining this process of return, the current article indicates some of the bridges between colonial and settler-colonial subjectivities, in the conceptualization of racial difference. While it does not contest the distinct nature of settler colonialism as a form of domination, the observation of these connections puts pressure on dominant cultural memory and political discourse in France and Britain which seeks to displace blame for colonial violence onto settlers alone.²⁵ Such discourses overlook the observations of historians who underline the ways in which “webs of empire” supported systemic cultural and physical violence on an empire-wide scale.²⁶

The spatial dimensions of Robin’s experiment also highlight the importance of connections between empires. Webs of empire, as Tony Ballantyne explains, “reached out into other states, nations and imperial systems, collapsing geographical and cultural space”.²⁷ Inspired by the possibilities that conquest and settlement presented for making the world anew, Robin’s “tribe” was not unlike other utopian projects launched by European travelers in the nineteenth century.²⁸ Unlike those travelers and settlers drawn to the lands conquered by their compatriots, however, Robin was drawn to New Zealand, a settler colony of the British Empire. For anarchists like Robin, of course, such national frames of reference were of little significance. Yet the perception of New Zealand as not simply a British colony, but as a “white man’s country”, was widely shared by French observers at the time of Robin’s voyage.²⁹

²¹ APP, BA1244, *La Tribu*, Mar. 1900.

²² Salesa, *Racial Crossings*, 242.

²³ Dalley, “The Deaths of Settler Colonialism”, 31.

²⁴ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 97.

²⁵ For a discussion of such discourse, see Howe, “Colonising And Exterminating?”. For a detailed study of French political and public attitudes towards settlers in Algeria, see Choi, *Decolonization and the French of Algeria*.

²⁶ Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race*, 13–17. See also Lester and Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance*. Although work on intra- and inter-imperial connections is less developed in the historiography of the French empire, the connection between imperial center and settler colony in the maintenance of colonial violence is established. See Sessions, *By Sword and Plow*; Gallois, *The Administration of Sickness*.

²⁷ Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race*, 14.

²⁸ Andrekos Varnava presents a number of such projects. See Varnava, *Imperial Expectations and Realities*.

²⁹ Paul Deschanel listed New Zealand under the territories “conquered and civilized” by “the white race” in his study of French interests in Oceania in the early 1880s. See Deschanel, *La politique française en Océanie*, 1. The English term “white man’s country” was explicitly used by the sociologist André Siegfried. See Siegfried, *La démocratie en Nouvelle-Zélande*, 8.

“Whiteness”, as Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds observe, “provided a mode of subjective identification that crossed national borders and shaped global politics”, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Transnational in scope, Lake and Reynolds’ frame of analysis is nevertheless circumscribed: “white men’s countries”, they continue, “sought legitimacy through locating themselves in the long tradition of Anglo-Saxon race history... They shared an English-speaking culture and newly ascendant democratic politics, priding themselves, as Anglo-Saxons, on a distinctive capacity, indeed a genius, for self-government.”³⁰ While this article does not question the coherence of internal processes of identification within the space historians have sometimes defined as the “Anglo-World”,³¹ the study of Robin’s voyage to New Zealand illustrates ways in which discourses of whiteness were also constructed across empires, through instances of Europeans’ engagement in each other’s imperial domain.

French Views of New Zealand in the 1890s

Robin’s decision to travel to New Zealand in 1898 was not only precipitated by his experience of press scandal or his integration into a neo-Malthusian network, but reflected a growing interest in Australasia in general, and New Zealand in particular, amongst French journalists, politicians and social scientists at the end of the nineteenth century. Known to the French police since his arrest in 1870, Robin remained under surveillance at the turn of the century. Described by police as “an eccentric”, his vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol and decision to live in separate lodgings from his wife and children appear to have raised almost as many suspicions as his political activities.³² Police agents tracked his movements around France, followed his correspondence with neo-Malthusian organizations across Europe and the United States, and listened in on his speeches in anarchist and socialist meetings around Paris. In March 1898 an agent reported that Robin had expressed his desire “to leave this country that’s as rotten as a fig ... and go to New Zealand to be free”.³³ After months of inaction on the part of Robin, however, the police dismissed the project as a “dream”.³⁴

New Zealand was, after all, frequently associated with dreams in the French cultural production of the era. Such representations, as Helène Blais points out, found their origins in the decades of European exploration of the Pacific, and drew on the wider cultural imaginary of islands as spaces of unlimited possibility.³⁵ In the mass press of the 1890s, New Zealand featured consistently, albeit relatively infrequently, as a fantastical land of shipwrecks, goldmines, and semi-clad cannibalistic tribes.³⁶ For more politically-engaged journalists, however, including the feminists of *La Fronde*, New Zealand provided a very real model for social and political reform.³⁷ Outside of the press, moreover, amongst politicians and social scientists, New Zealand was attracting attention as a model settler colony and a laboratory of social change. On the other side of the world, it seemed, New Zealand was holding up a mirror to France, revealing the flaws in French democracy and the shortcomings of the French colonial project.

French perceptions of the success of settler colonialism in New Zealand drew on implicit and explicit comparisons with Algeria, where, in the 1890s, French authority was seen to be

³⁰ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 1, 6.

³¹ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*.

³² APP BA1244, note, Paris, Sept. 23, 1907.

³³ APP, BA1244, extract from report, Paris, Mar. 15, 1898.

³⁴ APP, BA1244, note, Paris, June 30, 1898.

³⁵ Blais, *Voyages au Grand Océan*, 234. On islands and the imaginary, see Barbu, Meylan and Volokhine, *Mondes Clos: Les Iles*.

³⁶ See, for example, “Nos Echos”, *Le Journal*, Oct. 27, 1894; Raphael Viau, *La Libre parole*, May 12, 1898.

³⁷ “Ligue française pour le droit des femmes”, *La Fronde*, Jan. 13, 1898.

under threat from a large and newly-enfranchised population of foreign European origin, and a generation of French-educated Muslim elites.³⁸ Preoccupied since 1830 with fighting “Muslim fanaticism” in the inhospitable Algerian desert, bemoaned Emile Chautemps, *député* and future Minister of Colonies, the French had let themselves be overtaken on the world stage by the British, who had wisely established colonies in temperate lands, like New Zealand, where their survival and domination were assured.³⁹ British success, the celebrated geographer André Siegfried claimed, had been aided by the innate weakness of the Māori, who – despite their apparent martial spirit – had been destined to decline in New Zealand, where the climate was ill-suited to an originally “tropical race”. Unlike the French in Algeria, the British, therefore, were seen to have benefited from the inevitability of the effacement of the Māori. “By a process of natural evolution and without the least effort”, explained Siegfried, New Zealand had been transformed from a “*no man’s land*” to a “*white man’s country*”.⁴⁰

Siegfried’s reliance on anglicisms to describe this transformation not only indicated his engagement with the racial thinking of the ‘Anglo-World’, but his impression of the cultural homogeneity of New Zealand settler society. This society was, in Siegfried’s estimation, largely free of foreign European influence, leading to a strong identification between settlers and the British, and minimizing conflict between local and central authorities. The link between cultural and political identification was likewise noted by Albert Métin, envoy of the French Ministry of Commerce in 1898-1900: in reproducing the cultural codes and practices of the British middle classes – reading extensively in English, playing cricket and football and sports of all kinds – settlers across Australasia signaled their enthusiasm for ‘*Greater Britain*’.⁴¹ To protect this settler-colonial utopia, noted Siegfried, New Zealand settlers had acted decisively to regulate land distribution and restrict immigration, particularly from Asia.⁴² The perception of settler cultural homogeneity as a guarantee of political stability contrasted markedly with dominant political perspectives on Algeria, where, since the collective naturalization of tens of thousands of foreign Europeans in 1889, the ‘un-French’ practices and mentalities of settlers were blamed for rising social tensions and violent demonstrations against the French government.⁴³

That the British had beaten them to claim authority in New Zealand in 1840, following competing private settlement initiatives in the preceding decade, was a source of deep regret for many French imperialists of the Third Republic who, like *député* Richard Waddington could not but think of what might have been: ‘it is most unfortunate that the project that was envisaged at one time, at the beginning of the July Monarchy, and that consisted in the occupation of New Zealand, was not pursued. It is certain that if we possessed the two beautiful islands of New Zealand, we would have more space, more resources, [and] greater prosperity’.⁴⁴ These elements, politicians suggested, would have served to consolidate French rule in New Caledonia, where the system of convict transportation was the target of renewed criticism by Australian and British authorities in the 1880s and 1890s.⁴⁵ That the near miss in New Zealand

³⁸ Asseraf, *Electric News in Colonial Algeria*; Chopin, “Pages without borders”; Zessin, “Presses et journalistes ‘indigènes’ en Algérie coloniale”.

³⁹ *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés*, Nov. 22, 1894, 1961.

⁴⁰ Siegfried, *La démocratie en Nouvelle-Zélande*, 8–9.

⁴¹ Métin, *Le socialisme sans doctrines*, 269–70.

⁴² Siegfried, *La démocratie en Nouvelle-Zélande*, 40–41, 23, 189–97. See also Hamer, “André Siegfried and New Zealand”.

⁴³ According to demographer Augustin Bernard, the collective naturalisation of June 26, 1889 led to the creation of 21,696 new French nationals and 50,798 cases of “suspended naturalization” amongst young people awaiting the age of majority. See Bernard, “Le recensement de 1906 en Algérie et en Tunisie”, 27. For an example of the stereotyping of Algerian settlers in political discourse of the era, see *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés*, May 19, 1899, 1440–41.

⁴⁴ *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés*, May 2, 1883, 831.

⁴⁵ Neilson, ‘Settling Scores in New Caledonia and Australia’.

under the July Monarchy coincided with what had been, for the French, a long and draining effort to conquer territory in Algeria, only heightened the pervasive sense of regret.⁴⁶

Added to this regret were misgivings that in losing New Zealand, France may also have lost its way as a champion of democracy. Faced with the impressive program of social reform in the colony in the 1890s, French observers were forced to reflect on the unfulfilled promises of the Revolution. French socialists repeatedly pointed to the example given by New Zealand in the creation of a Labor Ministry and legislation on arbitration, pensions, working hours, minimum wages and agricultural subventions. They asked why the Republic was not leading the way in the creation of a more just society. During a debate on pensions in 1901, *député* Edouard Vaillant ventured the following explanation: “what has happened is what always happens in France: we proclaim principles, and they remain frozen in words rather than taking on life in institutions... The Revolution, in 1793 and again in 1848, declared welfare assistance obligatory. Yet obligatory welfare assistance has not yet been created, and never will be in this country where the formulation of ideas is greatly preferred to their application.”⁴⁷

Settlers in New Zealand, by contrast, were perceived to be suspicious of theory, and firmly grounded in practical realities. Such perceptions drew on geographically diffuse frontier myths of colonial manliness and hardiness of spirit, anchored in the European imaginary by fictional literature and the popular press.⁴⁸ The construction and diffusion of the image of the hardy Pakeha male, as Jock Phillips observes, was gaining momentum in these years.⁴⁹ The dynamic program of social reform in New Zealand – understood more as a pragmatic response to local realities than an expression of revolutionary principle – provided evidence of this settler-colonial spirit. Even steadfast opponent of socialism and critic of the “megalomaniac tendencies” of the state in Australasia, colonial theorist Pierre Leroy-Beaulieu, could not help but admire “these bold, young lands” and “the progressive spirit and energy” of their inhabitants.⁵⁰ Less critical French observers, including Siegfried and Métin, noted that “while Western Europe is richer in doctrine, Australasia is richer in realities”. In matters of social justice, these travelers observed, New Zealand had – together with the Australian colonies – “gone infinitely further than any other country in terms of practical experience”.⁵¹ The prospect of social reform without class war – “socialism without doctrine”, as Métin described it – held obvious appeal for these Frenchmen concerned by the growing social tensions of the era.⁵²

As a man committed to the reform not only of French society, but of human relations more broadly, it is unsurprising that Robin also chose to travel to New Zealand to observe the innovations so widely remarked upon in Europe. The tempering of theory with a sense of its practical application, moreover, mirrored his own notion of “integral education”. “A true integral man”, he would later explain to a journalist in the colony, “is at the same time a theorist and a practical man; he reunites the two qualities systematically separated by official routine... He is at once the brain that directs and the hand that executes, the scholar and the workman.”⁵³ If his system of education had been rejected in France, noted Parisian paper *La Presse* on the eve of his departure, it would be sure to “triumph brilliantly” in New Zealand.⁵⁴

Robin’s Experience in New Zealand

⁴⁶ Blais, *Voyages au Grand Océan*, 245–46.

⁴⁷ *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés*, June 10, 1901, 1305.

⁴⁸ Hogg, *Men and Manliness on the Frontier*; Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*; Mackenzie, “The Imperial Pioneer”.

⁴⁹ Phillips, *A Man’s Country?*, 39.

⁵⁰ Leroy-Beaulieu, *Les nouvelles sociétés anglo-saxonnes*, x, xvii.

⁵¹ Siegfried, *La démocratie en Nouvelle-Zélande*, 79–81; Métin, *Le socialisme sans doctrines*, 256.

⁵² Métin, *Le socialisme sans doctrines*. This appeal is also noted by Robert Aldrich. See Aldrich, “La classe ouvrière australienne”. See also Hamer, “André Siegfried and New Zealand”, 114.

⁵³ “Integral Education”, *Lyttelton Times*, Apr. 29, 1899.

⁵⁴ “M. Robin s’expatrie”, *La Presse*, 12 May 1898.

The prediction of *La Presse* was to prove at least partially correct. After giving a first lecture on “rational writing” to the Alliance Française in Auckland, Robin made his way to Christchurch, where he was invited to give a series of lectures on pedagogy to the Société Française at Girton College.⁵⁵ His ideas complemented those of local resident, Professor Bickerton, from whom Robin would learn lessons of his own over the course of his stay at Wainoni, the intentional community founded in 1896.

Robin and Bickerton were not only of the same generation but also shared a background in pedagogy and experience of conflict with their respective educational authorities. Born in England in 1842, Bickerton had taught at various English institutions before emigrating with his family in 1874 to take up a post at Canterbury College.⁵⁶ The Bickertons’ arrival in New Zealand coincided with the upsurge of European settlement following the wars of the 1860s and the consolidation of settler rule. While Bickerton’s professional status afforded him a certain respect within the local community, his public questioning of family structures at a time when, as Phillips argues, the settler quest for respectability entailed a particular “reverence for the family”,⁵⁷ earned him influential critics. Finding himself at odds with the College Board of Governors in 1894, Bickerton took a year of leave and set about creating his “federative home”, which he explicitly conceptualized as an educational experiment.⁵⁸ This establishment, Robin explained, had been created to bring together:

people who think that in a freely-formed community, one may avoid many of the difficulties, troubles and worries of the current system of isolation; that one may find at will a peaceful solitude – something that is impossible within the family; that the terrible pain of abandonment is alleviated, that a social unity is formed that is richer in benevolence and artistic joys, and that one may exist in this way with less expense than incurred through the extreme complication of separate households.⁵⁹

A desire to combat what they perceived as the modern scourge of loneliness through collective creative endeavor united Robin and Bickerton.⁶⁰ Understood to exacerbate rather than relieve this loneliness, the bourgeois family became their prime target of reform.

Although (heterosexual) couples and their children retained private spaces at Wainoni – in apartments in the principal residence, or in the cabins of reinforced paper which surrounded this building – all residents shared access to common areas in the drawing room, conservatory and social hall.⁶¹ Meals, in the words of one local journalist, were “more or less ‘moveable feasts’ served from the common kitchen, somewhat in hotel fashion, to suit the different modes of life and habits of the Federators”.⁶² Residents came together for social activities, making use of the on-site art workshop, forming choirs and orchestras, and organizing various entertainments. Housekeeping was organized collectively, and planning was under way for a communal nursery and sports hall for older children, to be managed by residents themselves.⁶³

⁵⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, Dec. 20, 1898; *Press*, Feb. 2, 6, 16, & 18, 1899 and Mar. 16, 1899.

⁵⁶ Parton, “Bickerton, Alexander William”, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, first published in 1993. Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2b23/bickerton-alexander-william> (accessed 22 Feb. 2020).

⁵⁷ Phillips, *A Man’s Country?*, 51.

⁵⁸ Sargisson and Sargent, *Living in Utopia*, 27.

⁵⁹ Robin, “Une résidence fédérative”, 692.

⁶⁰ “Wainoni”, *Press*, Apr. 11, 1901.

⁶¹ *Ibid*; Robin, “Une résidence fédérative”, 694.

⁶² “Wainoni”, *Press*, Apr. 11, 1901.

⁶³ Robin, “Une résidence fédérative”, 695.

These last features, Robin and Bickerton agreed, would be especially important in combating the problems of life in isolated family units, the obstacles to “a true social existence”: “rapacious maternity, petty jealousies, the exclusivism of family and kin, and general cupidity”.⁶⁴ For both men, limiting births and restructuring the family were not only means of redressing socio-economic imbalances, but forms of feminist engagement. Over the course of his life, Robin’s engagement with the French feminist movement earned him both the sympathies of feminist newspaper, *La Fronde*, and the suspicions of the Parisian police.⁶⁵ Bickerton too was a regular correspondent with local women’s organizations, including the Christchurch Women’s Council and the Women’s Franchise League.⁶⁶ While the notion of coeducation won the support of some women, the federative home and proposals to abolish marriage as an “immoral” institution, and replace it with “a pure life of liberty” in which woman would be “free to exercise her God-given gift of selection”, were pragmatically rejected by others as “not ... practical under present social conditions”.⁶⁷ Whatever their intentions, formulated without sufficient thought for the realities of women’s experience in the patriarchal society of the day, Robin and Bickerton’s more radical proposals risked perpetuating women’s sexual exploitation through liberating male sexuality without the corresponding possibility of female sexual liberation.

These observations notwithstanding, the reform of bourgeois family structures nevertheless opened up the possibility of a radical revision of the racial hierarchies which underpinned European imperialism in this era. In both Britain and France, an increasingly medicalized political discourse presented the racially healthy family as the building block of the empire.⁶⁸ In France, as Margaret Cook Andersen demonstrates, the pro-natalist sentiment that mounted in the wake of defeat at Sedan resonated across the empire, where it was hoped that the racially regenerative effects of colonial struggle would counter the degenerative effects of European modernity.⁶⁹ In both imperial metropolises, women became the target of educational programs designed to ensure their children were raised as defenders and reproducers of the structures of colonial domination.⁷⁰ In disrupting the traditional family and creating a disjuncture in the imperial triumvirate of family, race, and nation, Bickerton’s federative home created the possibility for a wider destabilization of racial hierarchies.

This possibility was foreclosed, however, by the federative home’s reproduction of the racial dynamics of the settler colony. From the earliest days of British rule, observes Salesa, New Zealand was a “‘racialized state’, one associated with a nineteenth-century British Empire increasingly organized and ruled through discourses and practices of race”.⁷¹ The goal of forming a racially coherent nation – articulated in the first years of British rule – was increasingly expressed, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as a quest for whiteness. “To achieve the goal of a racially coherent nation that was some shade of white”, notes Vicki Luker, “indigenous elements had logically to be absorbed into the majority population”.⁷² This process of absorption was in evidence at Wainoni, where the ideal of a superior European civilization based on elevated aesthetic forms and scientific principles was firmly maintained.

While the local press described the federative home as a space in which residents could “receive their friends ... without distinction of caste or rank”, neither the press reports, nor the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 695–96.

⁶⁵ “M. Paul Robin”, *La Fronde*, Sept. 14, 1898; APP, BA1244, note, Sept. 23, 1907.

⁶⁶ “Women’s Franchise League”, *Evening Star*, Apr. 24, 1896.

⁶⁷ “M. Paul Robin”, *La Fronde*, Sept. 14, 1898; *Lyttelton Times*, Mar. 6, 1899; “Women’s Franchise League”, “The Morality of Marriage”, *Evening Star*, Apr. 24, 1896.

⁶⁸ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Saada, *Les Enfants de la colonie*.

⁶⁹ Cook Andersen, *Regeneration through Empire*.

⁷⁰ Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood”; Ricciardi Colvin, *Gender and French Identity*, 78.

⁷¹ Salesa, *Racial Crossings*, 17.

⁷² Luker, “The Half-Caste in Australia”, 322.

descriptions penned by Bickerton or Robin noted the presence of Māori people, language or cultural practices.⁷³ Indeed, the residence actively promoted the cultivation of European artistic forms through its program of cultural activities, and defended the primacy of European scientific rationalism in forms that accentuated the imperialist domination of the natural environment and its Māori inhabitants. These forms were admired by Robin, who noted the greenhouses and the fifty-meter-long glass and iron construction in which ferns nestled among artificial rocks. These structures marked the landscape of the “Southern Alps”, which remained visible on the horizon, beyond the river Avon.⁷⁴

European attempts to dominate the natural environment through scientific intervention were further reflected in the presence at Wainoni of a chemistry laboratory and a photography studio. In the adjoining art workshop, Robin was struck by the presence of “a number of taxidermy penguins, brought back from a voyage to Macquarie Island by the Bickerton brothers, and an interesting photograph which measures six foot long, showing the nesting place of a myriad of penguins”.⁷⁵ These objects constituted symbols of the violent incursion of Europeans in the South Seas, a violence restaged in the regular shows organized by Bickerton and his brother, in which lantern slides of the penguins were shown to captivated audiences, followed by a shadow pantomime depicting “an amusing dynamite scene, an absurd mock combat, and other numerous delusions”. These literal projections of what Wolfe refers to as the “screen of the frontier”, behind which settler violence is regularized and white settlement extended,⁷⁶ were celebrated by local journalists. The “innocent and hearty amusement”, reported the *Akaroa Mail*, also included the rendition of comic songs, amongst which “‘The Alabama Coon’ was much appreciated”.⁷⁷

Bickerton’s ambition to harness technological innovation in the service of cultural forms which reflected the epistemological and physical violence of settler colonialism was perhaps most evident in his establishment of a fireworks laboratory at Wainoni. The Bickertons, in partnership with Messrs. Stokes, were the only manufacturers of fireworks in New Zealand at this time. Their products, noted the *Wanganui Chronicle*, were “exhilarating and indispensable” at settler festivities, including Easter celebrations, and, in 1901, for the anticipated British victory in the South African War – a conflict widely represented in the local press as the legitimate suppression of unruly settlers gone native.⁷⁸ Robin marveled at the presence of the fireworks laboratory, situated next to a paper cottage housing young residents. The roman candles and smaller fireworks had been moved from the laboratory into a number of outbuildings, he noted, “to limit damage in case of an explosion”.⁷⁹ The presence of the fireworks laboratory at Wainoni made manifest what Veracini refers to as “the paranoiac dispositions characterizing the settler colonial situation”.⁸⁰ At once a symbol of settlers’ violent domination of the environment and its inhabitants, and of the precarious fragility of a community whose fears of indigenous insurgency never abated, the fireworks factory stood at

⁷³ “Wainoni”, *The Press*, Apr. 11, 1901.

⁷⁴ Robin, “Une résidence fédérative”, 693.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 694.

⁷⁶ Wolfe, “Settler colonialism”, 392.

⁷⁷ “Bickerton Brothers”, *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser*, Feb. 18, 1896; *Western Star*, Nov. 29, 1898.

⁷⁸ “Fireworks Display. Easter Monday Night”, *Wanganui Chronicle*, Apr. 1, 1901. Although the Afrikaners were fellow white settlers, New Zealand journalists differentiated between the local settler community and those of the southern African republics by routinely representing the latter as uncivilized. For typical examples of these representations, see “Boer Treachery,” *The Daily Telegraph*, July 26, 1900; or “Disgusting Practices,” *Manawatu Evening Standard and Pohangina Gazette*, Mar. 6, 1900.

⁷⁹ Robin, “Une résidence fédérative”, 694.

⁸⁰ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 75.

the heart of Wainoni, representing the tensions of a perpetual present from which settlers could not return.

Resettling Europe

French journalists and police agents had interpreted Robin's escape to New Zealand as a definitive rupture with his homeland.⁸¹ And yet, in May 1899, Robin decided to return to Europe. He was, reported a local journalist, "charmed with the colony, and would like to remain ... but circumstances do not permit of it".⁸² The existing sources do not record Robin's motivations. What is clear, however, is that throughout his stay in New Zealand, Robin followed the news from France with interest. Interviewed by the *Star* and the *Lyttelton Times* in January 1899, Robin expressed dismay at the divided state of the French socialist movement, as well as his fears of a coup amidst the chaos of the Dreyfus Affair. "He himself, in spite of its failings, would like to see the Republic maintained and ultimately transformed from within", noted journalists.⁸³

Was it to lend his efforts to this process of transformation that Robin returned to Europe? If the French Republic, in its national specificity, mattered little to Robin, its universalist form was of great import. Press interviews suggested that Robin's experience at Wainoni had helped him reflect on how to create transformation on a universal scale. "As a philosophic anarchist", journalists explained, "collectivism was not his ideal. Yet Robin thought that in the progress to the ultimate goal, mankind might very likely pass through some social system such as that sketched by Bellamy".⁸⁴ American author Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000–1887* was published in 1888, and had become influential amongst reformers in North America, Europe and New Zealand, where, according to Sargisson and Sargent, the first edition "sold out in days, and numerous pirated editions were published".⁸⁵ The book depicted a utopian metropolis in Boston, as encountered by protagonist Julian West, who falls asleep in 1887 to awaken over one hundred years in the future. In the city re-discovered by West in the year 2000, a state-supported industrial army ensures the employment and egalitarian remuneration of all men and women of working age, producing a classless society and harmonious relations between the sexes.⁸⁶ The vision cannot but have appealed to Robin.

Despite its global appeal, Bellamy's book was necessarily imbricated in the dynamics of the North American settler-colonial situation. Its publication in 1888, as Matthew Beaumont notes, coincided with a new public perception of the disappearance of the frontier. "In the absence of uncolonized space", explains Beaumont, "Bellamy's utopian vision, centered on a man who penetrates a temporal frontier and who thus helps to build a perfect community in the future rather than in some hitherto untouched geographical area".⁸⁷ This perfect community, as Yeonsik Jung further observes, was predicated upon an act of "forgetting" which absorbed the bodies of natives and migrant and diasporic people of color into that of the white settler. "Bellamy's seeming nonchalance about the racial identity of utopia's inhabitants", argues Jung, "attests to his implicit acknowledgement of white Anglo-Saxon dominance and ownership of the utopia".⁸⁸

⁸¹ APP, BA1244, reports, Paris, May 12 and Sept. 4, 1898, London, Aug. 5, 1898; *L'Eclair*, Nov. 23, 1898; "A travers Paris", *Le Figaro*, Sept. 4, 1898.

⁸² "News of the Day", *The Press*, May 10, 1899.

⁸³ "A Veteran Progressivist", *Star*, Jan. 18, 1899; "A Veteran Progressivist", *Lyttelton Times*, Jan. 18, 1899.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Sargisson and Sargent, *Living in Utopia*, 24.

⁸⁶ Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁸⁸ Jung, "'Forgetting' Race", 145.

In returning to Europe, Robin reenacted Julian West's penetration of a temporal frontier, exchanging the perpetual present of a settler colony suspended in its founding moment of violence for the relentless march of industrial modernity. For all his admiration of Bickerton's work, Wainoni had struck Robin as an atemporal Eden: a beautiful garden beside a river, fashioned according to Bickerton's particular interpretation of Christianity.⁸⁹ For Bickerton, living "a life of self-sacrifice as outlined by Christ in his parables on the kingdom of Heaven [was] the true means of regenerating the race".⁹⁰ For Robin, however, to truly transform humanity, man had to accept his fall into the flow of time. This he made clear in the first issue of *La Tribu*, the newspaper he launched in March 1900: "the greatest dream of those who love liberty, and simplicity, and who hate the slavery engendered by the institutions of the old world and the useless complexity of decadent countries, has been to create agricultural communities in lands less occupied by the white man. These ventures have sometimes known considerable success, for a period of time, but sooner or later they have succumbed to decadence".⁹¹ His own venture, he intimated, would not hold off the inevitable advance of time, but rather would embrace industrial modernity in an attempt to re-set its trajectory.

For his re-entry to industrial modernity, Robin selected the Belgian town of Ghent, site of one of the first major industrial developments outside of Britain. According to the report of the police agents who were again on his tail, Robin's intention was to create "a libertarian family home".⁹² This family, explained Robin in *La Tribu*, would take the form of a "tribe" peopled by the "isolated and unmarried – the old and the young, men and women – suffering from their sad and constant solitude". Their alienation, Robin clarified, was not a result of their lack of integration into family structures; for in the "modern family", he observed, "the boredom which results from a monotonous existence too often and too quickly replaces the original bonds of love". Rather, their alienation, and the disintegration of the affective ties of the family itself, were consequences of the pressures of modern civilization, which sacrificed liberty, and love, to the daily struggle for subsistence. Through organizing collectively to reduce living costs, however, people would find that "the satisfaction of their modest material needs makes it easier for them to exercise the perfect solidarity for which the mentality of modern, benevolent human beings has long equipped them". The "old, simple name of *Tribu*", Robin believed, was the most appropriate for this community as it signified "integral liberty" and a lack of hierarchy.⁹³

Robin's perception of tribal living echoed prevalent European representations of the indigenous peoples of the Pacific as, "the last witnesses of the state of nature so dear to the philosophers of the Enlightenment".⁹⁴ According to European navigators, scientists and travelers, the perceived proximity to nature of Pacific islanders was communicated in their childlike characters and instinctive behavior, liberated from constraining structures of social control.⁹⁵ In fusing what he saw as an unsophisticated, pre-modern form of social organization with modern mentalities, Robin hoped to restore to Europeans a seemingly lost capacity for instinct without unleashing the violence of the more ignoble forms of savagery which had come to dominate European representations of tribal and indigenous peoples in the nineteenth century.⁹⁶ The pursuit of love and liberty within Robin's tribe was only to be undertaken by those who were "devoid of religious prejudice", and whose "principles [were] rigorously scientific". "We want to prove by reasoning and example", Robin insisted, "that by communal association in free tribes, all of us – even the most unhappy – may obtain a marked improvement

⁸⁹ Robin, "Une résidence fédérative", 693, 696.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 696.

⁹¹ APP, BA1244, *La Tribu*, Mar. 1900.

⁹² APP, BA1244, BA1244, report Nov. 1, 1899.

⁹³ APP, BA1244, *La Tribu*, Mar. 1900.

⁹⁴ Blais, *Voyages au Grand Océan*, 228.

⁹⁵ Fry, *Framing the Islands*, 43–49.

⁹⁶ Douglas, "Novus Orbis Australis".

in their circumstances, and that this improvement will rapidly increase along with the solidarity of individuals within the tribe, and the solidarity of tribes within society".⁹⁷

Robin's attempt to reform industrial modernity through idealized tribal relationships depended on "a particular way of narrating, conceptualizing, and experiencing temporality", that Mark Rifkin identifies as "settler time".⁹⁸ Unable to conceive of the synchronicity of indigenous and European forms of social organization, Robin presented the former as anachronistic, only given contemporary value by its appropriation and redefinition by the latter. Indigenous forms and bodies vanished, absorbed into a white European body regenerated by its connection with instinct, with liberty, with love.

Conscious of the difficulty of his endeavor, Robin nevertheless anticipated the legacy he might leave for future generations. "Of course", he wrote in *La Tribu*, "we would rather we were guided by a perfect model, having only to follow the example set by a community that has come through the initial difficulties and has long since become prosperous, sure of its future. Such a community does not exist yet. It is up to us to create it for those who will follow us". Printing a short message in English addressed to "Wainoni Federative Home, New Zealand", Robin asked Bickerton to "please give us again your useful teaching, and let us know your progress".⁹⁹

For both Bickerton and Robin, however, these experiments were to be short lived. Dismissed from his university post in 1902 following renewed criticism of his views on marriage, Bickerton closed his federative home and reopened Wainoni as a park.¹⁰⁰ Robin's initiative met with even less success: the tribe disbanded after only two months with Robin dismissing those who had participated as "indecisive and foolhardy".¹⁰¹ Disappointed and in ill-health, Robin nevertheless remained committed to his goal of racial improvement, trying to revive the defunct *Ligue de régénération humaine* and maintaining correspondence with Drysdale in London, as well as other contacts in Europe and North America. "The perseverance of Robin's efforts is astonishing", noted one report from the Parisian police, who maintained their surveillance until 1912, when, frustrated by the constraints placed on his reforming zeal by age and infirmity, Robin took his own life.¹⁰²

Despite the ephemeral nature of Bickerton and Robin's experiments on opposite sides of the world, the connection of the two men indicates the ways in which racial discourse was constructed not only between settler colonies and imperial centers, but across the French and British empires. Robin's attempt to resettle Europe through the creation of a modern white tribe was inspired by his voyage to New Zealand, a land already regarded as a laboratory of social innovation. Observing Bickerton's Wainoni against the backdrop of the colony's extensive program of social reform, Robin was encouraged to reflect on the failures of European reformists and returned to Europe with a perceived antidote: the disembodied essence of the tribes of the Pacific. In dissociating this essence from the native bodies perceived to host it, however, Robin's conception of human solidarity remained limited, and his goal to end loneliness and isolation unattainable.

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⁹⁷ APP, BA1244, *La Tribu*, Mar. 1900.

⁹⁸ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, ii.

⁹⁹ APP, BA1244, *La Tribu*, Mar. 1900.

¹⁰⁰ Sargisson and Sargent, *Living in Utopia*, 24–25.

¹⁰¹ APP, BA1244, report, "Iconoclastes", Paris, May 9, 1900.

¹⁰² APP, BA1244, note, Paris, July 6, 1901; Brémand, *Cempuis*, 115.

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