



‘Administering the medicine’: progressive education, colonialism and the state

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On 18 August 1904, Frank Tate (1864–1939) ‘of the Education Department’ attended the 189th meeting of the Beefsteak Club held at the Port Phillip Hotel in Melbourne as a guest of J. P. McInerney, a prominent city barrister and member of the University of Melbourne Senate. At the time Tate was in the middle of important negotiations with the university that were to establish Victoria’s post-elementary vocational education system for a new nation and a new century. He now found himself a guest at one of the city’s exclusive gentlemen’s social and debating clubs, a situation he was somewhat diffident about but evidently considered ‘useful’. Having risen through the ranks, from pupil to pupil teacher, from teacher to inspector and training college principal, Tate was now entering the social and cultural centres of power.¹ Two meetings later he was formally admitted as a member of the club, having earlier been warned, in the best tradition of such fraternal institutions, that his membership might be conditional ‘on his repeating his dog story’.² Tate, at the age of 40, had joined a select group of professional and ‘commercial’ men of influence, a group of socially aware and progressive gentlemen whose monthly discourse had, over two decades, rehearsed and defined the issues of ‘these modern times’.³

A month earlier, in July 1904, in Batavia (contemporary Jakarta), Jacques Henry Abendanon (1852–1925), the colony’s Director of Education (and simultaneously of Religion and Industry) had presented a hurriedly prepared but extensive two-volume report on vocational education in Java to the colonial governing Council of the Dutch East Indies. Twelve years older than his Victorian counterpart, Abendanon had already established himself at the top of his profession. A lawyer by training, Abendanon had held important public positions in the law fraternity as secretary

1 R. J. W. Selleck, *Frank Tate, A Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1982), 167.

2 Beefsteak Club Minutes 1886–1907 (MS) (Henceforth BCM), University of Melbourne Archives, Minutes, 15 October 1904.

3 Tate had been a long time member of the less prestigious but older established literary society, the Shakespeare Society (1884) and of a more recently established walking club, the Wallaby Club (1894) (Selleck, *Frank Tate*, 73–4, 128–9, 167). He was not a member of the more prestigious Yorrick Club established in 1868 with the self-conscious aim of ‘bringing together literary men and those connected with literature, art and science’ (*The Yorrick Club: Its Origins and development, May 1868–December 1910*, Melbourne, 1911, 13). This was the oldest and perhaps the most notable men’s club in Melbourne. It admitted only ‘professional men’ in 1871 but it was only in the 1880s that ‘new blood’ representing particularly the medical profession, armed forces and new government bureaucrats began to dominate. Destabilized by the 1880s depression, a comparison of memberships of the Yorrick and the younger Beefsteak Club in the early 1890s suggests these overlapped and that Beefsteak Club membership represented the changing of the guard in the make-up of the men of influence.

and treasurer of the short-lived Netherlands-Indies Association of Jurists, and in the 1880s was editor of the colonial legal journal, *Het Recht in Nederlandsch-Indië* (*The Law in the Netherlands Indies*). Since 1889, he had been member of the executive board, later secretary and vice-president, of the prestigious cultural society, *Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunst en Wetenschappen* (The Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences) and, more significantly, in 1891 was admitted to the *Indisch Genootschap*, the influential colonial lobby group and association of old colonials in the Dutch capital, The Hague. He held numerous other memberships of cultural and academic associations in The Netherlands and throughout Europe.⁴ While, like Tate, he had his political enemies, he also had 'made it' into the social circles of the élite of colonial society

Appointed director of education one year before Tate, Abendanon had much in common with his Australian counterpart. Both were migrants from metropolitan Europe, had entered government employment and made their mark as successful civil servants to finally arrive after a long career at the very centre of the colonial bureaucratic structure. Both came to their position after having publicly aired views that were clearly socially progressive and both were appointed specifically to institute significant systematic changes to national education systems. Both men also were appointed to their positions at a time of dramatic change in the political climate of their society. On 1 January 1901, Melbourne had celebrated the birth of the federation of the self-governing colonies of Australia. Victoria had suddenly changed from being a self-governing British colony to being a state within the Commonwealth of Australia, and its capital Melbourne from being a parochial colonial capital to being the temporary capital of a new nation. In the same year, Jacques Abendanon's Batavia, the capital of the archipelagic colony of the Dutch East Indies, was all agog following the speech from the throne opening the new session of the Dutch Parliament. The young Queen Wilhelmina, whose coronation the colony had celebrated three years previously, had announced that her government would introduce a new era of 'ethical' colonialism.⁵

This paper attempts to draw some comparisons between the vision and work of these two directors of education, appointed to reform the education systems and schoolroom strategies of two quite different states in the first years of the new century. As only a summary sketch of the respective education and social systems can be given in this article, its focus will be to highlight the apparent similarities in the discourse on educational reform in these two dissimilar political contexts. More specifically, the emphasis will be placed on the cultural and racial context within which educational reform was being conceived and implemented in the two settler communities with a view to investigating how the pedagogical discourse, which can be loosely defined as 'progressive', was employed to function in explicitly racially charged educational contexts. Furthermore, it asks how very similar pedagogical ideas could contribute to the dismantling of colonial structures in one context while elsewhere they are used to more effectively entrench colonialism. Were these educational ideas in fact the same, or may it be that ultimately education gains its physical shape from social and cultural rather than pedagogical imperatives?

4 H. van Miert, *Beylogenheid en Onvermogen: Mr J. H. Abendanon en de Ethische Richting in het Nederlandse kolonialisme* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1991), 22.

5 For a discussion of the ethical policy see E. Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in Fragmenten: Vijf studies over koloniale denken en doen van Nederlanders in de Indonesische Archipel, 1887-1942* (Utrecht: HES, 1981).

Two societies, two systems of education

State-provided systems of elementary education emerged in the British self-governing colony of Victoria and the Dutch East Indies colony of Java, at approximately the same time. The educational bureaucracies of both colonies were established in the 1860s to oversee and cautiously expand the provision of elementary education together with some unrelated, post-elementary, vocationally related educational institutions. In Victoria and Java churches were also important educational providers, catering to the destitute, the rich and to middle-class girls. In both colonies, an élite made use of an extensive range of private schools, tutors and governesses, as well as a limited number of exclusive grammar schools linked to metropolitan cultural and academic systems.⁶ Within this élite class, further divisions were underscored by the practice in both societies of sending their children 'home' for 'real' education. Moreover, in both settler societies class divisions reflected in schooling tended to coincide with ethnic differences. In Victoria, public schooling had contributed to the assimilation of a Roman Catholic Irish working class into the dominant Anglican English and Presbyterian Scottish public culture. This had been largely achieved by 1900, by which time the majority of the population could identify itself as Australian born. In Java, the heterogeneity of the incoming migrant population was less of an issue than the racial and cultural distinctions that were increasingly being made between the *pur sang* white Europeans, made up largely of migrating colonials who constituted the higher echelons of the civil service and dominated the economy, and the locally born settlers, the majority of whom formed a mixed race mestizo community.⁷

More apparent of course, in colonial societies, was the division between white settlers and the indigenous population. In Victoria the 'native problem' had been effectively removed from public scrutiny and concern by 1900, and remnants of the southern Australian Koorie communities had been largely committed to mission-run reserves.⁸ Immigration policies had ensured a significant Asian community was prevented from developing. In Java the demographic relativities were reversed: its European population numbering about 70,000 dominated an indigenous population in Java of around 20 million. A large Chinese population of several million formed an intermediate community who predominated in urban centres and in the organization of internal trade and business. Wealthier Chinese participated in European schools but the community agitated increasingly for schools of their own. Missions provided the main source of indigenous schooling in both colonies although in Java, a system of indirect rule determined that a small number of schools had been established to provide Western education for indigenous administrators.⁹

6 Victoria established its own university in 1854 based on contemporary British principles but higher education did not appear in Java until the 1920s.

7 For an account of the position of Eurasians in the Dutch East Indies and a discussion of the cultural polemic surrounding this community see J. G. Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasians in Dutch Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983) and A. Stoler, 'Rethinking colonial categories: European communities and the boundaries of rule', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 13 (1989), 134–61.

8 See B. Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989); H. Reynolds, *Frontier, Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

9 Western schooling in the nineteenth century was restricted to a small indigenous élite. Schools intended mainly to train indigenous clerks had been established since the 1850s on an *ad hoc* basis but systematized in the 1890s. Acculturated Javanese students were at various times admitted to European elementary schools. Religious Islamic schools were the main form of (non-Western) schooling for Javanese.

The expansion and more systematic provision of education in both colonies were not evident till the end of the nineteenth century. A combination of internal political and economic pressures, technological change and improvements in international trade and communications induced pressure for social and economic reconstruction that inevitably affected the provision of education. In both contexts a series of state-commissioned investigations into social and economic conditions provided the impetus for major changes in education. Despite opposition, the commissions of inquiry pushed through 'progressive' social ideas, the outcome of which in Victoria and Java was the expansion of schooling for 'the people'—the extension of a simplified academic curriculum for 'the masses' with an emphasis on 'practical application' and 'civic consciousness'. In essence, then, this amounted to a common educational strategy to effect social change to which the term 'progressive education' can properly be applied.¹⁰

Frank Tate and Jacques Abendanon were at the forefront of those who considered the existing provision of elementary education for 'the people' to be inadequate but both found their proposals to expand the system curtailed by more conservative forces intent on maintaining the nineteenth-century social hierarchies that had characterized colonial society. Abendanon retired in 1905 before the expansion of native schooling was implemented and it is doubtful whether he could have realized his more liberal and expansive educational plans. A three-year universal system of village native elementary schools established in 1907 provided only the rudiments of a Western education in the regional language and the expansion of standard elementary schools as he had envisaged was only evident a decade later. Not till 1921 was an articulated education system available for indigenous pupils (male and female) with the means to avail themselves of the opportunity. When completed, the colonial education scheme provided separate and still highly unequal streams of Indonesian, Chinese and European elementary and higher elementary education linked at the top by multiracial secondary and vocational schools. Frank Tate, who stayed at the helm of Victorian education till 1928, had succeeded by 1914 in expanding, and by 1920 further refining, a state school system to provide an articulated structure of elementary, higher elementary, specialist girls' domestic science,

10 The term 'progressive' is employed here to categorize the pedagogical and structural ideas advanced by the two directors at the turn of the century. While recognizing the conventional use of the term 'progressive' in educational history literature to describe specific educational projects which developed around the time of the First World War and in the *inter-bellum* period, the term 'progressive' has a broader purchase in social and political history to describe late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social reform movements and discourses. In this context 'progressivism' constitutes a band of social thinking ranging from democratic liberalism to liberal socialism which, in the American context, could be defined as 'a search for organising principles around which a viable social order could be constructed' by 'a new middle class with its bureaucratic mentality' (R. H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (London: Macmillan, 1967), viii. For similar interpretations of this turn-of-the-century period see for Australia M. Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives* (St Lucia, Queensland University Press, 1985) and compare the account of nineteenth-century Australian liberalism, S. McIntyre, *A Colonial Liberalism: The lost world of Three Victorian Visionaries* (Melbourne Oxford University Press, 1991). For The Netherlands see S. Stuurman, *Wacht op ons Daden: Het Liberalisme en de Vernieuwing van de Nederlandse Staat* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1992) and more generally P. Wagner, *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (London: Routledge, 1994). One of the more extensive explorations of the relationship between social change and pedagogy at this time is provided by R. J. W. Selleck, *The New Education* (Melbourne, Pitman, 1968).

boys' technical and a few academic secondary schools.¹¹ In the 1920s Melbourne and Batavian politicians could claim, respectively, that the diligent working-class and Javanese child with the appropriate aptitude and attitude could reach the highest rungs of university or vocational education.¹²

The expansion and more systematic provision of education in both colonies was not evident until the beginning of the twentieth century when new social and economic pressures promoted educational changes. It is precisely because of the evident differences in the demographic and political circumstances of the two communities that a comparison of the educational discourse and practice at this time gains significance. Whilst, in the course of the nineteenth century, an education system had evolved that reflected and reinforced the class, racial and gender divisions of colonial society in each colony, by the end of the nineteenth century new political and economic demands for a less segmented and more harmonious society found expression in new educational discourses advocating and defining fundamental institutional changes as well as changes in pedagogical process and content. Nevertheless, as this article intends to show, this new educational thinking that was related to and expressive of more progressive social policies remained permeated by an underlying preoccupation with race in what could be described as an essential colonial perspective on the presence of white society in Asia.¹³

Frank Tate and the 'new education'

Let us return to Frank Tate on the occasion of his first guest appearance at the Beefsteak Club. Tate, who his biographer confirms was a good raconteur, used the occasion to publicize his ideas about education and rehearsed once more the substance of his many speeches on 'the new education' by way of an anecdote:

[A man] had a dog for which a friend recommended a dose of oil. Accordingly the oil was procured: there was the oil, there was the dog. The trouble was how to mix them. After many attempts the dog was secured by three strong men, while a fourth poured the oil down his throat. As soon as the dog tasted the oil, his opposition relaxed and finally he chased the man with the bottle to have a final lick. So it was with education: the fault was in the manner of administering it. As soon as the boy tasted it, he liked it.¹⁴

11 The establishment of village schools in Java represented a compromise between those who argued that that 'simple' and 'practical' education best suited the needs of the native villager, and conservatives who believed that the 'native' should not be given access to Dutch (liberal) culture. In Victoria's elementary schools, where in 1910 the majority of pupils did not proceed beyond the fifth class, modernization of the curriculum also meant making it more practical and relevant to the majority of pupils while continuing to provide a mechanism for selection of those with more academic aptitude. The problem of articulation and linking up the various sections of the education system, which had their own historic *raison d'être*, preoccupied both sets of system managers in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

12 As claimed in F. Tate, *Continued Education* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1920) and A. D. A. De Kat Angelino, *Staatkundig Beleid en Bestuurszorg in Nederlandsch-Indië* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1929).

13 The term 'colonial' is used here in a double sense. First to characterize the relationship between the settler society and culture and its metropolitan European parent to which politically, economically, socially and culturally it remained subservient. Second with reference to the relationship of the European community to its indigenous environment which, in the Australian psyche, extended beyond the Aboriginal population which it had been assumed was no longer of any consequence, to encompass 'Asia', both in a metaphorical sense and as perceived quite literally as a physical threat. See D. Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850–1939* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000). A major contemporary example is by a noted Victorian Liberal, Charles Pearson, *National Character* (London: Macmillan, 1894).

14 BCM, 18 August 1904.

Later in the evening, after the men had consumed their traditional steaks, wine and cigars, Tate expanded on his views on education. The club's main speaker for the evening, Tate's host, barrister McInerney, had argued that education 'could not alter Nature's law of development'. 'God's endowments in the brain cell,' he asserted, 'should be fostered until it attained its full potential' but 'the scope for education was only what remained after allowing for sex, race and parentage, over which the schoolmaster had no control'. Tate sidestepped the implicit (colonial) assumptions of a static society that such a view implied, agreeing that education should be seen as 'giving a chance to a boy or girl of being what Nature intended'. But, repeating the now easily recognized slogans of the 'new education', he added that school played only a part in this and that education 'was as broad as life and as long'. It was 'not a preparation for life: it was life'; and the school's role was to 'encourage expression [since] to apply knowledge was power.'

Tate's response implied, if politely put, quite a different perspective on education and society than that of his host. It perhaps reflected a lesson that Tate had learned from his own life experience as he made his way up through the ranks within the education service. Specifically it was a view that had already set him at odds with more conservative elements advocating educational reform, such as McInerney himself with whom he had been debating the possibility of state secondary—as distinct from church-run—grammar schools. McInerney's implicit assumption was that each had his predestined role in society. This was a view that had dominated nineteenth-century educational thinking and remained evident in the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Technical Education (1899–1901). On the eve of Australian federation, this inquiry had advocated a restructuring of elementary education and the better preparation of working-class boys for their destined role in society as workers.¹⁵

At issue in educational discussions then proceeding in Melbourne was the development of a 'scientific' and rational basis for the Victorian economy. It was generally agreed that this required the expansion of state education beyond elementary education to provide bright boys with skilled agricultural and vocational education. Implicitly it was understood that this would also involve a reconstruction of Victorian society. The new nation was required to demonstrate a more 'democratic' ethos, and selection by merit offered both a more democratic and rational principle for economic and social progress than a colonial one based on class. The conservative opposition of the day recognized this and, as one media critic described it:

He [Tate] sees visions and reams of a cultured population crammed with all the eulogies at the expense of [i.e. paid for by] the state, Noble citizens, elevated lives, happy homes, all the product of the new education so engross his vision that the Government can expect no help from him on the prosaic question of reducing cost.¹⁶

Others protested that progressive educational reforms represented a state-engineered onslaught on established class privilege or worse, 'socialism', which amounted to the dismantling of the traditional social structures of nineteenth-century colonial

15 Selleck, *Frank Tate*, 114–15. Tate had been a key witness at the Royal Commission and the successful applicant for the position of principal of the teacher training college. It had recommended as a central plank in its agenda to improve the quality of elementary school teachers. His appointment as Director of Education followed subsequently and was effectively unchallenged (Selleck, *Frank Tate*), 131–3.

16 *The Argus* editorial quoted in Selleck, *Frank Tate*, 142.

society.¹⁷ The more socially progressive perspective on education implied the promise of access to the cultural privileges of society to all through opportunities of extended academic education. In reality such opportunities were to remain extremely limited and the main emphasis of the pedagogical and institutional reforms tended towards the provision of practical and technical training for boys which, while offering financial improvement, did little to effect social mobility.

Nevertheless, it was particularly in the elementary curriculum that educational change became evident. In order to entice working-class children to improve themselves intellectually and in terms of vocational skills, elementary education had to be made 'less bookish', more practical and 'child-centred'. The curriculum had to mediate between the traditional aims of a liberal education and the reality of the child's environment and social-class origins. Within a year of taking up his position, Tate moved to transform the curriculum, educate his inspectors and encourage his teachers to promote the 'spirit' of learning rather than to focus on a precise recitation of 'facts'. At the same time, Tate's first reformed elementary curriculum (1902) emphasized a new national and civic consciousness and focused on inculcating social responsibilities into the minds of the working-class children who attended state schools. The conservatives were indeed correct: the Department of Education envisaged itself as being involved in social reconstruction and central to this was the assumption that the state had responsibility for the social welfare of all classes as well as having a primary role as an active agent of social change.¹⁸

The outcome of the 'new education' promise in Victoria remains to be adequately researched, although it would seem the homilies of the civics lesson were little more than ideological rhetoric.¹⁹ Opportunities for post-elementary education for the urban working class of Victoria—40% of Victoria's population of 1.2 million lived in Melbourne—were severely restricted until the 1950s not only by the limit in the number of public secondary school places provided but also by the insertion of new layers of grading and assessment, which made it ever more difficult for the increasing numbers of children rising through the system to go on. By the 1920s a two-tier schooling system had been established for the state, consisting of a public system of general education and a network of state regulated, church-controlled academic schools subjected to a common examination and grading that effectively represented a meritocratic system of selection which, despite some genuine attempts to ensure otherwise, in fact soon secured a new status quo.²⁰ Private church schools continued to dominate the pathways to the university and the professions and

17 This was particularly apparent in conservative opposition to the extension of the state secondary education, to which the education director responded that in the absence of private provision, 'the State must in its own defence undertake the work' (Selleck, *Frank Tate*, 192).

18 These implications were explicitly articulated in Tate's 'Recommendations referring to State Education' presented to the government in 1908 following his tour of England and America. In this 108-page report Tate referred explicitly to 'national education' and set out the link between education and nation building. It focused on a category of students 'destined' to 'technical education and practical work'. At the same time he argued that traditional class divisions were now inefficient and that education provided the means for a controlled restructuring of society.

19 D. McCallum, *The Social Reproduction of Merit: Education, Psychology and Politics in Australia, 1900–1950* (London: Falmer Press, 1990).

20 Despite initial protests, the *élite* private school sector and the class it represented used state-regulated examinations to retain domination of the cultural, professional and economic structures of the state. The dual education system of state and Protestant church grammar schools was integral to the maintenance of an 'ordered' meritocratic society.

technical education never broke through the barriers of class prejudice. Social stability was maintained both in terms of class—by the limited access provided to further education—and gender, through enforced ‘domestic science’ training for girls.²¹ Indeed it was also maintained intellectually, by the impact of a new pedagogy which encouraged ‘the dog to lick the bottle’ and little else.

Jacques Henry Abendanon and the ‘ethical policy’

Since his appointment as Director of Education, Religion and Industry in March 1900, Jacques Abendanon had attempted to implement a series of changes in elementary and post-elementary education in colonial Java.²² Abendanon faced a far more complex social agenda than his Melbourne counterpart. He needed to balance the demands of a divided white colonial community as well as to improve what he saw was the obvious neglect of the education of the indigenous population. Tate could afford to ignore an indigenous population—it was generally believed that Aborigines were dying out and anyway were conveniently locked away in reserves and in the care of missions. According to his biographer, Tate only once referred in a meaningful way in his letters and papers to the general condition of Victorian Aborigines.²³

Abendanon, however, had involved himself directly in the question of the reform of native education, and of native policy generally, as councillor of the Colonial High Court (*Raadshcer bij het Hoogerrechtshof*). In his most significant public statement as a senior legal officer of the colony and prior to his appointment as Director of Education, he had argued against legislation emanating from The Netherlands, which for the first time expressly excluded ‘natives’ and ‘foreign orientals’ from Dutch citizenship.²⁴ He had explicitly asserted the right of suitably qualified Javanese to gain access to colonial institutions and implicitly at least had recognized the possibility of the progressive transformation of indigenous individuals and of indigenous society in general. He had used his public speech against the legal changes to set out a case that defined the moral duty of the modern (colonial) state to accept responsibility for all its citizens equally according to need. These were the principles from which his policies for the reform of native education, in particular that of

21 In the words of Miss I. Henderson: ‘some teaching and training in [“those subjects which are connected to the home”] should, in my opinion, be given to every girl no matter from what class she may come, and no matter what particular pursuit of life she may choose to follow later on. The majority of women have some time or other during their lives to undertake part at least of the responsibilities of a home, and for this reason every girl should receive some preparation to fit her to carry out such work in those subjects which may be grouped under the title of Domestic or Home Science’, I. Henderson, ‘Education of Women’, *Proceedings of the First Educational Congress* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1912), 97.

22 It remains unclear why Abendanon was selected. Colonial bureaucrats in Batavia and The Hague were predominantly hostile to his proposals, as was the most significant Governor General of the period, General van Heutsz. He was not an educationist although he had been secretary of the department for one term from 1889–94, itself a curious break in his, till then, rapid rise within the legal bureaucracy.

23 Selleck writes: ‘Though he uses the customary condescending slang (“Pompey”, “darkey”) he describes the Aborigines as “these black patriots who resisted the land grabbing white man and died fighting—better fate than their fellows who died of white fellow’s rum and other poisons”’. Frank Tate, Correspondence, Swan Hill, 1897 quoted in Selleck, *Frank Tate*, 98.

24 This regulation ended several decades of uncertainty regarding the legal status of ‘native Christians’. Abendanon was influenced by French colonial policy of the assimilation of natives under European law and argued that the legal definition of the racial groups made assimilation impossible in the Dutch colony.

indigenous women and Christian converts, were derived. It was the moral obligation of the Dutch colonial state, argued Abendanon:

... to raise up the native to a certain stage of independence which any citizen of a State requires in order to fulfil his destiny as a human being. We are so far away from this last obligation that we do not even attempt it with any seriousness.²⁵

Upon taking up his new position Abendanon immediately set about improving the existing Dutch language elementary school curriculum in the centres of European settlement. He introduced higher elementary and vocationally oriented education for non-academic students alongside the select grammar schools, which prepared their pupils for Dutch universities and the colonial bureaucracy. These schools, as well as several new post-elementary vocational schools, were specifically intended for the poorer mixed-race European or mestizo population. They were, however, also to be open to those indigenous Javanese who could afford them—although few expressed interest in vocational training not related to higher status positions. Abendanon opened the first (European) girls' post-elementary school in the capital, and later in the two other urban centres of Java, Surabaya and Semarang. These initiatives gained the support of those who had been campaigning for the protection and improvement of the position of locally born settlers against the privileged position of and the increasing competition from better qualified Dutch migrants from metropolitan Europe.²⁶ Abendanon's reforms of colonial education formed part of an agenda of settler nationalism that had already seen the creation of the colony's first nationalist settler political party, the *Indische Bond*, in 1898. Friction between the Batavian colonial government and the colonial office in The Hague on the direction of colonial policy and the educational qualification of the colonial civil service in particular,²⁷ a widespread belief that the economic development of the colony was being neglected,²⁸ and a dramatic increase in the number and outspokenness of a Dutch-language colonial media and a growth in colonially produced literature²⁹ were all indications of an emerging settler nationalism very similar to that which Tate had imbibed in the nearby British colony in the latter years of the nineteenth century.

More controversial, however, were Abendanon's plans to expand the provision of elementary education for the indigenous Javanese population and that of the indigenous Christian communities elsewhere in the archipelago. Early in his appointment he extended subsidies to non-state providers of native education and presented a plan for a radical transformation of the state-provided elementary indigenous schooling system. This provided for a sixfold increase in native elementary schools through the construction of 1350 such schools over five years to meet the educational needs of the children of urban Javanese.³⁰ Despite colonial bureaucratic opposition, he recommended the establishment of separate schools for Muslim girls from the Javanese aristocracy and the widespread provision of Dutch-language instruction for those aiming to become indigenous civil servants and teachers. These latter schools

25 J. Abendanon, 'De Rechtongelijkheid in Nederlandsch Indië', *Tijdschrift van Nederlandsch Indië*, 25 (1896).

26 U. Bosma, *Karl Zaalsberg: Journalist en Strijder voor de Indo* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1997).

27 See C. Fasseur, *De Indologen, Ambtenaren voor de Oost, 1825–1950* (Amsterdam: Ber Bakker, 1993).

28 E. Locher-Scolten, *Ethiek in Fragmenten*, 1981.

29 G. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum: Journalist en Romancier van Tempo Doeloe* (Amsterdam: Nijgh en van Ditmar, 1988).

30 S. L. van der Wal, *Onderwijsbeleid in Nederlandsch Indië* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1963).

were to be open to all Javanese students of talent rather than limited to those from specific social backgrounds.

In advocating the remodelling of education in colonial Java in order to boost the position of the mestizo community and to give more opportunity to the upper layers of the indigenous population by offering them greater access to European culture, Abendanon was implementing a new vision of a more rational and integrated society. Although not unaware of the contemporary pedagogical revolution, as his advocacy of vocational and less formally academic curricula suggests, he was not an educationist. Instead, it was his legal training and progressive liberal outlook that led him to focus on structural inequities, recognizing in this the crucial function of education as a key institution of social amelioration.³¹ Like Frank Tate, he appeared to be advocating a new inclusive nationalism. Like Tate, he recognized that national progress and greater economic efficiency required the dismantling of the rigid class and racial divisions that the traditional colonial structures had maintained.³² As in Victoria, a hostile establishment ridiculed the suggestion that the masses could be transformed and criticized the 'waste' of public resources. Critics within the Department of Colonies in The Hague advised the Minister of Colonies bluntly that the ordinary Javanese was not yet ready to be trained up to become a professor: he was first and foremost a farmer and his evolution could only be gradual. The departmental note added:

... this proposal [concerning the expansion of native education] is simply foolish! Where will the theories of this utopian director lead us? Because it is simply utopian to assert that we could proceed in this way under fine sounding slogans such as 'education is the greatest good' and 'more must be done for the native from whom the money comes' and so on. Should this be applied to the medical service, the railways, irrigation and so on, where would it end? [Sections] A1/2 [of the Department of Colonies] consider the proposal too stupid to give it any attention, including the principle upon which it rests.³³

Two colonial progressives or new nationalists

Despite their significantly different social contexts, personal backgrounds and terms of office (Abendanon lasted only one five-year term while Tate continued in office for another 25 years) numerous parallels can be drawn in the educational circumstances confronting the two directors of education in these neighbouring colonial states and their responses to them. Both were, socially speaking, new arrivals, forming a 'new class' that had been produced by and was dependent on the expansion of the state, and, for both, bureaucratic careers allowed them to scale the social barriers. Tate's family background of failed petty entrepreneurs would, but for his bureaucratic success, have set him apart from the circles he was later to inhabit. Abendanon's

31 Stuurman has explored the development from *laissez-faire* or conservative liberalism to progressive or social liberalism in Dutch politics (Stuurman, *Wacht op on daden*, 1992) while its colonial equivalent, generally referred to as 'the ethical policy', received its postcolonial analysis in the work of Locher-Scolten, *Ethiek in fragmenten*, 1981. Her analysis has been adopted by Abendanon's biographer, Van Miert.

32 In Dutch colonial historiography, Abendanon's position is defined as advocating 'association', that is of the natives with the Dutch. The key advocate of this policy was the colonial policy adviser and influential fellow member of the Bataviaasche Genootschap, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (J. Coté, 'Colonialism and Modernity in Indonesia: Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and Islam in Indonesia', *Journal of Arabic, Islamic & Middle Eastern Studies*, 3/1& 2 [1996–97], 23–50, 70–93).

33 Memorandum Dept. A1/A2, Ministry of Colonies, 23 January 1902 quoted in Van Miert, *Bevlogenheid*, 1991 58. The same memo continued: 'It is really ridiculous and high time that this director was more restrained....'

Jewish-Portuguese and merchant background would appear to have separated him ethnically and culturally from the more staid Protestant Dutch colonial élite (although his Batavia still reflected touches of its former Portuguese influences). Both men thus had personal experience of how the institutions of civil society could be used as vehicles for personal advancement. For both, it would appear, their pathway to becoming educational and social reformers commenced in the 1890s when the experience of the effects of the local social and economic fractures produced by the worldwide recession galvanized them into social action.³⁴

Although the two directors were, in a sense, migrants, by the time each came to occupy a leadership role they had been long enough in their land of adoption to feel themselves committed to their respective countries. Both came from ambitious families that sought to take advantage of the apparent opportunities for social and economic advancement in these colonial New World settings. Abendanon's merchant and banking family had already established itself in the Dutch West Indian colony of Suriname and had him sent to The Netherlands to study law, migrating to Java in 1875 to join the colonial law service. Tate's parents migrated to Victoria from Britain in 1855, one family amongst many caught by the gold fever of the times. Positioned outside their respective social establishments, and as migrant settlers perhaps less permeated by the colonial mentalities of their adopted homes, they fulfilled the role of class (and race) intermediaries. Noted by contemporaries as inspired by their cause and as energetic workers for social change, they continued even after their retirement from public office to be involved in imperial and international education reform movements. Significantly, both can be seen to have been members—both metaphorically and literally—of a broadly based alliance of professional, commercial and bureaucratic men who had grouped in the capital cities of both states by the end of the nineteenth century and who were defining modern social and cultural agendas. Underlying such agendas was the rejection of the irrationality of traditional colonial and class hierarchies, assumptions about the efficacy of a more rational social order based on merit and function inspired by a belief in social harmony as a basis for 'progress'.

There were, of course, some fundamental differences in their situation. Abendanon was operating in what was classically a colonial state and society, with its clear racial divisions and where the economic and power privileges of a white élite were maintained by the military, bureaucratic and sexual forms of power. Here a minority community, reinforced by migration from the imperial metropolis, dominated the political, economic and social existence of a subjugated population. When he expressed an interest as a reformer in 'the education of the people', Abendanon was addressing the question of 'educating the native', thus directly challenging the fundamental structure of a colonial division of society. Abendanon saw a more equitable provision of native education as a fundamental responsibility of a modern colonial state—and as a fundamental element to its survival. For Abendanon, a Western education would raise the native to a 'higher level' and thus allow him (and her)—and convince him (and her)—to participate in the richness of universal (European) civilization.

34 Wagner describes the socioeconomic impact of the depression period as the basis of what he terms the 'crisis of liberalism' that characterized the Western intellectual discourse in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Wagner, *The Sociology of Modernity*, 1994.

Frank Tate, on the other hand, expressed little concern for Australia's indigenous or Asian immigrant population. The new nation of Australia was a white bastion in Asia, safeguarding the boundaries of the Empire. As an independent legislature, it was now in a better position to more adequately control the constitution of its 'national blood' according to its own perceptions of security and progress.³⁵ Race was as significant an issue here as it was in colonial Dutch East Indies—in its absence. When Tate spoke of the 'the people' he principally had in mind the working classes upon whose toil the future of the nation depended: those of the rural districts he had left behind in 1873 in his journey up the social ladder and those industrial classes whose children populated the huge metropolitan schools until they had fulfilled their compulsory school attendance requirements.³⁶ For Tate, education was to halt the decline of civilization as manifested in rural Victoria where 'the people seem to be relapsing into animalism'³⁷ and to humanize urban communities which, in a contradictory imaginary, were deprived of the humanizing contact with nature.

In the view of Abendanon and the colonial progressives in Batavia, a reformed, prosperous and unified Dutch East Indies would eventually (under the guidance of European settlers) form part of a greater Netherlands.³⁸ For Tate, a prosperous and autonomous Australia would contribute to a stronger empire and the continued dominance of the British race.³⁹ For both this meant rejection of past colonial dependence and the inauguration of an apparently more democratic settler nation. For both education was to be the means of achieving such a transformation.

Civilization, race and progressive education discourse in Victoria and Java

While a more detailed comparison of the educational development of these two colonies is beyond the limits of this paper, some indication of how educational reform formed part of a broader strategy of social change and reflected a broader intellectual shift in both communities will be attempted here. Central to contemporary debates in both countries was the issue of 'civilization': the nature of culture and, in particular, the implications here of race and genetic inheritance and intelligence. These debates emerged from the mid-1880s in both countries and were expressed in a range of contexts. In colonial Java, the racial 'other' was obviously a more potent and immediate concern, but fears of decline in 'racial stamina' within the European community and of racial difference were discussed with equal passion in Victoria. In Java the condition of its European working-class 'stock', mainly of mixed European and Javanese parentage, as the basis of the colony's economic prosperity and security *vis-à-vis* the overwhelming numbers of the colonized population was no less an issue than it was nationally in Australia where the more xenophobic saw themselves—and continue to see themselves—surrounded by a racially and culturally inferior, and (contradictorily) dangerous, human tide.

35 See Walker for the discussion of this debate. Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 2000, Ch. 14.

36 Selleck's biography clearly shows Tate's abhorrence of country life, his attraction to the rural gentry but also his attraction to the rural mythology popular in his day (95–102). Tate returned briefly to the Victorian countryside between 1895 and 1899 as an Inspector of Schools.

37 Selleck, *Frank Tate*, 1982, 96.

38 In the 1920s the Dutch East Indies was granted dominion status and thus the European community at least was in the same relationship to the mother country as were Australians.

39 This was explicitly argued in his *School Power—an Imperial Necessity* (Melbourne: Imperial Federation League of Australia, 1908).

As already indicated, both Tate and Abendanon participated in influential cultural circles in which, broadly, the horizons of the new society were being imagined. In Melbourne, the minutes of the monthly meetings of the Beefsteak Club, inaugurated in April 1886, form an informal record of the cultural and scientific debates amongst ‘men of influence’ that fashioned the progressive discourse motivating educational reform. Batavia had its equivalent groups amongst which the *Bataviaasche Genootschap voor Kunsten en Wetenschappen*, the scientific and cultural society whose membership similarly defined the cultural intelligentsia of the colony, was the most prominent. But in Java the progressive lobby was probably more clearly articulated in sections of the media. A survey of these two more informal cultural institutions will be used to map out the parameters of the ‘progressive discourse’ in the two cities.⁴⁰

The minutes of the Beefsteak Club are a record of the papers given each month as after dinner speeches by members. Outgrowing the traditional preoccupation, typical of such nineteenth-century male clubs and debating societies, of celebrating a taste of ‘the greats’ and the well-springs of ‘civilization’, the minutes of the Beefsteak Club meetings reveal a noticeable shift in its assumptions about the nature of ‘culture’. Rather than assuming culture to be static, the sum of a given quantity of arts and beliefs, there is a much more fluid notion of culture as the expression of race as variously reflected in, or obstructed by, science, technology or cultural traditions. And, towards the end of the century, there is an increasing fascination with the connection between cultural expression, biology and individual psychology. Increasingly, papers on any topic alluded to, or were couched in terms of, or consciously addressed the idea of, ‘evolutionism’ in the sense of progress whether in scientific, social or cultural form. In addition, old distinctions between ‘science’ and ‘culture’ or ‘civilization’ are ignored and both are addressed as essential elements in the history of human progress. In brief, the papers, despite their diversity, express a celebration of a progressive European civilization that nevertheless hints at, and in some cases predicts, a threat to the continuation of progress in the future without the transformative intervention of science.

In the early years of the club’s history, older Beefsteak members, such as University of Melbourne classics professor Tucker, the Melbourne physician Patrick Maloney, engineer William Ievers and businessmen Frank Stuart and James Deegan—all also members of the older, more literary-oriented Melbourne Shakespeare Club—maintained a more traditional conception both of club life (as literary discussion society) and of the place of culture in society. Their cultural views can be characterized as Romantic and their social philosophy liberal and individualist. In applying these traditional concepts to colonial Australia they implicitly conceived of culture in evolutionary terms but saw colonial society as deprived of the lifeblood of civilization evidently embedded in the social institutions of ‘home’.

40 The emphasis here, intentionally, is on men’s associations. In the Dutch colonial context I have written on the role of Dutch feminists and feminist discourse in the colonial reformist project (J. Coté, ‘Our Indies Colony’: reading first wave feminism from the periphery’, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 6 (1999), 463–84. See also E. Locher Scholten, *Women and the Colonial State: Essays in Gender and Modernity in the Netherlands Indies, 1900–1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000). A growing literature exists on women and the colonial project and for Australia see M. Lake, ‘Colonised and colonising: the white Australian feminist subject’, *Women’s History Review*, 2/3 (1993), 377–86; P. Grimshaw, ‘A white woman’s suffrage’, in *A Woman’s Constitution? Gender and History in the Australian Commonwealth*, edited by H. Irving (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1996).

'Modern civilization' and the 'new generation' in colonial Australia was 'deficient in fervour and originality' and Young Australians 'were ill-formed on the same monotonous social pattern, wore clothes of uniform cut, had namby-pamby airs and were characterised in all things by dullness and mediocrity'.⁴¹

For businessman Stuart, social mobility was a threat to a conservative cultural and social order: young colonials were too eager 'to emigrate from the country' and the desire to become 'professional men, business men and clerks was too prevalent'. 'Our present mental state', he asserted at the end of the economic boom of the 1880s, 'is a state of smartness. . . . We are smart, but not learned; more given to the practical and energetic than to the poetic' although he thought this was probably typical of a young community.⁴² Alfred Deakin, the future Australian prime minister and guest on this occasion, disagreed and believed that in time 'green gardens and golden orchards' would be established in 'tracts that were [now] desolate and useless' as well as 'substantial towns . . . where people would find society and entertainment and cease to long for city pleasures'. He also saw positively the much maligned (and class-based) enthusiasm for football, as 'an expression of modern life and modern character' reflecting the 'spirit of competition'. All in all, for Deakin 'our national spirit was responding to the necessity of our environment, our substance as a nation . . . pouring itself into the moulds placed for it'.⁴³

The classics scholar, Tucker, was similarly pessimistic. He rejected Deakin's evolutionary positivism and argued the necessity of the mental disciplining of the young country:

In no age is it more necessary to think straight, and to get humanity at large to think straight, than it is at present. The noisy wheels of so-called progress are making dust fly thick all round and there is much difficulty in groping our way through the clouds. Democracies more than any other form of government require to be warned of the meaning of thinking straight.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, he too was an evolutionist, believing that in time the '[r]acial defects [of colonial society] would disappear by intermixture of blood and the free interchange of ideas'. He had in mind an intermixture of more British blood into the colonial pool. The barrister Samuel Leon rephrased this concern in more modern language asserting that 'civilized humanity' depended on the application of scientific ideas for the betterment of humanity (1889). His 'science', however, was little more than the maintenance of English institutions: an application of the principles of *laissez-faire* liberalism ('every man should be free to enjoy the fruits of his labour and that the rights of every man should be guarded by just laws'); the protection of 'our franchise, our land system and our Education Act'; support of 'our public library, national Gallery'; and ensuring 'we . . . kept ourselves free from the influx of foreign rubbish'.⁴⁵

41 William Ievers, BeM 4, August 1886.

42 Frank Stuart, BCM 38, 5 October 1889.

43 Alfred Deakin, BeM 38, 5 October 1889. Solicitor Potts, a founding member of the Beefsteak Club, also disagreed with the assessment of national character noting that 'the Federation movement was beginning to stir the mind and, under the influence of this, our customs and character would put on new form and colour. With the growth of national life the intellectual growth would keep pace and doubtless a national poet would in due time arise and guide our tastes and shape our aspirations' (BCM 4, August 1886).

44 Professor Tucker, BCM 49, November 1890.

45 Samuel Leon, BCM 43, 1889.

At the beginning of the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century these Liberal and culturally Romantic assertions about the state of colonial Australian society, based on implied definitions of Western civilization, were only beginning to be disturbed by a sense of racial otherness and new scientific ideas about human nature and genetic dispositions. It was particularly the contingent of new professional men who, responding to the gathering momentum of Australian nationalism, began shaping the agendas of the Beefsteak Club. In discussion and formal papers they explored what they saw as the impact of race and human nature on Australia's future prospects in positivistic and what might be termed scientific terms. In 1890 the barrister Leon introduced modern notions of innate criminality⁴⁶ and science professor Baldwin Spencer discussed notions of the innate difference in male and female intelligence (arguing that the 'process of reproduction was found to be almost antagonistic to the development of nervous tissue'). Science showed that 'the bringing about of intellectual equality between woman and man was a false ideal since 'in man, the frontal lobes, the seat of the highest intellectual faculties, were more developed than in women'.⁴⁷ Later he also 'proved' the innate difference of Aboriginals who, his research had shown, lacked religion, social structure or rational thought. Barrister McInerney discussed the inevitability of survival of the fittest within and between nations as an argument against socialism and as an expression of the British liberal ethos.⁴⁸ Two consecutive papers dealt with heredity, introducing the basic premise of eugenics as a social science to attack the problem of social and racial degeneracy. 'The children of drunkards inherited such degenerate conditions as insanity, idiocy, scrofula, deaf-mutism and tendency to phthisis and epilepsy', argued the physician O'Sullivan,⁴⁹ providing more specific detail to the earlier paper by Colonel Goldstein.⁵⁰

Progress for these men came to depend upon a more precise scientific classification—providing greater certainty in an age of increasing uncertainty—and the application of rational scientific remedies. Whereas in the late 1880s it was sufficient to believe that 'rational homes' and universities produced rational private lives and 'useful' and 'worthy' citizens and it was sufficient to dismiss socialism as a system that produced 'mental cripples',⁵¹ in the early 1890s a broader social view becomes apparent. For Goldstein for instance, the categories of the poor no less than the criminal and the insane represented an obstacle to social progress necessitating a scientific and professionalized intervention into poverty alleviation and an informed state.⁵² These new ideas increasingly intruded into oblique discussions of the current economic depression, Victoria's future and the state of other countries. In the sober mood of the depression, the gentlemen of the Beefsteak Club agreed that only a better understanding of 'Nature's laws', the encouragement of individuals rather than any idealistic attempt to improve society en masse, 'the intelligent perception of the causes of suffering and consequent self-restraint', together with the reproduction of 'healthy and intelligent stocks' and the replacement of 'the ungovernable and

46 Sameul Leon, BCM 47, September 1890.

47 Baldwin Spencer, BCM 62, April 1892.

48 McInerney, BCM 63, April 1892.

49 O'Sullivan, BCM 72, February 1893.

50 Goldstein, BCM 71, December 1892.

51 Discussions minuted in BCM 22, April 1888; BCM 17, October 1887 and BCM 9, February 1887.

52 Goldstein, BCM 50, February 1891.

unfit' by 'the intelligent and self-controlled', could ensure social and material progress. There was no 'easy fix', only careful analysis.

By the beginning of the century, these 'scientific' ideas were more confidently assumed in discussions and elaborated upon. They became central in the far better informed and more optimistic post-depression discussions about other countries and races, Australia's future after federation, and technological progress. Physician J. W. Barrett, who joined the Beefsteaks in 1892 and was by then already revealing his versatility as social and educational reformer (he was to become the major influence in remodelling the University of Melbourne), laid less stress on innate racial character and gave more importance to the transformative power of modern education.⁵³ Based on his own observations overseas, Barrett was ready to criticize the 'mother country', that is Great Britain, for its technological backwardness in comparison with the technological advances in Germany and Japan.⁵⁴

The most prominent issue of the 1900s, which simultaneously represented the first years of the new nation, was how to retain, first, England's and more generally the Empire's, and more broadly still white Europeans', superiority in the evolution of human progress. It was one of the oldest members who initially raised the 'Coloured problem' apropos 'a straggling procession of some twenty dusky individuals from whose neck downwards all indication of Oriental magnificence had ceased'; 'a number of little yellow men in naval uniform, officers of the Japanese training ship' who had recently arrived in Melbourne; and Melbourne's remaining Chinese immigrants who 'washed and gardened, sold weird comestibles and presided at fan-tan tables'. These local examples were but portents of a much greater problem. The empire's 'coloured problem' amounted to 458,130,000 subjects ('260 m. turbaned friends, 190 million Negroes, ... 2 million Malays, 3/4 of a million Chinese, half a million Australian blacks, 115,000 Redskins, 65,000 Arabs and 43,000 Maoris'), about whom 'the boldest advocate of Imperial development might well be dismayed by the possibility of having raised such a Frankenstein'. The 'problem' in Dr Fletcher's view, was, first, how 'we' were to preserve our predominance over the coloured races, while still retaining them within the Empire; and second, how to preserve the Caucasian as the leader of the world's destiny. After listing the defective characteristics of each of the races under English protection as well as the 'eradicable duplicity' of Chinese and Japanese, his solution was to open Africa as 'the destination of our surplus native races' (the Empire's and Australia's) and to encourage more British migration to a White Australia.⁵⁵

The thrust, if not the details, of this view had been incorporated in the new nation's first piece of national legislation, the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 and was widely supported. His medical colleague, James Barrett, proceeded to address the 'coloured question' more scientifically in a paper from which Tate later borrowed heavily. It was not only race characteristics that would maintain British or European characteristics, he maintained. It was rather, as the example of Japan made evident, also dependent on 'the supremacy ... in science, commerce and manufactures. The character, the industry and the business intelligence of the race were therefore the essential conditions for the maintenance of this gigantic and

53 See Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives*, for a biographical essay on James Barrett.

54 James Barrett, BCM 147, May 1900; BCM 149, July 1900; BCM 151, September 1900; BCM 158, July 1901.

55 Fletcher, BCM 168, July 1902.

unwieldy Empire.⁵⁶ The solution to national and ultimately race supremacy was education, and that had to begin with the improvement of elementary education by:

... discourtenancing the importance attached to examinations and further, of scientific technical education. Once the scientific method was utilised and proper inquiry made, results would soon make their appearance. There must be a right and a wrong way of preparing everybody for their particular business in life. The future of the Empire depended on the re-organisation of methods of education and of their extension to fields hitherto unknown and uncultivated ... unless a radical change were effected, the supremacy of the nation would become a thing of the past.⁵⁷

None of these ideas was in itself novel, remarkable or peculiar to contemporaries' ears. The minutes of the Beefsteak Club merely recorded the conversations of the times and suggest in conveniently summarized form a trajectory of progressive thought across a generation. These were the ideas, as Selleck has shown in his intimate biography of Tate, which were garnered by people like Tate and which, in espousing them, made Tate the man of his times and the man for the job. Further, the modern discourse of the time thrust education and educational reform to the forefront of the solutions to what was perceived to be the contemporary problem: the promotion of the evolutionary path of human development in which England and the British, and more broadly Europeans, had until now led the way. The modern insight showed that 'culture' or 'race' or 'genetic inheritance' were no longer sufficient in their own right but had to be articulated through, and tempered by, systematic education. The development and proper ordering of education therefore had become the primary task of modern government. At the same time, education had to secure and maintain internal social order: effective education would more adequately produce a more stable and productive society by promoting true ability. Thus what was essential was the establishment of a rational and national system of selection through education.

Colonial progressives in the Dutch East Indies colonies had reached a similar conclusion. Most clearly defined in the leading progressive journal on colonial affairs, *De Indische Gids* 1878, published in The Netherlands, a progressive colonial settler reform agenda had emerged in the last decade and a half of the nineteenth century which demanded greater colonial autonomy in the conduct of political and economic affairs, the promotion of settler private enterprise and 'the rational, intellectual and moral education of the native'. The journal's progressive liberal proprietor, Carla Eliza van Kesteren (supported by Pieter Brooshooft, the editor of his colonially based daily newspaper, *De Locomotief*), envisaged the promotion of an indigenous peasant farming economy; the rational restructuring of the colonial bureaucracy; the development of modern rail, road and telegraph communications; the application of science to improve agriculture and livestock production; and the expansion of education as the basis of modern colonial Java.⁵⁸ Over 20 years, van Kesteren's papers hammered out a blueprint for a prosperous colonial state governed by a strong white settler community but which integrated 'the natives' as a modern working and consumer class while offering the native aristocracy the possibility of entering European society.

By 1900 this reformist agenda had been widely accepted and government commissions were being instigated to implement some of its less radical proposals. One

56 Barrett, BCM 171, 11 October 1902.

57 Barrett, BCM, 171, 11 October 1902.

58 Inaugural editorial, *De Indische Gids*, vol. 1, 1879, 3–5.

major commission into native welfare, the *Mindere Welvaart Onderzoek*, which took a decade (1904–14) to investigate all aspects of native economy, concluded that an indigenous workforce was essential for the colonial economy but that their welfare was dependent upon the native's ability to adapt to the demands of an industrial colonial economy. This necessitated the expansion of education for:

[i]t will not be necessary to point out that education will be the main means whereby a population—at a stage of development behind that of other races in the same land with which it is increasingly coming into contact—can be brought to a more equal status with those other races, and thereby make it economically stronger. Seen in this light—which must be the case in an investigation into the lesser welfare of the population—then . . . it is apparent that such education cannot be arranged simply with an eye on the needs of that population within its own life world; it must meet the higher demands of the daily intercourse with those higher level races if it is to be raised from its backward position and not always to be the victim in interaction with those other population groups.⁵⁹

While the voluminous report concluded that the ultimate cause of native backwardness was native character, skills and attitudes and the interrelated effects of climate, religion and culture, the impact of these conditions could be neutralized, it believed, by assisting natives to 'tak[e] over the work habits of the more civilised, imitating the European example, and the improvement of hygiene'. While commissioners agreed that 'a people's nature cannot be changed in an instant, increasing interaction is already having more impact than could have been achieved otherwise' and eventually, it concluded echoing Frank Tate's allegory, 'the native himself comes to recognise his needs and to realise that they are no longer unreachable'.⁶⁰

In colonial Java, however, it was not only 'the native' who represented a working class in need of transformation. There was also a large poor urban mestizo community that formed the disadvantaged, working-class rump of European society. This attracted the attention of the more conservative concerns of colonial intellectuals for whom racial degradation loomed as large a threat as it did in colonial Australia.⁶¹ Here also there was a concern that a declining white race would be overwhelmed by coloured races or, as the Commission investigating urban pauperism phrased it in 1903, there was 'a situation which, given the place which it is deemed desirable for the European element of the population here to occupy in the midst of a native population, is not satisfactory' and therefore posed 'a threat to the existing order'.⁶² This investigation, while admitting certain structural factors such as the changing requirements of employment and lack of education facilities, saw the fundamental question as one of the negative character traits of the paupers themselves. The overwhelming conclusion that had to be accepted was, argued the Pauper Commission in 1903:

. . . if the battle against pauperism is to be waged, that battle in the first place, will have to be waged against those factors innate in the persons themselves, which would otherwise remain an obstacle for them in extracting their advantage from what this land and society could offer them.⁶³

59 *Mindere Welvaart Onderzoek*, IXb, Overzicht (Batavia: Landsdrukkereij, 1912), 312.

60 *Mindere Welvaart Onderzoek*, De Volkswelvaart Xb, Part 2 (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1914), 108.

61 The difference was of course that in Java, a minority white population was directly confronted by an overwhelmingly larger native population (approximately 75,000 Europeans to 25 million Indonesians) while with the Aboriginal populations largely discounted, Australian fears projected a more hypothetical image of a small white nation in an Asian region and, even more theoretically, as a white minority in a globally dominant coloured population.

62 *Het Pauperisme onder de Europeanen in Nederlands Indië 1901–02* (Batavia Landsdrukkerij, 1902), 5.

63 *Het Pauperisme*, 12.

The commissioners consequently presented what was a radical departure from an earlier *laissez-faire* political philosophy, in suggesting that:

... the right of the state to intervene with regard to Europeans in its employment—whether they be officials in the civil service or [military] officers—in private life where this cannot be seen to accord to general moral standards, should not be ruled out.⁶⁴

Although this did not exactly excuse the individual from exercising moral self-discipline (in this case the Commissioners were referring to mixed-race marital relations of its soldiers), it meant that the state had the right and the duty to oversee and constrain the expression of the individual's cultural and genetic make-up. Once again the essential message was that the patient had to be made to try the medicine and after that the medicine would, it was hoped, be self-administered.

Articulating a progressive education in Victoria and Java

The reform project that Abendanon himself articulated reflected the ideas that were generally circulating amongst the more progressive members of the colonial bureaucracy and the élite circles in the colonial capital. In a paper he gave to the Law Society in 1896, Abendanon had set out a broader case for Dutch colonial moral responsibility for native welfare than was apparent in the official inquiries undertaken while he was director. In it he rehearsed the by then well-known progressive liberal critique of contemporary colonial policy. He went on to suggest that the future of the colony was ultimately dependent on the relations between Europeans and natives, and thus, whatever the future of the colony, the civilizational task for which the colonial state was responsible was, 'to raise up the native in a moral, intellectual and industrial sense'. Currently schools failed to raise 'the natives' beyond a level of infantile intellectual development and failed to develop in them a sense of 'moral responsibility', evidently the key to civilization.⁶⁵

Abendanon argued that improvement in educational standards demanded an improvement in teacher training and the recruitment of more native teachers.⁶⁶ Above all it required the reintroduction of Dutch-language education which, he believed, was the key to accessing higher civilization. He was critical of conservative policy that restricted Javanese access to Dutch language in both educational institutions and within the civil service.⁶⁷ In non-academic education, schooling needed to be less mechanical, more practical and vocationally oriented. The weak economic position of the native flowed not from inherent flaws in the Javanese character but 'from the lack of training, [from the influence of] the entire environment, the organisation of the state [and] its political principles' and from the general position of dependence to which the native was assigned.⁶⁸ Indigenous economic activity could be fostered by introducing practical and craft activities into elementary schools and by the development of specific training establishments and state-supported craft exhibitions and craft 'depots' which could foster the development and sale of native craft production.⁶⁹ In 1898 Abendanon encouraged the *Bataviaasche Genootschap* of which he was secretary to take on the role of promoting and organizing the sale of

64 Het Pauperisme, 46.

65 Abendanon, 'De Rechtsongelijkheid', 1896, 228.

66 Abendanon, 'De Rechtsongelijkheid', 229.

67 Abendanon, 'De Rechtsongelijkheid', 1896, 231–2.

68 Abendanon, 'De Rechtsongelijkheid', 1896, 229–30.

69 Abendanon, 'De Rechtsongelijkheid', 1896, 230.

native crafts in Batavia in conjunction with commercial firms.⁷⁰ Beyond the expansion of limited opportunities provided for native education and vocational training, Abendanon criticized the failure to open the civil service to educated Javanese, quoting the tragic case of his friend from student days, the Javanese aristocrat Raden Mas Ismangoen Danoe Winoto, the only instance of an Indonesian entering the European bureaucracy since the 1864 legislation permitting this.

At the broader social level, Abendanon envisaged that those Javanese not drawn up into the colonial strata via education would largely remain within their traditional world. In an extensive report on native economy in 1904 he emphasized the need for gradual economic improvement and social change, and the necessity that modernization not disturb the harmony of the traditional village. Here education was to dislodge the inefficient rhythms of traditional village life but not change its essential character. His blueprint for the stimulation of Javanese indigenous industry implied a romanticized image of traditional village craft industries and of villages as sites of harmonious social relations contrasting with modern life. The villager, however, needed to be made *'weerbaar'*, able to withstand modern economic forces by being trained to establish capital accumulating enterprises.⁷¹ Government assistance in the form of credit facilities, and the provision of machinery, and raw materials such as wood and salt, as well as technical information and guidance, would modify traditional practices. The marketing and exhibition of craft production would stimulate 'the interest of the world market' but the establishment of village craft cooperatives to supply that demand would provide only a supplementary form of income alongside the eternal agricultural cycle. These modifications would make the Javanese economy largely self-sufficient but contain the bulk of the indigenous population securely within an overarching colonial structure and subservient to the European colonial economy.⁷²

Colonial conservatives systematically opposed Abendanon's educational reforms intended to modify the structural barriers of colonial society. They included attempts to relax restrictions for entry into the European elementary school system, the extension of subsidies for private Dutch-language courses and the reintroduction of Dutch to First Class native schools and the expansion of élite training institutions for indigenous civil servants. The response to these initiatives was that such facilities were not wanted, not necessary and too expensive. His project to establish girls' boarding schools was opposed on the grounds that this concept 'would have created an imbalance in the native society which would have produced the most tragic consequences in both social and marital life'.⁷³

70 Abendanon pointed to the current dependence of native craft on the patronage of royalty and the indigenous aristocracy reminiscent of medieval European craft but, even here, the native craft industry was limited by the lack of financial resources to enable the commodification of production. *Notulen, Bataviaasche Genootschap*, 4 January 1898, vol. xxxvi, 1899.

71 J. Abendanon, *De Middelen welke van staatswege ... kunst en nijverheid te bevorderen*, *De Indische Mercur* (24 July 1904), 512–14.

72 Abendanon's list of 'useful' native industries included the processing of natural fibres by weaving and plaiting to produce mats, bags, rope, carpets, paper; the preparation of timber for houses, boats, furniture and carriages; the exploitation of oil from coconut, peanut, kapok and other fruits; the manufacture of soap, leather, ceramic ware, tiles and porcelain and cigarettes and cigars. *De Indische Mercur*, 514.

73 Quoted in Van Miert, *Bevlogenheid*, 1991, 67. The advice continues: 'More development of the man and his gradually increased contact with European society will in time have an influence on the position of the girl and the woman, and then only could it be said that a need for more education for women existed, and only then, in the view of the Governor, will the time have arrived to provide greater opportunities for the education of women.'

Abendanon was essentially a liberal driven more by a faith in intellectual enlightenment than practical understanding of native society or colonial economics. He was progressive with regard to 'the native' by assuming that environment (including the political environment of colonialism), not innate malignancy or inability (the 'lazy native' assumption common in his day), was the cause of the Javanese subservient position in the colonial hierarchy. His reformist Utopia pictured a pluralist society in which a benign state instituted a harmonious collaboration based on a shared culture and the fulfilment of assigned roles. This was in effect the colonial version of a metropolitan liberal progressive view of a meritocratic society in which concepts of class (like race) were replaced by scientific notions of development determined environmentally or (in the colonial context, more straightforwardly) through racial evolution. For the progressive colonial bureaucrat like Abendanon, the rationalization of colonial society meant the assimilation of 'the native' into society. The first step in this assimilation was the definition of race where 'race' normally stood for 'culture'. In this debate progressives needed to show how reform would ultimately bridge or remove the cultural divide; reactionaries needed to rationalize their view of its ultimate unbridgeability. Nowhere was this issue more central than in the area of education policy.

Frank Tate, when asked what he considered was the function of elementary education at the 1899 Royal Commission into Technical Education (convened to determine what was to be done about the education of the working class), responded that 'relevant' practical and manual education would 'encourag[e] a desire in the minds of the children to stay on the land'⁷⁴ and 'reduce a craze to come down to town and get into the Railways or some other Government department' while ensuring 'a more intelligent application of the mind to the work in hand'.⁷⁵ Tate's social vision for the new nation, despite his call for reform, ultimately rested on a romantic image of a rural yeomanry essentially similar to Abendanon's views on the Javanese villager. If romantic, it also had significant conservative social implications, which were at the heart of a planned meritocracy. On the other hand, Abendanon could also agree with Tate that practical and relevant education would not be added to a programme 'for its utility alone'⁷⁶ but had a much broader civilizational role. For both directors, cultural 'difference', the central feature of the nineteenth-century colonial condition, had become an obstacle to modernization and the creation of a modern state. While not to be obliterated, plurality had to be rationalized. Social progressives in both states could agree that 'it will pay the country to give as free and as liberal an education as it can afford'⁷⁷ since '[e]ducation is giving mental development through the acquisition of instruction'.⁷⁸ But, like Abendanon, Tate was in fact concerned to limit social change, to induce social and economic modernization and to raise the level of cultural and moral standards without greatly altering the 'natural order', to incorporate the working class more effectively into the social and economic structure of a modern society without destroying the 'natural competition' which a meritocracy would provide. If a progressive education was intended

74 Minutes of Evidence, *Royal Commission into Technical Education* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1901), Question 1121.

75 Minutes of Evidence, Question 1126.

76 Minutes of Evidence, Question 1178.

77 Minutes of Evidence, Question 1273.

78 Minutes of Evidence, Question 1272.

effectively to transform a colonial class-based society by the substitution of a modern society based on differences in ability it did not intend to significantly alter the cultural, racial and gender order.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has suggested in this summary of two contemporary debates that the educational solutions advocated and to some extent implemented in two quite different political contexts were, essentially, similar. Broadly, despite the different social, cultural and racial characteristics, the two educational reformers envisaged a similar social problem and a similar solution. Education was the main tool in achieving a new social harmony in a changing world. Such education had to both induce change and contain change. Solving the problems of colonial social disorder involved social progressives in two moves: first the dismantling of traditional society and its social structures and second the institution of new structures based on a new set of social rationales, central to which was the establishment of an articulated universal system of education. Despite indications of greater democratization in the social visions social and educational reformers appeared to promise, the changes in educational provision effectively consolidated rather than liberated the target social categories within newly defined boundaries. The educational strategies proposed by these social reformers constitute the core of what can be termed progressive education.

‘Colonial’ is not a term normally applied to a discussion of Victorian education and yet technically of course Victoria was a colony until December 1900. Education was crucial in the production and maintenance of colonial social structures, not least in settler societies such as Australia. Colonial educational structures were instrumental in maintaining a colonially dominant élite and colonially imposed culture in nineteenth-century Java and Victoria both in terms of the white settler community’s relations to its imperial parent culture and in terms of colonial culture’s relations with its colonized other. The veiled presence—if not the constructed absence—of Australia’s colonized natives did not, as the reported debates suggest, change the colonial nature of education debates in the colonial period. Nor did the fact that the ‘native hordes’ existed outside the boundaries of the island nation. The educational reform being implemented in the state of Victoria in the new nation of Australia in the first years of the new century were constructed within the same colonial/imperial context as those in the continuing colonial state of the Dutch East Indies. Frank Tate’s reforms to uplift the moral, cultural and economic calibre of the Victorian working classes duplicate those being directed at (primarily) a Eurasian settler community in Java but they are also comparable to proposals addressing the ‘uplift’ of the Javanese worker. ‘School power’ Tate stated (and Abendanon had also implied) was ‘an imperial necessity’. It was a suitably mechanistic and colonialist aphorism for the new pedagogy of applied learning. Progressive education was thus centrally implicated in the reconstruction of both the colonial and the post-colonial state.

In colonial Dutch East Indies, the evident European colonial domination continued for a few more decades, although the reforms advocated by colonial progressives did represent in principle recognition of the extension of civil society to include the Indonesian. The educational solution arrived at in the state of Victoria with regard to the incorporation of the lower social orders was effectively similar. The new nation (or at least this section of it) offered educational equality to a social category previously denied access to the cultural goods of society, but in practice

hedged this by layers of grading and institutional structures to ensure that actualization of this offer was severely restricted. On the other hand, whereas the Victorian working classes saw some benefit from the combined educational and social compromises introduced by progressive liberalism, it was the apparent contradiction between the reality of continued sociopolitical domination and economic exploitation and the symbolic gestures that colonial progressivism implied that inspired Indonesian nationalist leaders to demand the national emancipation that had been symbolically inferred. There was no revolution in Victoria!