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Panel Session 5D: French Juvenile Correctional Institutions: Views from Below, from the Periphery, and From the Radical Press.

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Within “l’Enfer des gosses”: Unprecedented Multi-Media Indictments of Child Abuse in French Juvenile Prisons via Illustration and Mass Circulation of Inmate Testimony by Anarchists. *L’Assiette au Beurre*, Circa 1907.

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### **Revised Version After Peer Review.**

At a time when young, innocent asylum-seekers face life-threatening mass incarceration under deplorable, degrading conditions on the southern border of the United States, American scholars have a heavier obligation to demonstrate the historic formation of principled opposition to the state-sponsored abuse of youth inmates maligned as deviant or incorrigible by ignorant, demagogic, and lying political leaders.<sup>1</sup> The tumultuous history of public controversies over state

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<sup>1</sup> See Nick Miroff and Robert Moore. “7-Year Old Migrant Girl Taken into Border Patrol Custody Dies of Dehydration, Exhaustion.” *The Washington Post*. 13 Dec., 2018, p. 1. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/7-year-old-migrant-girl-taken-into-border-patrol-custody-dies-of-dehydration-exhaustion/2018/12/13/8909e356-ff03-11e8-862a-b6a6f3ce8199\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.40f0cbc0eca6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/7-year-old-migrant-girl-taken-into-border-patrol-custody-dies-of-dehydration-exhaustion/2018/12/13/8909e356-ff03-11e8-862a-b6a6f3ce8199_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.40f0cbc0eca6) (Accessed 15 June 2019.) See also

efforts to suppress juvenile delinquency during the French Third Republic offers excellent points of comparison.

In the history of French prisons for youth, the Parisian *maison d'éducation correctionnelle* of La Petite Roquette remains notorious. (See Figure 1.) Under construction from 1825 and taking its first child inmates from 1 November 1836, the hulking Petite Roquette subjected its young incarcerated to progressively stricter regimes of total cellular confinement and punishing sensory deprivation.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, successive modes of incarceration endorsed by the French state elicited enormous oral and textual debates within the halls of power and amidst a growing, learned, specialist monograph literature on prison reform and effective correction and rehabilitation of malefactors young and old.<sup>3</sup>

However, the early twentieth century saw a burst of unprecedented, coordinated, multi-media exposés on state-sanctioned abuse of imprisoned French youth. These revelations came mainly from the raucous and ill-disciplined, illustrated serial popular press of the capital. One instructive sample of such innovative, publicized investigations of a great youth prison from the inside out can be found in the 30 November 1907 edition of the *Assiette au Beurre*. (See Figure 2.) The *Assiette* was the longest running radical, anarchist-inspired, beautifully illustrated, and popularly acclaimed weekly in the Parisian print worlds of the era. Most notable here is the innovative graphic fusion of an eloquent former juvenile inmate's written testimony about the actual somatic and

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Miriam Jordan. "8-Year Old Migrant Child From Guatemala Dies in U.S. Custody." *The New York Times*. 26 Dec., 2018, p. A1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/us/guatemalan-boy-dies-border-patrol.html> (Accessed 15 June 2019.)

<sup>2</sup> On La Petite Roquette see Henri Gaillac, *Les Maisons de Correction* (Paris: Editions Cujas, 1971), 61-68. Patricia O'Brien, *The Promise of Punishment: Prisons in Nineteenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 125-130.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Vicomte d'Haussonville, *Les Établissements pénitentiaires en France et aux colonies* (Paris: Levy), 1875.

psychological effects of his dehumanizing imprisonment combined with a sequence of jagged, unprecedented images displaying the institutional degradation of youth deemed delinquent by the state. The artists of these images intended to stagger viewers by revealing the grotesque, daily brutalities prison staff inflicted on child detainees under a regime of strict solitary confinement. This exposé textually and visually catalyzed viewers' outrage over these abuses by emphasizing the very young ages and myriad vulnerabilities of incarcerated children.

The *Assiette's* collaborating graphic artists made an entirely new, garish public record of the Third Republic's multiple penal failures. They threw a harsh light on the miserable isolation blocks and deeper, hidden, pitch-dark punishment cells for kids at La Petite Roquette. This hellish place drove vulnerable, serially abused child inmates to insanity and suicide. It was "l'enfer des gosses."<sup>4</sup> In such popular, widely circulated exposés, I think, one finds new and strong evidence for the decisive, transformative impact of left-wing, illustrated, popular serials on contemporary French currents of prison reform especially affecting youth. Moreover, as penned by authors and artists welded by strong anarchist politics, these exposés demonstrate the power of starkly illustrated French weekly, cosmopolitan serials to project and fulfill a prime ambition of European anarchism: honest, collaborative, and collective artisanal labor liberating humble audiences from the bankrupt moral and administrative pretensions of profoundly corrupt, bourgeois, "law and order" states. In the workrooms and pages of the *Assiette*, La Petite Roquette became the picture-perfect embodiment of such a repressive, immoral, and dysfunctional polity.

Designed by Hippolyte Lebas, celebrated architect, professor of art history, and member of the Institut de France, the thickly walled Petite Roquette imposed the constant surveillance of

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<sup>4</sup> "Hell for Kids." Term employed by the former Roquette inmate and eye-witness, Miguel Almercyda, in *L'Assiette au Beurre*, No. 348, 30 Nov. 1907, 566.

Benthamite pan-optic incarceration. By ministerial decision in 1836, the structure was designated as a prison for young detainees, a *maison d'éducation correctionnelle*. Sprawling over 25,000 square meters, with 588 separate single cells measuring a paltry seven by eight feet, the institution adopted by 1840 a strict cellular isolation (*isolement cellulaire stricte* or *intégral*) for each detainee. For child inmates, this meant a perpetual solitary confinement day and night punctuated by a single hour of daily exercise taken alone in one walled *promenoir* constantly under a guard's watchful gaze. In daylight hours, each inmate got tedious piece work assembling fans, making costume jewelry, stringing pearls, or filing and polishing cast metalwork. Inmates were forbidden to speak unless directly queried by a staff member. House rules entirely prohibited communication between inmates. Absolute silence was to be maintained under threat of more humiliating sanctions including confiscation of bed linen from the talkative, reduction to bread and water for the obstreperous, and banishment to the all-black punishment cells (the dreaded *cachots*) for any who verbally insulted a jailor or protested any of the conditions of their confinement including their tedious, mind-numbing production work so profitable to the state. Prison directors imposed these measures to maximize official discipline of inmates. Supervisors became convinced that near total silence would encourage beneficial introspection, contrition, and humility within the incarcerated boys. Consistently forced to contemplate all alone their prior misbehavior in total silence would deeply spur delinquents' rehabilitation into docile, domesticated, and productive citizens.

The strictures of this isolating rule prohibited any common hall or any common refectory. These atomizing rules even demanded a re-built chapel divided into 276 blindered stalls. (See Figure 3.) There, appropriately isolated and contrite imprisoned youth might view the officiant but were prevented from ever communicating with or even seeing fellow miscreants at any point during the service or at prayer. Even given names got prohibited at Roquette. Staff only referred to each inmate by his cell number often over months or even years on end. By April 1847, Victor Hugo

defined this kids' reformatory as "a cloister, a hive...a city built from a mass of infinite solitudes. Nothing but children who never hear one another...separated by a wall, an abyss."<sup>5</sup> Foucault identifies La Petite Roquette as the first site in France where stringent cellular imprisonment became the disciplinary norm.<sup>6</sup> By 1840, Petite Roquette housed 449 child inmates, that vast majority on a strict isolation regime.<sup>7</sup>

From 1836 to at least 1929, the population of young inmates fluctuated as high as 600 but rarely fell below 200 at any given time.<sup>8</sup> Prisoners sent to Petite Roquette after court sentencing could range in age from thirteen to nineteen years old. However, children as young as six could be punished there for up to three months at a time if mothers or fathers could convince local police authorities on cursory inspection that their progeny were incorrigibly delinquent and in immediate need of the state's "paternal correction" delivered in one allegedly special wing of the prison. Thus, over time, a significant proportion of the prison's juvenile inmates were thus officially innocent, never having been convicted of any crime before any official tribunal of state justice. Some believe that a disastrous royal visit by Empress Eugène on 22 June 1865, during which her highness was booed and spat upon by insolent delinquents, led to the closure of the place and exile of its denizens to penal farm camps.<sup>9</sup> This is certainly not the case. The pique of Imperial philanthropists soon evaporated. More than a decade later, a persistent population of juvenile inmates at La Roquette included Parisian youngsters accused of various crimes, kids awaiting trial on more serious charges

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<sup>5</sup> V. Hugo, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Ollendorf, 1913), Tome 25, 242-250, here at 242, "Choses Vues. La Prison des condamnés à mort," (April 1847).

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1991), 235.

<sup>7</sup> O'Brien, *Promise of Punishment*, 126.

<sup>8</sup> Michelle Perrot, "Sur la Ségrégation de l'Enfance au XIXe Siècle," *Psychiatrie de l'enfant*, XXV, No. 1, 1982, 179-206, here at 200.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

before various city tribunals (*prévenus*), youth convicts under age 20 serving court sentences of six months or less, and even younger boys deemed incorrigible by their parents and committed to state imprisonment for more rigorous paternal discipline. But some convicted adolescents who pulled longer sentences also ended up confined there. All such detainees continued to do very hard time in Petite Roquette up until the 1920s.

Indeed, subsequent parliamentary investigators of the cellular isolation regime got assurances from Roquette's own staff physician that even stints of up to twenty-three months in solitary detention had no discernible ill effects at all on the physical health or spirit of youths so confined. For the 1872-73 *Enquête parlementaire sur les prisons*, the house physician, Dr. Mottet, inventoried how 148 young detainees at Petite Roquette had amassed a total of 2,126 months in cellular confinement (an average of at least fourteen solitary months per inmate).<sup>10</sup> Dr. Mottet confidently opined that none of the isolated youth suffered impaired health from their sequestration itself. Whatever medical problems his closely surveyed patients presented stemmed solely from congenital or pre-existing illnesses in mind or body detrimental long before their rigorous incarceration began. This was to be expected for a majority of his inmates, all poor boys from degenerate families.<sup>11</sup> Complicit Catholic clerics, like the Abbé Crozes, almoner there, long endorsed the cellular regime at La Roquette, seeing in it the perfect, quasi-monastic conditions to inspire excessive but salutary guilt and deep penitence among the imprisoned. Such brutally enforced contrition would ultimately add

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<sup>10</sup> See Dr. Charles Mottet. "Réflexions sur l'influence du régime cellulaire sur la santé." In *Enquête parlementaire sur les prisons* (1874), 193-198. See also École nationale d'administration pénitentiaire (Enap) "Histoire et patrimoine pénitentiaire. Emprisonnement individuel—débat 1840-1945." <https://www.enap.justice.fr/histoire/emprisonnement-individuel-1840-1945> (Accessed 2 Oct. 2018.)

<sup>11</sup> Mottet, "Réflexions," 197.

to the ranks of the faithful, the indoctrinated, and the submissive, actually enhancing the spiritual welfare of all.<sup>12</sup>

Such officious endorsements of deeply beneficial solitary confinement for delinquent children echoed through new monographs on modern and proper state penal systems penned by widely influential elite authors. In a noted treatise of 1875, the Vicomte Paul d'Haussonville, a former rightwing member of the National Assembly and respected conservative authority on public policy, stoutly defended La Petite Roquette's curious but enduring solitary confinement program for delinquent youth. For Haussonville, the bizarre and dangerous, communicable social pathologies of cunning Parisian street kids demanded the firm repression and separation that only La Roquette's still operational solitary punishment system could apply and enforce. Haussonville asserted: "the Paris street urchin, to borrow a trite but very true nickname, is a type apart and must be subjected to the strictest controls."<sup>13</sup> Haussonville identified Parisian child delinquents as the worst of all French criminal youth. Physically stunted but sharp-witted and inveterately rebellious, they were entirely impervious to any effective correction via agricultural labor in the rural penal colonies also in vogue at the time.<sup>14</sup> Incurable Parisian rebel children had to be separated from more impressionable detainees, preferably locked up on site, and always segregated. Zealous philanthropists molly-coddling such subversive kids had to be ignored and the most severe regimes of imprisonment maintained for these peculiarly dangerous metropolitan brats. Their youth notwithstanding, these

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<sup>12</sup> For a cogent synopsis of French Catholic senior prelates' opinions on the moral and spiritual police benefits of solitary confinement for delinquent children see Jean Lebrun. "Cloître et guérir. La colonie pénitentiaire de la Trappe 1854-1880." In Micelle Perrot (ed.), *L'Impossible Prison* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 236-276.

<sup>13</sup> See d'Haussonville. *Les Etablissements pénitentiaires*. Here at 398-399. "Le gamin de Paris, pour nous servir d'une expression triviale mais consacrée, présente un type à part qui demande à être traité avec des procédés particuliers."

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

budding subversives manifestly threatened public welfare. In their artful repost, creators of the *Assiette* denounced such false official certitudes and visibly emphasized the very young ages of child detainees showing the absurdity of labeling such youngsters as incorrigible.

Amidst the stolid complacency of French clerics, nobles, and medical doctors studiously amassing data on strictly imprisoned youth, Eugène Bonaventure Jean-Baptiste Vigo fell into La Petite Roquette at the age of seventeen on 28 May 1900. A lowly paid, non-resident apprentice to a Parisian studio photographer and way behind on his rent, the young Vigo foolishly accepted a gold coin purloined from the boss's purse by the man's own son, a lad sympathetic to Vigo's predicament. When dad pressed charges for petty theft and accepting stolen goods, Vigo suffered because he was already known too well to the neighborhood Paris police for prior attendance at local anarchist meetings.<sup>15</sup> After a cursory, five-minute interrogation before the presiding magistrate, Vigo pulled a sentence of a hard two months in La Petite Roquette. Upon his release, the vengeful Vigo attempted to blow up the jurist who railroaded him through his first delinquency trial. Surreptitiously stalking his target, the would-be assassin noted that the hasty judge paid a daily visit to a neighborhood *pisoir* near the courts—an isolated place to strike with little risk of collateral casualties. Fabricating a small bomb comprised of magnesium flash powder and other photographer's chemicals activated by a crude fuse, Vigo attempted to blow up his quarry in the public urinal. But the detonator failed. Vigo fled. Investigating police scooped up the dud, noted its curious charge of photo chemicals, and filed the weapon away as forensic evidence. When Vigo got rounded up in a later dragnet of suspected anarchist sympathizers, the cops put two and two together immediately arresting the photographer's apprentice for fabricating weapons. Condemned

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<sup>15</sup> For details on Vigo's early political formation and deep anarchist sympathies, especially for Spanish activists, see Jonathan Almonsino, *Miguel Almereyda (1883-1917). De l'anarchisme à l'union sacrée* (Sarrebruck: Editions universitaires Européennes, 2012), especially 15-23.



at trial on 21 June 1901 for gross delinquency and suspected traffic in explosives, Vigo drew a full year back in the hands of his abusive jailers at Petite Roquette. Vigo was amnestied in 1902 but only twenty days before the expiration of his full sentence. Upon his release, Vigo definitively adopted the alias Miguel Almereyda (stolen he claimed from a chivalric romance novel). The new Almereyda threw himself into an incendiary career as anarchist author, militant journalist, and public lecturer determined to reform the French state's punishing judicial system and its relentless, desensitizing attacks on imprisoned children.<sup>16</sup>

The new Vigo/Almereyda found a perfect vehicle for his prison reform campaign in the *Assiette au Beurre*. Still going strong six years after its launch, this fully illustrated, irreverent, and muck-raking weekly was an unusual and artful hybrid publication. It was best known for the stable of premier French and international graphic artists empowered by the editorial staff to choose the main theme of each issue. Those notable artists, working singularly or in teams, could then compose original, eye-catching, mixed media illustrations for mass circulation via photo-engraving. Great graphic artists could partner (should they wish) with similarly engaged, sympathetic authors furnishing either simple comic picture captions or more extensive, contentious prose contributions on the week's often outrageous leading theme. This innovative, broadly critical production method richly appealed to popular audiences looking for a visual joke or thrill. It also attracted more well-heeled graphic art connoisseurs who carefully bound up their subscription issues of the *Assiette* in museum-quality folios by month, quarter or year. Key to the *Assiette's* success over its remarkable, radical twelve-year run was its directors' willingness to showcase innovative printing techniques,

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<sup>16</sup> For key background details on Vigo's (Almereyda's) tumultuous life, see the entry "ALMEREYDA Miguel" in the online *Dictionnaire des anarchistes*, via Maitron at University of Paris 1: <http://maitron-en-ligne.univ-Paris1.fr/spip.php?article155252> (Accessed 24 Sept. 2018.)

utilize a variety of high-quality paper stocks of different colors, and indulge artists by employing varying inks and color schemes suitable to reproduce en masse their signature styles with the help of highly skilled master printers.

Almeryda's artistic partner in the Roquette issue was Aristide Delannoy. Superbly trained as a painter at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Delannoy soon became an ardent proponent of anarchist and anti-militarist causes. Switching effortlessly to graphic illustration, Delannoy developed a bold, mordant, confrontational style through which he attacked the brute inequalities and violent hypocrisies of the Third Republic.<sup>17</sup> (See Figure 2.) Under tight Parisian police surveillance, Delannoy also labored for militant journals like *L'Almanach de la Revolution* (1902-1907), *Les Temps nouveaux* (1905-1910), and *La Guerre Sociale* (1906-07).<sup>18</sup> Delannoy was a stalwart illustrator for *L'Assiette* contributing hundreds of designs and more than fifteen complete illustrated issues over the entire run of the publication. In 1908, Delannoy's scathing visual denunciations of French colonial army atrocities in Morocco (showing the commanding general in a bloody butcher's apron wielding a huge sanguine knife) led to police raids on his studio, arrest, trial, condemnation, a massive fine, and hard prison time that ultimately destroyed his fragile health.

In 1907, Delannoy and Almeryda combined to display boldly the terrible dehumanizing effects of child imprisonment at Petite Roquette. Counter-attacking complicit doctors in church and state, the investigators capitalized on Almeryda's personal, eye-witness testimony of his own

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<sup>17</sup> For a cogent introduction to and sharp visual survey of Delannoy's popular graphic works see Henry Poulaille, *Un Crayon de combat. Aristide Delannoy* (Saint. Denis, Le Vent du Ch'min, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> Delannoy's movements and frequentations were closely followed by agents of the Paris Police. Rich details of this surveillance covering all aspects of his life political and artistic are available in Delannoy's voluminous secret police dossier, Archives Police de Paris, BA/1028.

adolescence terribly blighted by his two ordeals inside the prison. The November 30 1907 issue of the *Assiette* stands out historically because, I believe, it is the earliest instance in France where a former juvenile inmate's blatant, personal account of the physical and psychological wounds inflicted on him by a state penal institution got graphic, multi-media coverage via a mass circulation illustrated serial. With weekly press runs hitting 25,000 copies or more in Paris alone, selling briskly at metropolitan sidewalk kiosks and at newsstands in train stations across the country, the *Assiette* was a potent amplifier of public disgust and popular protest over the constant abuse of vulnerable, incarcerated children at the hands of vicious state jailors.

Almeryda dismisses outright all state claims for careful, graduated, scientific punishments of juvenile detainees depending on their age and the severity of their offenses. Behind Roquette's thick walls, all kids tossed in get the same regime of squalid accommodation and brute intimidation regardless of whether they have been condemned by court sentence or merely suspected of delinquency by parents handing them over for temporary "paternal correction."<sup>19</sup> What's worse, sadistic guards treat all newcomers to the same abusively violent reception. Waiting for the shift change to maximize their forces, guardsmen make a show of leaving the cell blocks. As unwary new inmates call across to their fellows or start up forbidden conversations, the guards--doubled in force--creep back in. Suddenly rattling and brandishing their massive rings of huge iron keys in a deafening clanging wave of sound echoing down the blocks, staff jailors throw open the steel cell doors of miscreants, charge in, terrorize, and punch up the offenders—using the giant keys like brass knuckles to pummel inmates' torsos. Such blows leave no tell-tale traces on the prisoners' whitening faces. New detainees' cries, pleadings, and tears pierce the din, carrying down the blocks as a warning to all others now even more intimidated and silent in their cells. Some of the stifled,

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<sup>19</sup> *L'Assiette au Beurre* No. 348, 30 November 1907, 566.

Almeryda imagines, even derive a perverted pleasure from vicarious experience of the rookies' vocal misery.

According to Almeryda, the guards' own backgrounds and current professional frustrations only heighten child inmates' risk of violent mistreatment. A plurality of guards at Roquette, often southerners or Corsicans, are former non-commissioned officers in the French army prompt to physically assault all subordinates. As in the ranks of the Parisian police under the Third Republic, former army soldiers and NCOs get special priority for all new correctional staff openings. For older recruits, Petite-Roquette is a dead-end job with no hopes of further promotion. Drowning their professional frustrations in drink, often inebriated guards lash out more violently against the inmates menacing and pummeling them unmercifully. Almeryda has seen this all too often and Delannoy translates that first-hand testimony into lowering visions of hulking guards with their favored tools of physical abuse looming over very young, defenseless children. (See Figure 4.) Note in Figure 4 the set of big, bad keys in the guard's reddened right hand busting through the right frame side of Delannoy's picture. The menacing caption conveys the brute jailor's admonition to the previously abused child inmate: "Don't strut, watch yourself, you know you've only got one eye left!"

Audaciously, in the pages of this issue of *Assiette*, Almeryda specifically names several alcoholic, vicious guards and precisely locates the prison coordinates of the merciless beatings they gave ill-fated detainees.<sup>20</sup> Raucous, accusatory serials like the *Assiette*, flouting all the libel laws, gave aggrieved and vengeful leftists unique opportunities to denounce their exact state tormentors by name and memorialize their many victims via searing words and images. Such capacity to testify, to name names and verbally confront one's prior abusers aloud has been identified by psychologists as

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 571 and 577-578.

essentially therapeutic for abuse victims attempting to surmount post-traumatic stress syndrome. Almereyda and Delannoy, via the *Assiette*, took that therapy and projected it nation-wide.

At Roquette, the continual physical abuse of child inmates is undeniably systemic. With inmate feeding manipulated as a coercive weapon by a cruel staff, detainees, forbidden to share any food, suffer constant hunger pangs. Continual malnutrition (“une faim obsédant”) induces disorienting hallucinations among imprisoned and isolated boys. Trying desperately to escape that stalking hunger, they often resort to gnawing on their prison-issue leather boots or on the wooden stools in their barren cells.<sup>21</sup> Past meal times, no uneaten rations may remain in the cell and must be discarded. Testifying as “le prisonnier E.V.” (Eugène Vigo), Almereyda reports seeing some inmates, desperate, voracious with unrelieved hunger, furtively even resort to snatching uneaten morsels from the squalid communal garbage pails into which all inmate waste gets tossed.<sup>22</sup> Delannoy’s shard of an illustration (see Figure 5), splayed across the page, ripped from any frame, aptly conveys one child’s ragged hunger. Here, French anarchists, via an innovative visual culture of their own, level another blow against the duplicitous bourgeois state. It usually starves, never nurtures the young children it falsely claims to cherish.

But in La Petite Roquette, it gets worse. Naturally rambunctious and chatty kids do not take well to an enforced regime of absolute carceral silence. Isolated boys speaking up or speaking out at any time invite more direct physical attacks by jailors. Talkative repeat offenders face additional deprivations of bed linen (making sleep on bare bed boards almost impossible). They are denied even menial hot food rations. Others get trips to dreaded isolation cells, painted all black, freezing in winter, and crawling with vermin in summer where total silence reigns uninterrupted. There the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 568.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 568.

only sustenance is hard bread and water. In Almereyda's observations, such recurrent physical abuse leaves isolated children stultified and perpetually fearing guards' approach. Child inmates become nervous wrecks, trembling uncontrollably, aphasic, and often muttering low to themselves if only to hear a single human voice in the absence of any solace from another living being. Almereyda was there. He knows this.

Testifying again as the "prisonnier E.V.," Almereyda asserts that ten months of enforced near total silence in Roquette cost him a quarter of his former operating vocabulary.<sup>23</sup> Once familiar words died within him as a consequence of his terribly restricted speech. Even a year after release, he testifies directly to the reader that his capacity to carry on ordinary conversations remains severely impaired as intermittently he cannot remember or employ correctly even the most common words and phrases. Here, post-traumatic stress apparently wreaks havoc on a boy's rhetorical skills even after liberation. Such appalling, forced linguistic impoverishment of the young, a vicious and absurd, retrograde state sanctioned disability, blatantly contradicts all official claims that cellular systems of incarceration actually promote better education of inmates.<sup>24</sup> The first rule of silence, savagely enforced by taciturn guardians, traumatically deprives children of their voice with lasting and terrible psychological consequences. Almereyda can now use the unique expressive resources of the *Assiette* to publicize a new and wounded child psychology from the viewpoint of a former delinquent youth

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 574. On the day of Almereyda's release from his second stint in La Roquette, an anarchist comrade testified that:

"He no longer knew how to speak. He looked for words and found none...amidst the hell of Petite Roquette, he had unlearned speech. Shocked, disintegrated, and overwhelmed by a belated freedom, he was no longer awake, unaware, and uncomprehending. I found him stupefied." Victor Méric, "Miguel Almereyda," *Les Hommes du Jour*, No. 180, 1 July 1911, 2.

<sup>24</sup> On these absurd claims by senior penitentiary staff and paid witnesses for the French state, see O'Brien, *Promise of Punishment*, 128-29.

gravely maltreated and stifled in a state prison. This unprecedented textual and visual campaign of protest against savage punishment of imprisoned youth attacked head-on as hypocritical and destructive all claims by penal experts that the republican state exercised any ameliorative educational effect on wayward youth via its prisons.

But a constant, gnawing physical hunger and even starvation of their speech were by no means the only somatic and spiritual deprivations kids suffered at Roquette. Mandatory line-ups of half-naked young inmates occurred weekly as doctors and guardians hunted down the skin diseases endemic among child prisoners. (See Figure 6.) The kids' heads routinely got shaved in a futile official effort to cut down on the spread of lice. Notoriously insubordinate detainees also were often forced to undergo such jail cuts just before their release. They thus re-enter the civilian world plainly marked as ex-cons, set up for more discriminatory abuse from society at large. They emerge shorn and now incapable of finding the gainful work sparing them another return to state prisons. (See Figure 7.) The inmates' extreme vulnerability to communicable diseases only worsens their plight, becoming another somatic mark against them. A number of *Assiette* artists, including Delannoy, make this inescapably clear through multiple editions of the journal spanning 1907 and 1908. Coming out, these children gain only a provisional liberty and the Third Republic only succeeds in creating perpetual, inarticulate, frustrated, and vengeful criminal wards of the state. Their rates of recidivism can only increase as they move inexorably from bad to worse regimes of abusive incarceration within a hypocritical and dishonest, wretchedly corrupting correctional state.

*Assiette* artists assert that juvenile prisons enforcing sensory deprivation, lexical dysfunction, hopelessness, and despair among their youngest inmates drive their most vulnerable detainees to self-destruction. Chronic recidivism is not the worst outcome here. Common child inmate suicide is the greatest indictment of the Third Republic's failed, inhumane police state offering many juveniles

no justice at all. Almercyda and Delannoy look unflinchingly at kid prisoners dead by suicide (see Figure 8). They compel a mass circulation audience to do the same. In multiple contemporary print venues, Almercyda asserted that a rising rate of suicide among French juvenile detainees at both city prisons and rural farm rehabilitation camps became the greatest spur to his protests of a corrupt, retrograde, and inherently destructive national prison regime.<sup>25</sup> He noted that another child suicide at Petite Roquette on 19 September 1907 precipitated his joint issue of the *Assiette* with Delannoy in November.<sup>26</sup> This was one more tragedy that complicit state agents did everything in their power to hide, excuse, or dismiss when they did not aggravate the injuries of children driven to self-destruction. Here we descend into the darkest circles of “l’enfer des gosses.” Almercyda, as the former “prisoner E.V.,” reports precisely that in March 1902 a desperate, despairing, thirteen-year-old Roquette detainee (only in for “paternal correction”) launched himself off the top of the stairwell in 4 Block.<sup>27</sup> Broken, with a fractured skull, bleeding profusely, and slipping into convulsions, the kid’s screams echoed in all directions across the building. The first guard on scene, attempting to pick up the dying child, shook him violently and shouted, “if you continue to jerk around I am going to slap you real good.”<sup>28</sup> The depraved indifference of the guardians, routinely joking crudely to insult children made desperate by their abuse, comes across vividly in Delannoy’s harrowing scene of one ginger kid’s suicide at Roquette (Figure 8). As one jeering guard tells his pipe-smoking, unmoved colleague with the big keys: “That’s not a grown man, that’s just a kid. After

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<sup>25</sup> Besides Almercyda’s several pieces for the *Assiette*, see also his widely re-printed article “L’Enfance coupable,” first published in *Les Documents du Progrès. Revue Internationale*, 4, Juillet 1910, 20-24.

<sup>26</sup> *Assiette au Beurre* 30 Nov. 1907, 571.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 571.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 571. Adding a footnote here, Almercyda helpfully translates the argot employed by jailers and detainees at La Roquette.



all, he died wetting himself.”<sup>29</sup> Delannoy’s stark image here perfectly illuminates Almereyda’s disgust and must rank as one of the most disturbing pictures of official corruption ever circulated in the graphic media of the era.

In a welter of academic studies of French prison regimes made by historians world-wide after Foucault’s epoch-making *Surveiller et Punir* (1975), readers could discover that some nineteenth-century doctors and learned observers, with statistics in hand, demonstrated that rigorous cellular child detention resulted in death rates (including suicide) for juvenile inmates far higher than in more communal institutions or at penal farm camps.<sup>30</sup> French state penitentiary officials then marshalled their own teams of experts, including proto-psychiatrists and child psychologists, to argue the contrary. Those hired experts falsely praised the docility and productivity of formerly deviant children subjected to such draconian discipline in a truly beneficial regime that turned a decent profit for the state from more focused prison child labor. Amid a blizzard of contending opinions exchanged in learned journals and congresses, none proved decisive enabling the closure of places like La Petite Roquette.<sup>31</sup> As Almereyda’s eloquent testimony makes painfully clear, those cellular prisons for kids just went on and on and on, breeding up at places like Petite Roquette new generations of solitary inmates and provisional parolees grievously wounded, stunted in body, mind, and spirit, incapable of productive human relations or reintegration within bourgeois society.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 573.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, O’Brien, 129-131 and the French and Belgian original sources cited there.

<sup>31</sup> Neither Gaillac, O’Brien, nor Perrot acknowledge this sad fact—stating or implying erroneously that closure of La Petite Roquette to child inmates occurred in or around 1865. Almereyda’s testimony via the *Assiette* powerfully refutes such claims and the false periodization of French penal reforms targeting children first established by Gaillac (66) and then repeated by Perrot (200ff).

As multiple issues of the *Assiette* plaintively pictured, how long and how far would a callous, inhumane, carceral regime go on tutored by authoritarian experts to qualify childhood itself as a perpetually guilty state never above suspicion? A French state that absurdly deemed big city kids in particular as congenitally subversive and worthy of carceral segregation could hardly present itself as a moralizing, redemptive step-parent via its penal institutions. Other anarchist authors and artists collaborating at the *Assiette* starkly illustrated that contradiction with the cover page of the issue for 12 September 1908: *L'Enfance Coupable*. (See Figure 9.) From 1905 through 1912, resolute, allied survivors of that punishing prison system, like Miguel Almercyda and Aristide Delannoy, placed and coordinated more and more stunning textual and visual denunciations of that heartless, duplicitous regime in various innovative publications of the French popular press.

Led by the *Assiette*, it was this shocking graphic campaign, I believe, that reached a far wider cross-section of literate, artful urban audiences, catalyzing larger coalitions of activists and volunteers soon successful in achieving more thorough reforms in the administration of French juvenile justice. Although standard histories of French legal and prison reform in the modern era have largely neglected the role of graphic artists and radical journalists in fomenting such innovations, it appears to me that these artful actors played a key role in such belated achievements. At the *Assiette*, that campaign began in earnest in 1905. It reached peak activity in 1907-1909, fueled by timely exposés of new prison atrocities in which the nimble production teams at the *Assiette* specialized. Quickly melding topical themes with graphic artistry of enduring quality, the *Assiette* established a unique and critical vantage point. Collaborating artists and authors used *L'Assiette* to attack dysfunctional state penal institutions of all kinds, including miserable prisons for children and adults, corrupt and abusive farm penal camps for junior offenders (like Mettray—a celebrated special issue of 13 February 1909), French military prisons savaging miscreant young draftees, and state-run asylums for mentally ill children. Capitalizing on first-hand field reports starkly illustrated by celebrated

graphic artists, the *Assiette's* producers, I believe, gave compelling impetus to major contemporary reforms in juvenile justice. They achieved this, in large part, by highlighting how very young inmates suffered the most in grotesquely dysfunctional state prisons and detention centers. The new and protected legal status for children articulated in the *Code de l'Enfance* (1911) and an entirely separate system of state courts for administering juvenile justice (the *Tribunaux pour Enfants*) authorized and operational in 1912 can now be appreciated as the enduring institutional results of anarchist artistry channeled and amplified via the *Assiette au Beurre* and kindred graphic publications of the era. Those combined reforms steadily diminished the numbers of child inmates subjected to abusive confinement at La Petite Roquette.