DEFINING THE FRENCH EMPIRE: MEMORY, POLITICS, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY, 1860-1900

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ABSTRACT

Christina B. Carroll: Defining the French Empire: Memory, Politics, and National Identity, 1860-1900
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This dissertation explores the debates waged over the meaning and value of “empire” in Second Empire and Third Republic France. More specifically, I examine the shifting role played by “Napoleonic” or “continental” imperial models in the contested construction of France’s expansive colonial empire. I argue that for much of this period, French writers and politicians saw continental and colonial empire as related political formations. I employ a range of sources, including government policies, newspapers, journals, pamphlets, treatises, textbooks, and novels, to show that the memory of these older continental imperial models in fact shaped republican understandings of and justifications for the colonial empire they were building.

The relationship between “continental” and “colonial” empire, I contend, became particularly fraught in the wake of the Second Empire’s collapse during the Franco-Prussian War because popular publications came to associate the term “empire” with decadence, effeminacy, division, and defeat. In fact, the republican government that came to power in the shadow of the defeat defended its legitimacy by defining itself against the empire that preceded it. As a result, when republicans embarked on their own project of overseas expansion in the years that followed, they found “empire’s” negative associations troubling. Over the course of the next thirty years, they struggled to redefine empire, free it from its Napoleonic legacy, and justify their colonial ambitions.
My work focuses on the cultural and political transitions during the early years of the Third Republic that made “empire” acceptable in new terms. Its analysis demonstrates the ways in which discourses of European racial superiority over colonial others intersected with older arguments about the organization of the French state, and reveals how the conversation about empire became entangled in the ongoing struggle over France’s politics and national identity.
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INTRODUCTION: EMPIRES, REPUBLICS, AND FRENCH POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY

During the Third Republic, France embarked on a major project of colonial conquest, vastly increasing its territorial holdings in Asia and Africa. The government invested considerable resources in this expansion, but reservations about the wisdom of having an empire persisted, especially in the new Republic’s early years. During the 1873 revolt in Cochinchina and Cambodia, a number of politicians from across the political spectrum even maintained that France should give up both colonies, and they expressed misgivings about increasing French investment in the area. The reasons for these misgivings varied according to political leaning: while some radical republicans worried that maintaining an empire might undermine the principles of the new republican state, right-wing nationalists believed at least initially that pursuing an empire would distract the country from more pressing revenge against Germany in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. It was only in the early decades of the twentieth century that the new colonial empire became widely accepted, and even then, there was little agreement about the empire’s purpose, its administration, or its implications for French national identity.

1 Although the beginnings of the second colonial empire are usually dated to the 1830 invasion of Algeria, France did not acquire most of its overseas territories until after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. See Charles Sowerwine, France Since 1870: Culture, Politics and Society (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 89.


These disagreements about France’s empire partially stemmed from the early French Republic’s deep political and ideological rifts. But they also resulted from the fact that the very idea of “empire” had an ambiguous history that was bound up in political divisions and turmoil. Different writers, intellectuals, and politicians could link the concept to multiple governmental regimes and use it to signify either a particular political system within the territories of continental France or the state’s relationship to conquered, colonized territories overseas.¹

The memory of the Napoleonic empires – and especially the Second Empire – in many ways lay at the center of these tangled understandings of “empire” in the early Third Republic. Over the course of his reign, Napoleon III sought to provide shape and substance to his imperial regime by developing and popularizing a new “theory of empire.” In the early years of his rule, Napoleon III usually described empire as an internal form of political organization that drew on the legacy of the Revolution but tempered that legacy with the promise of order and security.² He thus treated “the French Empire” as functionally equivalent to “the French nation.” But in the 1860s, Napoleon III began to take a greater interest in France’s overseas territories. He tried to expand France’s foothold in North America by setting up a proxy emperor in Mexico, extended France’s investment in Indochina, and became interested in the conditions of his Arab subjects in Algeria. In the late 1860s, he began to describe Algeria as a “royaume arabe” – an Algerian

¹ The French monarchy had carved out the first overseas colonial empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which France lost in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to wars with Britain, revolution, and Napoleonic disinterest. But even as Napoleon sold French territory in North America, he attempted to establish a new European empire, which he hoped would extend into Egypt. He was eventually defeated, and the victorious powers replaced the empire with a monarchy. Later political leaders in search of popular support sometimes attempted to associate themselves with his myth: notably, when the July Monarchy invaded Algeria in 1830, the king self-consciously drew on the imagery of Napoleonic conquest and victory. And when Napoleon III declared himself Emperor in 1851, he too attempted to lay claim to his uncle’s reputation – not only through political propaganda, but also through colonial conquest. See Sudhir Hazareesingh, “Napoleonic Memory in Nineteenth-Century France,” *MLN* 120.4 (2005), 757.

kingdom with a culture distinct from France. This kingdom, he implied, was its own nation with its own national identity; it was not part of France. Instead, both Algeria and France were both subsidiary parts of a multinational multiethnic Napoleonic Empire, and he, at its head, was the emperor of both the French and the Arabs. This model—which proved deeply unpopular among settlers in Algeria and republicans in France—reconfigured the meaning of empire; it functioned as both as a specific kind of political system and as a way of organizing territories. Napoleon III thus merged “continental” empire with “colonial empire”—if not necessarily in an equal way.

The legacy of Napoleon III’s vision of empire was thus problematic for republicans in the early years of the Third Republic. France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War had tarnished Bonapartism generally and Napoleon III in particular in the eyes of much of the population. Despite its relatively brief duration, the conflict left France territorially dismembered and in debt to Germany, but it also brought about a political revolution and a subsequent civil war that left deep internal divisions. In the wake of this destruction, numerous popular publications and much of the press came to associate the very word “empire” with weakness, decadence, internal strife, and defeat. Indeed, the republican government that came to power in the wake of 1870-71 defended its legitimacy by defining itself explicitly against the imperial government that preceded it. As the republicans embarked on their own overseas empire-building project in the years that followed, the ambiguity of “empire” and its referents therefore became increasingly troubling—especially since their political opponents often made use of the ambiguities inherent

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5 In the aftermath, the republicans that came to power linked empire not only with authoritarianism but also with decadence, effeminacy, and decay. See Karine Varley, *Under the Shadow of Defeat: The War of 1870-71 in French Memory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 84.
in republicanism’s relationship to empire when they criticized republican-driven colonial expansion. Questions about the relationship between continental and colonial empire thus intersected with and complicated republicans’ attempts to solidify their political platforms and positions. Over the course of the next thirty years, they struggled to redefine empire, free it from its Napoleonic legacy, and justify their republican colonial ambitions. This project was, on the whole, successful: by the early decades of the twentieth century, the colonial empire became widely accepted across most levels of French society.6

This dissertation focuses on the cultural and political transitions during the early years of the Third Republic that helped make “empire” acceptable by defining colonial actions in new terms. It treats “empire” as a contested category in French public discourse, which individuals of different political and ideological persuasions attempted to define against one another by appealing to an array of models and historical memories. It focuses specifically on the relationship between continental and colonial understandings of empire, and considers how the memory of Bonapartist continental empire influenced and challenged beliefs about overseas empire in Third Republic France. It traces how these understandings shifted over time in response to political changes within France itself and to the expansion of French holdings overseas. These transitions show that “continental empire” and “colonial empire” were far from clearly defined concepts in late nineteenth-century France. French writers, intellectuals, and politicians disagreed just as fervently about their individual content and significance as they did about the nature of their similarities and differences. Indeed, especially under Napoleon III and in subsequent years, not everyone even agreed that they were distinct ideas. I thus do not treat “continental” and “colonial” visions of empire as two inherently separate models. Instead, I

6 Aldrich, Greater France, 100.
analyze how these two visions became separate models during the late nineteenth century and trace the way that “colonial” empire gained increasing support even as “continental” empire lost its appeal in response to changes within both France and its overseas territories.

This process of defining empire was not only important because of its effects on French republican ideology and French colonial policy. It also became entangled in highly politicized debates about French national identity that had become especially pressing after the military disaster and subsequent civil war of 1870-71.7 As socialists, radicals, republicans, legitimists, and Orleanists searched for ways to define France in the wake of defeat, empire, because of its semantic, historical, and political ambiguity, came to operate as a shared discursive field that all groups attempted to appropriate for their respective visions of what it meant (or did not mean) to be French. As a result, defining “empire” and interpreting its meaning in specific colonial contacts became an important component of the debates about the nation and national identity.

I examine this conversation about empire and its relationship to national identity as it transpired in the Third Republic’s overlapping political, intellectual, and popular circles. This analysis is in dialogue with the insights of post-structuralism and the new intellectual history, which, as Elizabeth Clark explains, “explores the material embeddedness of ideas and their relation to power… [and] appeals to climates of opinion, literary movements, ideologies and their diffusion, and to an anthropologically infused notion of culture.”8 By analyzing a mixture of official political speeches, newspaper and journal articles, theoretical treatises, academic histories, political propaganda, novels, and short stories, I unearth the themes and tensions that

characterized debates about the meaning of “empire” and trace how these debates shifted over the course of the late Second Empire and the early Third Republic. I also show how this ongoing public negotiation over the meanings of empire became intertwined with political power struggles and came to inform elite and popular culture.

In order to analyze the intersection of empire, republicanism, and national identity in late nineteenth-century French popular discourse, this dissertation poses three sets of questions. First, how did different writers, intellectuals, and politicians attempt to define the meanings and value of empire across this period? How, for example, did they envision the specific relationship between continental and colonial empire? Second, how did these contested understandings of empire intersect with the changing internal configurations of French politics? Which political groups, for example, mobilized particular definitions of empire, and for what reasons? How did these arguments for or against empire change as republican colonial expansion gained speed? Third, how did different views of empire share or reflect particular visions of the French nation?

By addressing these questions, this dissertation contributes to several different historiographical conversations. On the most basic level, it is in dialogue with the ever-growing body of work on the French colonial empire and its influence on the metropole. Over the past thirty years, a range of political scientists, post-colonial theorists, literary scholars, and historians, arguing against the idea that imperialism and colonialism only affected colonized subjects, have demonstrated that imperial expansion and encounters with non-European peoples deeply influenced French elite and popular cultures during the Third Republic. Moreover, they

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9 This scholarship has, for the most part, focused on a different aspect of empire than my own work; it tends to examine French representations of the “other” instead of looking at how these representations intersected with French memories of earlier empires. See, for example, Tony Chafer and Amanda Shakur, “Introduction,” in Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France, ed. by. Tony Chafer and Amanda Shakur (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 3; Eric Jennings, “Visions and Representations of French Empire,” The Journal of Modern History 77.3 (September 2005), 701-721; William Schneider, An Empire for the Masses:
have shown how, despite their apolitical pretentions, French scholarship, literature, and art often legitimized and perhaps even drove French imperial expansion. Writers and social scientists in particular played an important role in developing an array of ideological tools to solidify and justify French rule over colonized peoples. Popular writers and elite scholars thus were not only affected by France’s colonial empire; they also played an active role in shaping the republic’s colonial policies. This dissertation draws on these insights, but it also considers how polarized political debates within the metropole itself influenced political, literary, and academic visions of empire and imperial expansion.

Some scholars have looked more specifically at the content of republican justifications for empire and considered the nature of their relationship to French republican ideals. Much of this work has focused specifically on the idea of the “civilizing mission,” which, many historians have claimed, played a critical role in reconciling the republican commitment to equality and

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democratic politics with the practice of colonial domination.\textsuperscript{11} Alice Conklin’s \textit{A Mission to Civilize}, for example, argues that French republicans’ embrace of the civilizing mission “obscure[d] the fundamental contradiction between democracy and the forcible acquisition of empire.”\textsuperscript{12} According to Conklin, republicans justified conquering other peoples by claiming that France would end the “barbarism, poverty, and isolation” of African (and other colonized) peoples and bring them the benefits of technology, medicine, education, and legal practices. At the same time, they promised to grant colonized political rights once they had transformed into rational, republican citizens. However, as Conklin points out, the republic never fulfilled its promise of equality. And French republicans themselves were slow to see “the discrepancy between ideal and reality” at least in part because “French racism often worked hand-in-glove with more progressive values.”\textsuperscript{13} Conklin thus argues that the contradictory conflation of scientific racism and republican universalism made the practice of republican empire possible and stresses a process of ideological reconciliation during the Third Republic.


\textsuperscript{12} According to Conklin, this civilizing mission had become the “official ideology of the Third Republic’s vast new empire” by 1895 – although its roots predated the Third Republic. It “rested on certain fundamental assumptions about the superiority of French culture and the perfectability of mankind. It implied that France’s colonial subjects were too primitive to rule themselves, but were capable of being uplifted. It intimated that the French were particularly suited, by temperament and by virtue of their revolutionary past and current industrial strength, to carry out this task. Last but not least, it assumed that the Third Republic had a duty and a right to remake ‘primitive’ cultures along the lines inspired by the cultural, political, and economic development of France.” See Alice Conklin, \textit{A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1-2.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, 256.
Other scholars have taken issue with this argument that colonialism “contradicted” republican ideals. In *The French Imperial Nation-State*, Gary Wilder contends that “racism and colonialism” should not be treated as “signs of the absence or failure of republicanism understood one-sidedly as universalism.”¹⁴ Instead, he insists, French republicanism always incorporated both universalist and particularist dimensions and that both intersected with colonial discourses in complex ways.¹⁵ As a result, even if colonial conquest, institutionalized racism, and authoritarian bureaucratic rule contradicted some republican ideals, these practices did not contradict republicanism itself.¹⁶ This dissertation draws on this understanding of the dual nature of French republicanism. At the same time, however, it demonstrates that even if republicanism could accommodate colonial conquest, many republicans in the 1870s were concerned that the two were contradictory because of the associations between “empire” and authoritarian government. Republicans’ attempt to fashion a specifically republican model of empire was thus not only shaped by the contradictory legacy of the Revolution but also against the legacy of continental empire.

Wilder’s work does not only seek to reframe the conversation about French republicanism’s relationship to colonialism; it also articulates a new understanding of the relationship between the republic, the nation, and the empire. The republic, he insists, was not

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¹⁵ He contends that this dual character of French republicanism dates to the Revolution, which insisted that “‘men are born and remain free and equal in rights’ even as it also announced that ‘the principle of sovereignty rests essentially in the nation.’” Wilder identifies this moment as “the founding antimony between universality and particularity” because it simultaneously invested all men with rights and tied rights to membership in a specific group. This antimony, he argues, was embodied in “the citizen,” which not only distinguished between “national” and “foreigner” but distinguished between members of the nation who could access political rights and those deemed incapable of meeting the “criteria of individuality, rationality, and autonomy.” See ibid., 16.

¹⁶ According to Wilder, this was not simply because particularism undermined the republican ideal of universalism. Instead, they often worked together to constitute racist practices and ideas. See ibid., 19.
simply affected by its overseas colonies; it was “articulated with its administrative empire to compose an expanded and disjointed political formation.” This colonial formation was neither strictly an empire or a nation but an “imperial nation-state” that served as a complicated constellation of both. Wilder thus situates republicanism and colonialism within a discussion about the connections between empire and nation – a subject that remains, despite some recent scholarly attention, understudied. Most of the existing scholarship devoted to the subject has focused on the intersections between empire, nation, and politics in formerly colonized countries, such as India. As a result, modern “empire” has often been understood as a transitional form of political organization that precedes and ultimately leads into the self-contained nation-state. However, as scholars such as Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper have made clear, the relationship between empire and nation is infinitely complex; nations build empires, and states move between imperial and national configurations. Moreover, as scholars focusing especially on Britain have repeatedly shown, “empire” can become a central component of national identity itself. Wilder contends that in France, empire and nation also merged into “a political form

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17 Ibid., 2.

18 There are some works that consider the relationship between empire and nation in nineteenth-century France. For examples, see Michael Evans, ed. Empire and Culture: The French Experience, 1830-1940 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Daughton, An Empire Divided. For a twentieth-century example, see Charles-Robert Ageron, “L’exposition coloniale de 1931: mythe républicain ou mythe impériale?” in Pierre Nora, ed., Les Lieux de Mémoire, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard Quarto, 1997).


20 They argue that nations and empires are structured differently from one another. While empires are “large political units, expansionist or with the memory of power extended over space, polities that maintain distinction and hierarchy as they incorporate new people,” nation-states are “based on the idea of a single people in a single territory constituting itself as a unique political community. The nation-state proclaims the commonality of its people… while the empire-state declares the non-equivalence of multiple populations. The concept of empire presumes that different peoples within the polity will be governed differently.” See Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 9.

21 Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler
founded upon the antimony of universality and particularity that must nevertheless be analyzed in relation to political economy and in historically specific contexts.”

He thus argues that the “imperial nation-state” did not remain static. But at the same time, linking “empire” directly to “nation” and placing them into a unitary (if disjointed) configuration makes it difficult to see how the content of each term and the relationship between them changed over time. This dissertation demonstrates that in fact, for much of the nineteenth century, “empire,” “nation,” and “republic” were shifting conceptual categories that sometimes referred to state structure and at other times referred simply to particular political practices. Collapsing them into one structure – however complex - obscures the complicated ways that politicians, writers, and theorists articulated these ideas in the last decades of nineteenth-century France.

( Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997): 1-56; A. G. Hopkins, Globalization in World History (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 25; Krishan Kumar, “Nation-states as empires, empires as nation-states: two principles, one practice?” Theory and Society 39. 2 (2010): 119-43. Timothy Baycroft has looked at this relationship more specifically in France. His article, “The Empire and the Nation,” examines representations of the empire in the images and identity of the French nation and in French republican discourse. These representations, he maintains, were both omnipresent – by the early twentieth century, nearly every portrayals of the nation included them – and at the same time highly marginalized. Baycroft ties this simultaneous omnipresence and marginality specifically to French republicanism. The Third Republic had sought to acquire colonies above all to “increase the greatness of the French nation”; most people who supported colonial expansion thus saw them above all as a symbol for others. They thus became bound up with Republican attempts to spread “Frenchness” during the early years of the Third Republic. He notes that beginning in 1870, the Opportunist Republicans “sought to consolidate their hold on power and to spread republican and national values to the population through compulsory schools, military service, and the increased presence and prominence of republican national symbols and prominence of improvement of the communication networks within France.” The colonial policy was also bent on spreading national Enlightenment and republican values – in fact, Baycroft contends, internal regions and colonies were treated similarly. These republicans hoped that by inculcating these values, they could improve France’s political and economic position, and simultaneously civilize internal and external “others” by bringing them liberty and Enlightenment. The colonies were thus often treated as an extension of France itself. At the same time, the policies directed at metropolitan France were much more widely accepted than those directed towards empire, the latter of which was mostly just supported by the republican elite. As a result, there were far more resources to implement them in metropolitan France than in the colonies themselves. This different level of support affected their implementation, their success, and the legacies that they left behind. These haphazard attempts to institute policy were tied to the ways in which the empire (failed) to become part of French identity; “Greater France,” according to Baycroft, became part of French consciousness, but not an integral part of its self-perception. See Timothy Baycroft, “The Empire and the Nation: The Places of Colonial Images in the Republican Visions of the French nation,” in Martin Evans, ed. Empire and Culture: The French Experience 1830-1940 (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 148-160.

Wilder, The French Imperial Nation-State, 10.
My dissertation also connects these scholarly debates about French republicanism, empire, and nation to another historiography that considers the role of memory in late nineteenth-century political culture and understandings of national identity. Much of this scholarship has focused on the legacy and memory of Napoleon, the Napoleonic Empire, and the Napoleonic Wars and has clearly demonstrated that this memory loomed over France for much of the nineteenth century. A growing body of historiography has also looked at the complex ways that the memory of the Franco-Prussian War shaped republican identities and politics after 1870, but it has not focused on the specific position of Napoleon III in this memory. It also has not considered how the Franco-Prussian War and Napoleon III’s embarrassing defeat complicated the memory of the first Napoleonic Empire during this period. As Venita Datta has pointed out, in fact, most of the work on Napoleonic memory ends its analysis either before or with the fall of the Second Empire in 1870. As a result, this scholarship ignores the complex


25 See Datta, “L’appel au soldat,” 2. It is worth noting that Roger Gildea traces the Napoleonic legacy into the twentieth century, but he focuses most of his attention on its manifestations before 1870.
ways in which the memory of both Napoleonic Empires affected French culture and politics in the late nineteenth century.

By highlighting the connections between these late nineteenth-century discourses about “colonial empire” and the memory of older Napoleonic models of “continental empire,” my dissertation reframes current scholarly discussions about “empire” in France. While scholars have usually studied French overseas empires separately from French continental empires, I demonstrate that they were often perceived as interconnected in the mid-nineteenth century. By analyzing their relationship, this dissertation shows the degree to which French representations of empire were ensconced in longstanding internal political conflicts and highlight the ways in which discourses of European racial superiority over colonial others intersected with older arguments about the ideal organization of the French state. I also shed light on how French republicans eventually succeeded in differentiating transoceanic from continental empire and creating a new model of republican colonial empire. This new model of colonial empire, I argue, was itself shaped by a complicated set of influences, including the memory of both Napoleons, republican ideological values, political conflict within France, concerns about the French nation, international competition, racial science, and specific events in the colonies.

II. Defining the Nation: French Revolutionary Republicanism and Napoleonic Imperialism

In the early years of the Third Republic, the legacy of Napoleon III and his vision of empire was problematic for republicans because of its associations with the memory of French

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26 Most of the existing scholarship has focused on the intersections between empire, nation, and politics in formerly colonized countries. As a result, “empire” has often been conceived of as a form of political organization that precedes and ultimately leads to the self-contained nation-state. However, as scholars such as Burbank and Cooper have made clear, the relationship between empire and nation is complex; nations build empires, and states move between imperial and national configurations. See Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, Empires in World History (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 9.
defeat during the Franco-Prussian War. More generally, however, this legacy also intersected with ongoing debates about the nature of the French nation, the Second Empire’s relationship to French republicanism and later French imperialism, and the implications of this relationship for colonized people who lived under French imperial rule. These debates were deeply embedded in the long history of French continental and overseas empire, which stretched back at least to the seventeenth century, when the French monarchy conquered what would later come to be known as France’s “First Colonial Empire.”

France lost much of this empire in the late eighteenth century, but during the French Revolution, the remaining colonies came under scrutiny as republicans sought to redefine the French state by describing it as a united republican nation.

Although scholars have shown that the French Revolution’s project of nationalization had a limited reach, it is clear that revolutionaries saw unified nationhood as the basis for the new political order that they were establishing. Instead of locating political authority in a monarch or a set of elites, republicans grounded political sovereignty theoretically in what they referred to as the “French people” who collectively made up the “French nation.”

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27 The majority of this empire was located in North America, but the French also had holdings in Senegal, India, and most profitably, the West Indies. See Pierre Pluchon, *Histoire de la colonization français, v. 1: Le premier empire* (Paris: Fayard, 1991), 774.

28 It would be misleading to argue that most people living within the borders of France during the revolutionary period understood themselves in a specific way as “French,” let alone as belonging to a “French nation.” But the idea first began to gain currency during this period among revolutionaries and elites. See Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 96.

29 Scholars of nationalism continue to disagree about how exactly to define a “nation,” and they have shown that French revolutionaries did not share a unified understanding of “nation,” either. The earliest theorists of nationalism – Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Johann Gottfried von Herder, and, somewhat later, Ernest Renan - emerged in the wake of the revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. As Claude Nicolet has demonstrated, the word “nation” changed its meaning in French political thought over time. But, as a number of scholars have shown, the word began to take on some of its modern meanings when Abbé Sièyes identified “the nation” as the Third Estate and linked it to popular sovereignty. See Claude Nicolet, *l’Idée républicaine en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 16-18; Jeremy Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 75, 77, 200-202; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 101. For a summary of more contemporary debates about nationalism, see Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., *Becoming National: A Reader* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996).
historical perspective, it is clear that nationalism and democratic traditions have not always been linked (and have often been in tension), revolutionaries saw the French nation and the republic as inextricably bound up in one another. To speak of the nation after 1792 was to invoke republican values of political participation and political equality. As a result, many republicans positioned the republic as the natural political expression of the nation itself.

This interweaving of “republic” and “nation” was complicated by the fact that revolutionaries did not consistently define who belonged to the nation.\(^30\) On a fundamental level, most revolutionaries understood the “people” to consist of political-rights-bearing French men – but such an explanation did not designate who was “French” and who was not.\(^31\) Those perceived as outsiders – Jews, immigrants, ethnic minorities, and inhabitants of overseas colonies – thus occupied an ambiguous place in the new French republic. Their ability to exercise political rights or lay claim to republican citizenship remained an ongoing subject of debate, but many such groups did gain at least some rights during the First Republic.\(^32\)

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\(^{30}\) As Brubaker and others have made clear, the question of who belonged to the nation was much more important beneath the Republic than it had been beneath the monarchy. And while citizenship was granted liberally in the early years of the revolution, suspicion of “foreigners” or “outsiders” grew as republicans went to war. See Rogers Brubaker, “The French Revolution and the Invention of Citizenship,” *French Politics and Society* 7 (1989), 43; Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic*, 203; Michael Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France: The Treatment of Foreigners 1789-1799* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13; Suzanne Desan, “Foreigners, Cosmopolitanism, and French Revolutionary Universalism,” in *The French Revolution in Global Perspective*, ed. Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt, and William Max Nelson (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 86.


The ambiguities that attended this interweaving of “nation” with “republic” became particularly clear when revolutionaries debated the place of France’s colonial holdings in the new political order. Just as revolutionaries sought to redefine the nature of the relationship between the French people and the state, they also attempted to transform the relationship of those living overseas to the French nation. Were those living abroad French, and therefore entitled to the same political rights granted to men in France? If they were not French, what was their relationship to the nation? Could the French Republic rule over them, or was such an arrangement a violation of revolutionary principles? Should inhabitants of overseas colonies form their own nations instead? Revolutionaries asked these questions, but had no clear answers to them: they debated about whether they should leave the colonies alone, integrate them into the French nation, or grant them autonomy. Even those who embraced the idea that France should integrate the colonies into the French nation disagreed about the meaning and consequences of this decision. Some argued that all of the different inhabitants of integrated overseas territories should enjoy the rights that accompanied French citizenship, but others maintained that France should assimilate some inhabitants while leaving others – especially slaves and people of mixed race – on the outside.

33 The argument for “assimilation” was most in line with the ways in which revolutionaries approached others perceived as outside the nation-state. See Suzanne Desan, “Foreigners, Cosmopolitanism, and French Revolutionary Universalism,” in The French Revolution in Global Perspective, ed. Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt, and William Max Nelson (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 87.

34 It is worth noting that these debates did not take place in an ideological vacuum. They were also tied into pressing economic and political issues at the time. As Robert Forster among others has shown, the planters of Saint-Domingue and French merchants launched a successful campaign early in the Revolution to preserve slavery, which successfully delayed legislation for several years. The campaign for civil rights for free people of color was less controversial, largely because there were fewer economic risks associated with it. Even so, it seems that revolutionaries were concerned about upsetting the white population in Saint-Domingue, and thus unwilling to take definitive action to secure voting rights for people of color. It was only after the execution of Vincent Ogé - who had been a member of the unofficial delegation of people of color to the National Assembly in 1790 and returned in frustration to lead a revolt against slave owners - at Cap Français in 1791 that led revolutionaries to take the first steps towards establishing civil rights for freedmen. Even then, they wavered, and revoked the law in the face of planter resistance, which led to a widespread slave revolt. Arguably, therefore, the decision in 1794 to grant equal
In 1794 and 1795, the Convention resolved this ongoing argument by decreeing that all slaves in French colonies were free and that all residents of French overseas holdings could exercise French citizenship rights. As Jeremy Popkin and other scholars have shown, these decisions were not simply an ideological response that sought to resolve the contradictions between republican ideals and colonial realities. Instead, they emerged out of ongoing political disputes within France, the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue, and conflicts in Cap Français. The revolutionaries were thus responding to immediate political and military crises. Moreover, the promise of revolutionary citizenship was never fully realized in most of France’s colonies during this period. The decision to assimilate the colonies into the French nation was also short-lived – Napoleon I revoked it immediately when he became Emperor and in fact reinstituted slavery. Despite these limitations, however, the revolutionaries’ decision to declare overseas subjects French citizens set an important precedent in French imperial administration. This precedent would never disappear from some of the subsequent accounts of French imperial history.

Indeed, “assimilationism” – the colonial policy and political theory that both emerged out of and helped justify the policies that the republicans introduced - became a key component of rights to all people in the colonies had as much to do with contemporary political exigencies – the revolutionaries were trying to hold on to the colonies they had, and thought that they would be better able to do this if they freed the slaves - as it had to do with revolutionary ideology. See Robert Forster, “The French Revolution, people of color, and slavery,” in The Global Ramifications of the French Revolution, ed. by Joseph Klaits and Michael H. Haltzel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 90 & 98.

37 As Miranda Spieler has shown, most colonial regimes remained remarkably “despotic.” These regimes did not, she argues, “simply arise from local circumstances, wartime exigency, or the whimsy of administrators.” Instead, “Metropolitan assemblies thwarted the construction of colonial citizenship in the postemancipation era.” See Miranda Frances Spieler, “The Legal Structure of Colonial Rule during the French Revolution,” The William and Mary Quarterly 66:2 (April 2009), 374.
republican understandings of France’s overseas territories in the following years.\textsuperscript{38} Its longevity was due in part to its ties with the universalist ideals that defined French revolutionary republicanism. These ideals held that “human nature… was a universal impervious to cultural and historical difference,” and as a result, all men should have access to certain equal universal rights.\textsuperscript{39} Revolutionaries contended that human history consisted of slow progress towards global recognition of human equality and the political reorganization of the world into nation-states that would guarantee their citizens the “natural” rights they had been born with. They saw republican France as the “model nation” or torchbearer in this global march towards equality, and claimed that it would help lead other nations towards enlightenment.\textsuperscript{40} But as revolutionaries increasingly portrayed France as the embodiment of “universal” political rights and policies, they also began to identify the French language and culture with “universalism” itself. In other words, they believed that to gain enlightenment, other peoples needed to adopt cultural markers of Frenchness as well as “universal” French political ideas about human nature or human rights.\textsuperscript{41}

The tensions surrounding the French nation’s claim to embody “universal” political rights also characterized the “assimilationist” political and cultural thinking that emerged during the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{38} It would be misleading, however, to claim that the French monarchy never pursued “assimilationist” overseas policies. Royal edicts passed in 1635 and 1642 specifically declared that natives in North America, at least, would be considered “national Frenchmen” if they converted to Catholicism. But the kind of assimilation that the revolutionaries proposed was of a different order, and based on republican, not Christian, universalism. It also became a much larger component of French colonial policy during the Revolution. See Raymond T. Betts, \textit{Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 12.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{39} Universalism itself had a long history in French political thought. Naomi Schor dates it back to the medieval belief that because France was the “elder daughter of the Church” it was the site of Christian universalism. During the eighteenth century, the sense that France represented the “universal” country was compounded by the use of the French language across European courts. When French revolutionaries argued that France was the national embodiment of universal human virtue, they were thus building on a long tradition. See Naomi Schor, “The Crisis of French Universalism,” \textit{Yale French Studies}, no. 100 (2001), 46.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{40} This belief that France was a “model” nation pervaded Republican thought throughout much of the nineteenth century, even as the country slipped back into imperial and monarchical forms of government. See Claude Digeon, \textit{La Crise Allemande de la Pensée Française, 1870-1914} (Paris: Presses Universitaires de la France, 1959), 11.}

French Revolution. Because of their tendency to locate enlightenment, human rights, and human progress in the French nation-state, many revolutionaries came to believe that to exclude the inhabitants in overseas colonies from French citizenship would be to deny them access to human liberation. But at the same time, they also worried that some overseas inhabitants – especially slaves and freed people of color – were insufficiently French to belong equally within the political and cultural life of the nation. In order to participate in the revolutionary political project, revolutionaries expected those living in overseas territories to drop their differences and assimilate into French culture. This tension – between France as the bearer of “universal” rights and France as a particular nation-state composed of a “people” who embodied cultural practices and assumptions – would haunt both French republicanism and French imperialism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.42

These conversations about French universality, the French nation, and the assimilation of other peoples did not end with the rise of Napoleon. In part because Napoleon I incorporated republican ideas into the new imperial structure, they carried over into the new administration.43 But these ideas were further complicated by the fact that the French nation was now situated in a broader French Empire that incorporated a large number of other tributary states. If anything, Napoleon’s European conquests highly magnified the problem faced by revolutionaries trying to define their relationship to a finite number of overseas colonies. Napoleon himself tended to


43 Scholars continue to argue about the degree to which Napoleon carried on the revolutionary ethos. He did continue “to reform and rationalize the functions of the French state…” but at the same time, he introduced a strong sense of social hierarchy: he consolidated power into his own hands, and established an imperial elite drawn largely from the old aristocracy. See Philip G. Dwyer and Alan Forrest, eds., Napoleon and His Empire: Europe, 1804-1814 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3.
deny that his imperial rule was defined by a coherent political philosophy – he claimed to rule “flexibly” and “practically,” and denounced the Revolution for its adherence to “ideologies.” But his empire nevertheless set forth a particular vision of the nature of the French nation, the French Empire and the relationship of both to “universal” ideas or values.44

The Napoleonic Empire used aspects of republican universalizing discourse to describe the nature of its relationship to the territories it conquered. Imperial officials portrayed these states and territories as technologically, politically, or culturally “backward,” and claimed that France was spreading French enlightenment and “universal principles” to them.45 The Empire exported many of the ideals of the French revolutionary government, at least across Europe, and restructured the administration systems of conquered countries along “enlightened” lines – abolishing seigniorial privileges and streamlining hierarchies.46 Napoleon I also took some measures to “assimilate” the European territory he conquered into his empire. He established a universal law code that he intended to enforce equally across all states and incorporated the elites of conquered territories into an “imperial” nobility.47 However, even if he brought these states into the administrative, political, and economic systems of the French Empire, he did not attempt

44 As Geoffrey Ellis has argued, Napoleon himself never expressed this vision in its totality; indeed, he tended to contradict himself, and usually acted opportunistically and strategically. But the patterns of his actions and the policies he set in place made use of political ideas and thus left a set of (often contradictory) political legacies. See Ellis, “The Nature of Napoleonic Imperialism,” 100; David P. Jordan, “Napoleon as Revolutionary,” in Napoleon and his Empire: Europe, 1804-1814 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 34.

45 Stuart Woolf, “French Civilization and Ethnicity in the Napoleonic Empire,” Past and Present 124 (1989), 107. Most scholars agree that the French claims to have “modernized” Europe as they conquered it were dubious, at best. While in some places, the French rationalized administrative systems, centralized authority, and established the beginnings of the notion of equality before the law for men, in other places, they strengthened the hold of elites over the peasantry. See Ellis, “The Nature of Napoleonic Imperialism,” 102.

46 Some scholars have also argued that the Napoleonic empire inadvertently exported revolutionary nationalism to these territories, as a byproduct of the wider revolutionary ethos – and thus helped facilitate the growth of widespread resistance to the empire in places like the German states that ultimately helped lead to its downfall. See Charles Esdaille, ed, Popular Resistance in the French Wars (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

to assimilate the people into the French nation as republicans had done during the Revolution.  

The borderland territory that the revolutionaries had conquered remained part of France. But the other, more distant territories became imperial instead of national holdings, ruled indirectly from the imperial center. At the heads of some of these states, he placed tributary rulers who were often his own family members. Other states kept their traditional elites and even to some degree their traditional privileges.

The empire also did not treat all of the states that it conquered in the same way – even within Europe itself. Instead, the empire governed people differently according to various criteria – including when their particular state was conquered, where it was located, and the types of resources that the Emperor hoped to extract from it. And while the empire applied the same law codes and roughly similar administrative systems to each territory, no one state occupied a place that was exactly equal to the others. Each was subject to a distinct set of military obligations and tariffs and given different levels of latitude in selecting their own administration. All, moreover, were beneath France in the political hierarchy. As a number of scholars have shown,

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48 The French Republican regime had itself conquered a great deal of territory, often with Napoleon as its general. Especially in the early years, the Republic systematically eliminated the regimes of conquered territories and assimilated them into the French bureaucracy. See Michael Broers, *The Napoleonic Empire in Italy, 1796-1814: Cultural Imperialism in a European Context?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).


50 Some conquered territories only came under French control between 1810 and 1812, and so only remained under French control for four years. While they may have been territorially reorganized, French influence in parts of Austria, Italy, and Germany was especially limited. See Ellis, “The Nature of Napoleonic Imperialism,” 100.


the imperial conquests were thus peripheral to most of the interior life of the French nation, and imperial territories remained distinct from the French nation even as they were subjugated to it.

Napoleon’s treatment of the Empire’s overseas territories differed from his treatment of his European territories. On the most basic level, Napoleon was far less interested in France’s overseas colonies than in his European conquests. After all, he sold Louisiana to the United States in an attempt to raise money for his European wars, and he let the English pick off French holdings in India and the West Indies. But it is also clear that he had even more mixed feelings about applying revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, brotherhood, and human rights to the overseas empire than he did about invoking them in Europe. Despite the fact that Napoleon abolished old privileges in Europe, he reinstituted slavery in French colonies – partly because he wanted to reinvigorate the once-lucrative sugar trade that had dwindled after emancipation.

Napoleon’s reinstitution of slavery – and indeed, his wider attitudes towards overseas territories - did not simply mark a return to Old Regime policies. Instead, Napoleon’s encounters with peoples outside Europe marked a shift in French understandings of their relationship with non-European people – especially during the Egyptian campaign. Napoleon’s campaign itself was in many respects quite distinct from his later campaigns in Europe and from other, earlier French campaigns in North Africa. He brought with him a whole host of Orientalists, archaeologists, and painters. In addition to fighting battles with Egyptian troops, he visited key

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55 Napoleon invaded Egypt under the auspices of the Republic, not the Empire. But a number of scholars have cited the Egyptian campaign as a moment of transition in Napoleon’s movement away from a revolutionary general and towards a dictatorial ruler. Because the French Republic was involved in an internecine civil war when he invaded, he had the leniency to establish his own administration and rule by his own principles. Martin Evans and Amanda Sakur, “Introduction,” in Empire and Culture: The French Experience (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 10.
cultural landmarks so these experts could acquire information about Egypt. The specialists approached Egypt with a profound self-confidence about the French ability to label and categorize this non-European culture. Moreover, both they and their critical audience described the French invasion as an encounter between civilization and barbarism: they emphasized France’s technical dominance and posited France as the true heir to ancient Egypt. Some even suggested that France, coming into Egypt, might be able to “restore” the decadent race and return Egypt to its former glory better than the true Egyptians. As a result of these claims, many scholars link the emergence of the “civilizing mission” – which would later become central to French colonial ideology - to Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign.

It would be difficult to contend that French attitudes during and after the Egyptian campaign represent the Napoleonic attitude towards all of its overseas territory during this period. Napoleon was more interested in Egypt than in the other overseas territory that France laid claim to at the time – in part because Egypt connected to his dream of re-establishing the Roman Empire. However, if Napoleon’s attitude towards Egypt was distinct from his attitude towards France’s other overseas territories, it also differed from his approach to his later European conquests. It is true that the discourses about France’s ability to help the Egyptians “progress” were also often used to describe the French Empire’s relationship with its European

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56 Napoleon brought these scholars along because he had long been fascinated by Orientalist texts and writings; he befriended the Orientalist scholar Count Constantin-François de Volney in 1790, who helped consolidate his “Orientalist” perceptions of North Africa. See Henry Laurens, Les origines intellectuelles de l’expédition d’Égypte. L’orientalisme islamisante en France (1698-1798) (Istanbul: Isis, 1987), 192.
58 Some scholars have claimed that Napoleon’s time in Egypt set the stage for his shift away from revolutionary republicanism towards imperialism, which he later applied in France as well. See Osama Abi-Mershed, Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 23.
59 The Egyptian campaign predated the declaration of the Consulate and the Empire, so it was not an “imperial war.” See Pierre Pluchon, Histoire de la colonisation français, v. 1: Le premier empire (Paris: Fayard, 1991), 485.
subjects. But whereas the Empire promised to bring “enlightenment” and “liberty” to Europeans, it claimed that it would bring “civilization” to North Africans – an important distinction. Indeed, a number of scholars have contended that this vision of Egypt formed the basis of “an Orientalizing habit” of thought that would characterize French interactions with the inhabitants of North Africa for years to come.

The Napoleonic Empire thus both maintained and transformed revolutionary universalism and ideas about “assimilation” in its imperial policies and structure. It laid claim to revolutionary beliefs that France was a vanguard nation, destined to lead the world towards enlightenment and prosperity. Arguably, it institutionalized those beliefs by incorporating huge swaths of territory beneath its rule, “rationalizing” their administrative systems and law codes, and bringing revolutionary ideas to their people. However, while Napoleon undeniably assimilated these territories into the broad administrative system of his empire, he made no effort to assimilate them into the French nation. Each of the territories beneath his rule retained some elements (however illusory) of self-governance, and the people living within them were not described as “French.” Moreover, even as Napoleon espoused dreams of rebuilding and expanding the Roman Empire on the territory it had once occupied, new ways of understanding parts of that territory – namely, the parts in North Africa – were clearly emerging.


61 Patrice Bert, “Les contingences orientalistes de l’expédition de Bonaparte,” in L’orientalisme des saint-simoniens, ed. by Michel Levallois and Sarga Moussa (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2006), 39. In fact, Edward Said highlights the Egyptian expedition as the genesis for modern “Orientalizing” thought. As he notes, Orientalism was a regulatory Foucauldian discourse, crafted by European politicians, intellectuals, specialists, and regular people. The discourse existed “in uneven exchange with various kinds of power” and enabled Europeans to justify their dominion over the Orient based on claims to knowledge about it. However, Said insisted that despite its origins in the Egyptian campaign, it never referred to a real place: it was self-referential, built on previous European representations rather than empirical study. It placed “Occident” and “Orient” in a binary opposition that legitimized European domination by describing Orientals as devious, barbaric, and irrational and Europeans as rational, progressive, and scientific. Said claimed that this framework became such a prominent part of European identity that it operated in all cultural production, even when it did not seem to openly deal with the Orient. See Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 12, 30, 79.
Arguably, the fact that Napoleon, unlike the revolutionaries, did not assimilate conquered populations into the French nation and tended to treat diverse populations differently reflects the fact that he was trying to construct an empire. As Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper have argued, nations and empires are usually constituted quite differently from one another. While a nation tries to integrate its members into one political body, empires incorporate diverse sets of populations beneath their rule. They also place these diverse populations into a hierarchical structure. Napoleon, however, was not simply trying to build an empire; he was trying to build an empire around the French nation-state. As a result, his rule – like many other empires in the modern world – placed “empire” and “nation” into a direct relationship with one another.

The Napoleonic Empire’s relationship with nationalism was complex. Notably, although the Empire broke away from republican ideas about popular sovereignty within France, it preserved and exported republican ideas about the nation across its new territories. This usage rejected the revolutionary association of “nation” with “republic.” Under the empire, “nation” became a term not necessarily associated with any specific kind of political organization: indeed, the French nation, like the rest of the empire, was subject to authoritarian imperial political authority, which claimed to embody national sovereignty. France became a privileged nation surrounded by a set of affiliated territories that had access to different kinds of rights and

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62 In their book on the history of empire, Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper define empires through the ways in which they deal with difference. According to them, empires are “large political units, expansionist or with the memory of power extended over space, polities that maintain distinction and hierarchy as they incorporate new people.” As a result, they are quite distinct from nation-states, which are “based on the idea of a single people in a single territory constituting itself as a unique political community. The nation-state proclaims the commonality of its people… while the empire-state declares the non-equivalence of multiple populations. The concept of empire presumes that different peoples within the polity will be governed differently.” See Burbank and Cooper, Empires in World History, 9.

63 Napoleon did not entirely dispose of the republicans’ link between the nation and popular sovereignty. As Philip Dwyer has made clear, he awkwardly drew on it – at least symbolically - along with monarchical traditions to solidify his rule. See Philip Dwyer, “‘Citizen Emperor’: Popular Ritual, Popular Sovereignty and the Coronation of Napoleon I,” History 100.339 (2015), 56.
operated under French administrative systems to various degrees. Napoleon himself was the Emperor of the French, but was equally Emperor over western and central Europe. By removing sovereignty from the French people and consolidating it in his own hands, he was thus able to overcome the republican dilemma about how to deal with “outsiders” or those who were not clearly French. They could be integrated into the wider French Empire without needing to be integrated into France. Conquered people were subjects of the Napoleonic Empire rather than citizens of a French republic.

According to Burbank and Cooper, empire differs from nation based on the way that it deals with “problems of difference;” neither refers to a particular political doctrine. But under Napoleon, the French “empire” did not operate in opposition to the French “nation.” Instead, “empire” came primarily to function in opposition to the “republic” or the “monarchy”: it referred to a specific kind of political organization within France. At the same time, however, it also came to describe the way in which the French nation dealt with conquered territory. This method of dealing with conquered territory was itself based on a modified and partial version of republican ideas about “assimilation.” Napoleon thus created an alternate model for France’s political organization, its relationship to conquered territories, and its national identity that would continue to inform French debates about conquest for much of the nineteenth century.

In fact, both the republican model of “assimilation” and the Napoleonic model of setting up proxy subordinate states and incorporating them unequally into a broader imperial structure both played an important role in later French colonial policy. When the July Monarchy established French rule in Algeria in the 1830s, it invoked the rudimentary government established during the Napoleonic Egyptian campaign as a precedent for the structure of its

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64 Burbank and Cooper, Empires in World History, 8.
In 1848, on the other hand, the revolutionary government’s decision to change French “colonies” into “territories” and give them representation in the French national assembly directly built on the model of assimilation established during the French Revolution. When Napoleon III declared himself Emperor of France in 1852, both revolutionary and Napoleonic understandings of the relationship between empire, republic, and nation thus continued to circulate in political and intellectual discourse. At the same time, questions about whether France should assimilate its subjugated territories or treat them as separate dependent states also continued to have a political charge in the metropole. To insist that overseas territories should be integrated politically or even culturally into the French nation was to some degree to align with French republican principles. To contend, on the other hand, that these territories should remain distinct or separate from France was to align with the Napoleonic imperial model – although administrative assimilation was certainly part of the Bonapartist legacy as well. Napoleon III’s attempt to transform the Napoleonic imperial model would only further complicate these longstanding debates over the relationship between the administration of overseas territories and the political organization of France.

III. Themes of the Dissertation

This dissertation traces the evolving conversation about empire, its meanings, and its implications for France as it developed across political, intellectual, and popular spheres from the 1860’s into the early twentieth century. Each chapter focuses on a major event that excited

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66 The decision to re-abolish slavery similarly drew from revolutionary principles, but was also part of the wider republican attempt to institute metropolitan political practices and institutions in the colonies – assimilating them into the French nation. See Nelly Schmidt, “Schoelchérisme et assimilation dans la politique coloniale française: de la théorie à la pratique aux Caraïbes entre 1848 et les années 1880,” *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, v. 35, n. 2 (1988), 306.
discussion about empire among the French public. It uses those events as windows into the shifting views of empire over the course of this period. I do not argue that these events caused these shifts in understanding, but instead use them to examine how discursive patterns intersect with sudden conflicts at particular historical moments. Some of these key events took place in metropolitan France, but others emerged out of France’s colonies. This event-centered approach thus helps highlight the interconnectedness of colony and metropole in French debates about empire by showing how colonized peoples could affect metropolitan political discourses.

The first chapter begins by examining competing ideas about empire in the last decade of Napoleon III’s rule, focusing on his attempt to restructure Algeria and its relationship to France when he reimagined the territory as a “royaume arabe.” It looks at the connections between this reimagining of Algeria and the Emperor’s broader project of redefining the Second Empire in the early 1860s. It focuses especially on the shifting complex relationship between “continental” and “colonial” models of empire and considers why Napoleon III’s attempt to combine these models met so much resistance within both Algeria and France. Finally, it reflects on why, despite the fact that most of his policies were never effectively implemented, his conflation of these two imperial models remained so troubling to republicans in the years after his regime’s collapse.

The second chapter discusses the transformation that occurred in understandings of empire after the Franco-Prussian War. It considers how struggles over the memory of defeat and the political organization of the new government affected understandings of “empire” and its relationship to the “republic” between 1871 and 1879. It argues that the disagreements over the events of the année terrible and their significance helped solidify a diametrical opposition between the concepts of empire and republic—even if the French continued to disagree about the meaning of the two terms. Through political pamphlets, newspaper articles, and popular stories,
moreover, republican writers, intellectuals, and politicians largely established their interpretation of this dichotomy in French political culture. They popularized a discourse that defined “empire” as problematic system of government that contradicted France’s republican political practices and values. This interpretation of empire helped shore up the legitimacy of the new and different republican government, but it also left open the question of how republican France would now define its imperial relationship with its overseas colonies.

The third chapter then considers how this solidifying vision of the differences between empire and republic affected France’s relationship with its colonies in the 1870s – especially Algeria. It demonstrates that in the early years of the Third Republic, intellectuals, politicians, and colonists engaged in a widespread debate about the nature of Algeria, its place in the new republic, and its relationship to the French nation. This debate was informed by both colonists’ demands to be attached to the new French republic and by the republicans’ successful campaign within France to discredit “empire” as a form of political organization. Notably, during this period, almost no republican thinkers used the term “empire” to refer to Algeria – or to any of France’s other colonial possessions. The chapter thus shows that throughout the 1870’s, republicans differentiated between empire and colonization to explain why overseas domination did not contradict republican values. At the same time, they tried to show why their model of overseas “republican” colonization was superior to its Bonapartist predecessors.

The fourth chapter turns away from North Africa to examine how the conquest of Indochina in the mid-1880s once again altered French popular and political conversations about empire and its meanings. It looks specifically at the emergence of a new term to describe colonial expansion – *politique coloniale* – and considers how the conversation about this term intersected with broader contemporary political debates about the meaning, value, and history of
“empire” in the modern French republic. Its analysis shows how the memory of Napoleon III and France’s defeat during the Franco-Prussian War continued to play an important role in shaping the republican conversation about colonial expansion into the 1880s. For much of this period, critics of *politique coloniale* were still able to mobilize their hostility for the memory of Napoleon III to criticize their opponents’ ideas – partly because he was largely responsible for investing France in Indochina during the 1860s. In response to these critics, those who defended *politique coloniale* sought to develop a new political vocabulary and historical lineage to legitimize the idea of empire in republican France. By examining the connections between these disputes over Indochina and ongoing arguments about the political organization of the French state, the chapter highlights the ways in which the memory of the Second Empire helped shape a specifically republican discourse about colonial expansion.

The fifth chapter focuses on the ramifications of the French conquest of Madagascar and the Boulanger Affair in the mid-1890s. It looks at the emergence of the newly defined conceptual category of “colonial empire” as the key linguistic and conceptual framework for understanding French overseas conquests during this period. It argues that the re-emergence of “empire” as an organizing concept in republican colonial thought only became viable when the possibility of a metropolitan imperial restoration faded. However, it also demonstrates that France’s changing, post-Napoleonic political climate was not solely responsible for making “empire” a safe conceptual category for republicans to embrace. In fact, this chapter stresses that colonial and continental empire could be neatly separated in this period because of increasingly sophisticated racialized and racist thought, which made non-European people seem very different and suggested that the political connections between continent and colony were remote. As a result, concerns about “empire” as a form of political organization became irrelevant within France.
insofar as “empire” referred solely to non-European races and colonized people in France’s overseas territories. In fact, the colonial empire became increasingly integral as the essential other that helped nationalist thinkers define the French nation-state (at home) as a Republic.

This dissertation therefore sheds light on the connections between continental and colonial understandings of empire during this period of political transition and overseas imperial expansion. It argues that the French found new ways to be both republicans and imperialists, but it also suggests that the tensions between these ideas never entirely disappeared. This was in part because republicans continued to struggle to disassociate “empire” from its relationship with political despotism. But it was also because republican colonialism represented a contradictory reconciliation between the ideal of universal political rights, commitment to national sovereignty, belief in scientific racism, and embrace of overseas domination. My study of this republican/imperial tension also contributes to an ever-growing body of scholarly literature about conceptions of empire in the metropole, the nature and operations of collective memory, and the role of different kinds of cultural productions in shaping and reflecting contemporary political opinion. Moreover, by elucidating the connections between empire, republicanism, and national identity, the dissertation offers new insights into each of these key conceptual categories, especially as they appeared in late nineteenth-century France.
CHAPTER 1: IMPERIAL IDEOLOGIES IN THE SECOND EMPIRE: THE "ROYAUME ARABE"

On April 29, 1865, Emperor Napoleon III named his wife regent and left Paris for a highly publicized trip to Algeria. He travelled with an entourage that included the Generals Fleury and Castelnau, as well as Ismaël Urbain, the vocal advocate for indigenous Algerian rights, whom he had engaged as his translator.\(^1\) He left without public ceremony or escort, though most metropolitan newspapers printed evocative descriptions of his farewell to the Prince imperial and to the Empress. The imperial ship set sail from Marseille on May 1\(^{st}\), and landed in Algiers on May 3\(^{rd}\), where the Emperor was saluted by cannon fire and welcomed by a large crowd on the docks, composed largely of French colonists.\(^2\) The mayor greeted the Emperor as he stepped off the boat, offering him the keys to the city and expressing the joy that the people of Algiers felt at his arrival. He predicted that the Emperor’s visit would serve as the “base for Algeria’s future grandeur.”\(^3\)

The Emperor accepted the keys, and made a speech to the gathered crowd. He began by noting that he had travelled to Algeria in order to learn more about his subjects’ needs, as well as to assure them that they had the protection of the metropole behind them. He acknowledged their struggles with both the land and its indigenous inhabitants, and promised them that Algeria had

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\(^3\) *Voyage de S. M. Napoleon III en Algérie.* (Paris: Challamel, 1865), 11.
better days ahead of it. He encouraged them to “have faith in the future; attach yourselves to the soil that you cultivate as a new fatherland.” The colonists, he implied, would come to “belong” to Algeria as they worked its soil, and, in collaboration with the metropole, they would bring prosperity to the territory. He then introduced a new note, asking colonists to “treat the Arabs in your midst as compatriots. We are necessarily the masters, because we are the most civilized; we should be generous, because we are the strongest.” He finished by urging the colonists in the audience to “justify” French conquest of Algeria in 1830 by cultivating an attitude towards the indigenous based on “peace” and “charity.” The speech thus praised the colonists and implied that Algeria would become their homeland. But at the same time, it also highlighted the centrality of the indigenous population to the French imperial project – and implied that French claims to Algeria rested on France’s guarantee of their happiness. The speech thus sought to balance settler interests with indigenous rights, depicting the settlers as allies in the French government’s attempt to secure the prosperity of the conquered indigenous peoples.

Napoleon III’s attempt to lay out a vision of the colonists’ and indigenous’ respective roles in Algeria was part of his desire to rethink the territory and the nature of its relationship with France. In the face of growing popular frustration with France’s domestic and foreign politics, the emperor began to search for opportunities to define the Second Empire, affirm its importance, and secure its popularity in a new way. Beginning in the 1860s, he looked overseas

4 Saint-Félix, Le Voyage de S. M. L’Empereur Napoleon III en Algérie, 98.
5 Ibid., 98.
6 Ibid., 99.
7 Napoleon III’s speech appeared in most major newspapers. See Le Moniteur Algérien, L’Akhbar & Le Siècle, 4 May 1865.
8 Between 1860-61, Napoleon III made a number of political concessions in the face of a growing liberal opposition. But rising national debt and growing opposition to French involvement in the Italian Wars meant that the establishment of what Napoleon III called the “liberal empire” did relatively little to appease his political opponents.
for opportunities to increase his empire’s prestige at home and abroad. He tried to expand France’s foothold in North America by setting up a proxy emperor in Mexico, and, more successfully, extended France’s investment in Indochina. But it was in Algeria that Napoleon III made the most concerted effort to articulate a new model of French empire. Ultimately, Napoleon III hoped that this empire would have a strong link to both the first Napoleonic Empire and Roman imperial history and incorporate a number of different territories beneath it. In the meantime, however, Algeria would serve as the example of its future administrative system, while displaying the strength and liberal character of Napoleon III’s redefined empire.

Napoleon III’s visit to the territory in 1865 helped crystallize his new vision, while simultaneously revealing the depth of the political opposition to it. In both Algeria and France, this opposition did not focus, at least at first, on Napoleon III’s larger vision of empire. Instead, it was directed primarily against Napoleon III’s understanding of the respective positions of French colonists and indigenous subjects in the imperial model that he was developing – the very issue that he addressed in his speech to the colonists upon his arrival. The colonists did not object directly to the model of settler-indigenous relationships that Napoleon III laid out in his opening speech. In fact, they spent most of the Emperor’s forty-day journey across the country applauding him and composing songs in his honor. But it is clear that despite their apparent


11 They did, however, object to the coverage of the journey in the metropolitan press. The story was popular in illustrated journals like *l’Illustration* and *Le Monde Illustré*, which explained the Emperor’s itinerary, described the landscape of the colony, and above all, filled their front pages with detailed sketches imagining encounters with exoticized Algerian subjects. Writing in from overseas, colonists decried the illustrated journals’ enthusiasm for “exotic” scenes: they claimed that by portraying the Emperor surrounded by Arab tribes, metropolitan journalists were providing French readers with a misleading understanding of Algeria itself. The “overrepresentation” of indigenous subjects and wild, remote landscapes, they feared, would lead readers to believe that Algeria was an
enthusiasm, many people in the colony were already suspicious of the Emperor’s intentions towards Algeria. They were concerned that he was inclined to privilege the needs of the indigenous population and the military over those of European settlers. His decision to choose Ismaël Urbain as his translator – an intellectual whom the settler community viewed as a troublemaker responsible for eliciting misguided and uninformed sympathy for indigenous Algerians within metropolitan France – accentuated the issue. But the concern was primarily inspired by the long history of Napoleon III’s policies towards the colony. Many believed that ever since Napoleon III had become Emperor, he had systematically worked against the settlers by limiting colonization, depriving them of political rights, and keeping them under the rule of the military instead of assimilating them into the metropolitan administration. The new vision of empire that he began to articulate in the 1860s only strengthened these beliefs.

Colonist discontent had its roots in Napoleon III’s decision to revoke many policies passed by the Second Republic when he became emperor. The Second Republic declared Algeria an “integral” part of France, divided it into three départements, introduced a civil administration, and invested French colonists with the right to elect representatives to the National Assembly.  

undeveloped place – and thereby obfuscate the hard work that the Algerian settlers had done to “civilize” both the land and its people. The Emperor, they noted, was visiting the key sites of French colonization: the coverage should reflect this, instead of ignoring the settlers. The real wonder, they implied, lay not in the indigenous inhabitants and their unfamiliar garb, lifestyles, and surroundings – but in the work that the colonists had done to remake Algeria in the image of France. *L’illustration* dismissed their concerns as nonsense. See “Choses et autres,” *Le Figaro*. 11 June 1865, 6; P. Paget, “Voyage de l’Empereur en Algérie,” *Illustration*, v. XLV n. 1665 (24 June 1865), 396.

This concern derived partly from the nature of the Emperor’s schedule in Algeria – in addition to his trips to major cities, military encampments, and new settler communities, he also visited with indigenous Arab and Jewish leaders. See Octave Tessier, *Napoleon III en Algérie* (Paris: Challamel; Alger: Bastide; Toulon, J. Renoux, 1865), 16.


The revolutionary government thus officially ended the military rule that had French rule since the 1830 conquest – though it is worth noting that the “civil territories” of Algeria – inhabited by larger numbers of colonists – were assimilated into the metropolitan administration system starting in 1845. The decree also granted non-French
The French government also made land more available to interested colonists by declaring that all Arab land without tribal deeds belonged to the state, which could distribute it at will. It simultaneously weakened the authority of the much-hated bureaux arabes - army officers stationed amidst tribes in the Algerian countryside who served as the local arm of the French state among indigenous peoples - and incorporated the territories and indigenous tribes under their control into a centralized civil administration. In 1851, Napoleon III undid most of this legislation: he again placed the colony under a military governor, rescinded the electoral rights of colonists, and restored the authority of the bureaux arabes. He also proposed and pushed forward a law that made it more difficult for the state to sell tribal lands to settlers, slowing down colonization. Many colonists linked these measures – which they saw as oppressive – to the fact that the Algerian settlers had failed to endorse the plebiscite that made him emperor. The Emperor, they felt, was prejudiced against them because of their initial opposition to his rule.

It is unclear whether Napoleon III resented French colonists for their lukewarm support of his bid for imperial power. Throughout much of the early part of his reign, he ignored the

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16 Army officers in the bureaux arabes were usually versed in local languages and customs. In territory inhabited by both colonists and tribes, they were supposed ensure order and security in their territories. As a rule, they were independent groups of officers, subject to little state regulation. This lack of regulation, many colonists at the time claimed, led to abuse. See Rey-Goldzeiguer, Le Royaume Arabe, 78.

17 He divided Algeria into two kinds of territories – civil and military. While the “civil” territories – which contained the largest numbers of French settlers – continued to be governed according to French administrative practices, the “military” territories – which contained more Arabs – were restored to the authority of the bureaux arabes.

18 This law, passed on July 16, 1851, declared both indigenous and European property rights inviolable. See Georges Spillman, Napoleon III et le royaume arabe. (Paris: Académie des Sciences d’Outre-Mer, 1975), 16.

19 In 1851, Napoleon III, then president of the Second Republic, issued a plebiscite asking whether the French wanted to declare himself Emperor. In metropolitan France, more than 80% answered “yes,” while in Algeria, barely 50% of the population agreed. See Rey-Goldzeiguer, Le Royaume Arabe, 123.
territory, and in 1857, he even experimented once again with a civil administration. It was only after three years of civilian administration failed to resolve the colony’s conflicts that Napoleon III took a personal interest. He decided to visit Algeria for the first time to see what could be done about the colony that he continued to describe as a ball and chain attached to the French metropole. The trip itself was a small affair, because the death of the Empress’ elder sister cut it short after three days. The Emperor stayed in Algiers, visited key landmarks, including the city cathedral and the Kasbah, met with important colonial officials, inspected Christian orhanages, and watched an Arab fantasi. But the experience – however brief - reoriented his attitude towards the colony.

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20 The Emperor’s decision to restore the civil administration was tied in part to the subjugation of Kabylie in 1857. He was also responding to a scandal surrounding the Doineau trial in Oran. In 1857, a French court tried and condemned Auguste-Edouard Doineau, an officer of the bureaux arabes, for killing Si-Mohammed-ben-Abdallah, the agha of the Beni-Snouss tribe. This trial led to the further discrediting of the Algerian military system, even within the French metropole. See Kimberly Bowler, “‘It is Not in a Day That a Man Abandons His Morals and Habits: ‘The Arab Bureau, Land Policy, and the Doineau Trial in French Algeria, 1830-1870.’” (dissertation, Duke University, 2011).

21 In 1857, Napoleon III replaced the position of governor-general with a new ministry of Algeria and the colonies, appointing his cousin, prince Napoleon-Jérôme, as its head. As minister, Jérôme allowed for freedom of the press, and loosened the laws around property transaction. He also proposed to “assimilate” the Muslim populations by breaking down the tribal structure, undermining the authority of tribal leaders, and encouraging individual property ownership. Finally, he expanded the land open to settlers by resettling the tribes that lived there. But he had never visited Algeria, and knew little about the country. He managed to alienate large sections of the extant colonial administration – especially the military and the bureaux arabes. Scarcely more than a year after he took the position, with rising anger among the indigenous population and the threat of revolts on the horizon, the prince resigned. His successor, Chasseloup-Laubet, continued many of the same policies. See Georges Spillman, *Napoleon III et le royaume arabe* (Paris: Académie des Sciences d’Outre-Mer, 1975), 19; Guy Pervillé, *La France en Algérie, 1830-1954* (Paris: Vendémiaire Éditions, 2012), 52.


25 Even at the time, Napoleon III’s speeches made it clear that he was deeply preoccupied with the Arab population. When speaking to M. de Vaulx, the president of the Cour Impérial, he began by noting that the French “first duty was to occupy ourselves with the well-being of the three million Arabs that the outcome of battle has moved beneath our dominion. Providence asks us to spread the benefits of civilization across this territory… We must elevate the Arabs to free men, spread instruction among them while respecting their religion, improve their existence while developing their resources…” He continued, however, by emphasizing that the colonists would be able to help in this process. See “19 septembre 1860” in *Voyage de leurs majestés en Algérie, Septembre 1860* (Paris: Au Bureau de l'Illustration, 1860), 39.
Napoleon III’s response to his 1860 trip to Algeria took several forms – each of them controversial. First, much to the chagrin of the colonists, he decided to restore the military regime.\(^{26}\) Even more problematically, at least as far as the settlers were concerned, was his announcement in 1863 that the French government could not repurpose the land in indigenous possession for use by French settlers. At his instigation, the Senate passed the Imperial Act of April 22, 1863, which at least ostensibly protected the tribes’ claims to the land that they inhabited.\(^{27}\) In his speech promoting the act, Napoleon III went so far as to condemn earlier attempts by the French state to attract colonists to Algeria. He contended that the French could use immigrants to build up Algeria’s infrastructure, but that farming – which was the main occupation of most settlers – was better left to the indigenous, who were better acclimated to the climate and soil. The Emperor did not go so far as to contend that the French colonist population should leave Algeria – but he made it clear that in the future, the government should limit immigration to technicians and skilled laborers.\(^{28}\)

In addition to these policy changes, Napoleon III also published a letter in 1863 explaining his vision of Algeria and the nature of its relationship to France. Originally addressed to General Pélissier during the Senate’s debates over indigenous land in Algeria, it created even

\(^{26}\) On November 26, 1860, he thus suppressed the ministry of Algeria and the colonies. And indeed, it is clear that he based his decision to revoke the civilian regime in part on his impression that its policy of “assimilation” served primarily to strip the indigenous population of their lands, consequently fomenting resentment among them. See Guy Pervillé, *La France en Algérie, 1830-1954* (Paris: Vendémiaire Éditions, 2012), 53.

\(^{27}\) There has been some debate about the exact implications of this Senate decree. As Guignard makes clear in his article, while many have claimed that the decree was passed to protect indigenous property rights, others have maintained that it was simply conceived of as yet another strategy to dispossess the tribes of their territory. The act defined different kinds of territory, differentiating between the territory that had belonged to the Ottoman Emperor, forests, religious establishments, the public domain, private individuals, and “tribes.” It did not restore territory that had already been confiscated to its original holders. The Emperor may have posited himself as the “friend” of the Arabs but it is unclear that this law succeeded in preserving Arab land one way or another. See Didier Guignard, “Le Senat de 1863: la dislocation programmée de la société rurale algérienne,” in *Histoire de l’Algérie à la période coloniale* (Paris and Algiers: Éditions Barzakh, 2012), 77.

more of a stir than the new land policies. The letter reiterated his earlier controversial condemnation of European colonization. But it was the emperor’s conclusions, even more than his land policies, which upset the colonists. After laying out his vision of Algeria’s future, he sought to redefine the territory, arguing, “Algeria is not technically a colony, but a royauté arabe.” For obvious reasons, perhaps, the colonists objected to the Emperor’s claim that Algeria was not really a colony. But they objected even more strenuously to his contention that instead, France should understand and treat Algeria as an “Arab kingdom.” If the new laws and regulations might hinder the settlers’ immediate financial prospects, this terminology took a step towards delegitimizing their position, rights, and presence in Algeria. Most Algerian newspapers and journals did not go so far as to criticize the Emperor directly – even with the liberalizing press laws, that kind of direct criticism was dangerous in 1863. But many did imply that his policies were misguided, and that poor advisors combined with the Emperor’s own relative lack of familiarity with the colony had led him astray.

Subsequent events further heightened the conflict over Algeria’s identity and future. A widespread revolt by a number of Arab tribes in 1864 led by the Ouled Sidi Cheikh tribe in southern Oran resulted in a lengthy and frustrating military campaign, and ended with expensive restitution agreements to reimburse colonists whose property and livelihoods had been


30 According to a contemporary source, the letter, though “hailed” in France, had excited riots in Algeria itself. “The agitation became severe in Algeria… public squares were invaded… by a passionate crowd passing around a petition whose sense and implications escaped the majority of those who signed it; posters proclaimed Algeria in danger… a torrent of violent brochures emerged, all repeating the cry ‘save yourself’… All because of the Emperor’s letter.” See Frédéric Lacroix, L’Algérie et la Lettre de l’Empereur (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot Frères, 1863), 2.

damaged. In the midst of this chaos, the military governor of Algeria – the General Pélissier – died of a stroke. Napoleon III replaced him with General Mac-Mahon several months later, but the early part of the new governor’s rule was very rocky. The fourth governor in six years, he struggled to streamline a colonial administration that had already been restructured too many times. He also had trouble suppressing the cycles of the revolts that continued to envelop the countryside. Moreover, less than a year after assuming the position, he had already made it clear that he disagreed with many of the Emperor’s colonial policies in Algeria – especially the Emperor’s vision of the royaume arabe.

The Emperor’s visit to Algeria in 1865 was thus deeply imbued with political conflict – especially as his public speeches made it clear that he had not abandoned his ideas of 1863. The day after his arrival, he travelled to Sidi-Ferruch. At this highly symbolic site of the French

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32 According to a contemporary report to the Ministry of War by Count Randon, there were several causes behind the revolt. First, religious “fanaticism” had encouraged the countryside to go into revolt. But the switch to a civil administration in 1858, Randon maintained, was really to blame. After scarcely having subdued the Algerian countryside, the government launched into an entirely different policy than the one they had pursued before, leaving the indigenous peoples and their leaders confused, wary, and ultimately angry. The French government began “attacking the chiefs as exploiters of their tribes’ resources, and threatening them with a revocation of their rights…

The ideas of cantonnement, of resettling tribes, became the order of the day, and even began to be set into execution.” See Randon, “Rapport sur l’insurrection de l’Algérie en 1864” in Conquête et Colonisation, 1864-1865, F80/1679. Fonds Ministérielas, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.


35 A number of pamphlets published after the Emperor’s visit referred to anxiety surrounding the visit. In the weeks before his arrival, an Algerian publicist, Le Metayer des Planches, published a pamphlet titled “L’Empereur en Algérie,” which explicitly laid out what he saw as the key challenges currently faced by the colony. He did not go so far as to criticize the Emperor’s standing policies towards the colony, but he suggested a list of improvements that were fundamentally at odds with the policies pursued over the past several years. Le Metayer des Planches especially highlighted Algeria’s pressing need for new European colonists, and suggested several ways to recruit them. He also indicated that the governance of Algeria needed to be handed over to a civil administration once more, and decentralized from the metropole. He concluded on an ambivalent note: “The presence of the Emperor in Algeria opens up the possibility for vast hopes. They will not fail to be realized – if he is presented with the truth.” Le Metayer des Planches, L’Empereur en Algérie (Alger: Bouyer, 1865), 5, 20.
debarcation in 1830, he held an audience with Arab leaders.\textsuperscript{36} He began his speech by noting that thirty-five years before, the French had come to Algeria to liberate the Arabs from Turkish oppressors. Nevertheless, the Arabs had opposed French occupation. This, he felt, was fair – indeed, the Emperor even went so far as to indicate that he admired the Arabs’ “warrior dignity.” But now, he insisted, God had decided that the French should win, and according to the Koran, they needed to swear obedience to the French. Two thousand years ago, he noted, the ancestors of the French had also “courageously” defended themselves against the Romans, but eventually, the two civilizations had commingled, creating contemporary France – a civilization, he did not fail to point out, that was currently conquering much of the world. If the Arabs managed to escape from their “fanaticism” and “ignorance” by incorporating aspects of French culture into their civilization, they too might one day become a great nation.\textsuperscript{37} His speech did not once mention the “royaume arabe,” but he did promise his listeners, “France is not here to destroy the national identity of a people… [but] to increase your wellbeing.”\textsuperscript{38} This reference to the indigenous’ “national identity” solidified colonists’ suspicions that the Emperor intended to transform Algeria into an Arab nation subject to France – in which they would have no place.

In 1865, the Emperor had arrived in Algeria hoping to learn more about the overseas conflict-ridden land that was part of his domain, and to gain insight into the tensions that structured the relationship between the military, the bureaux arabes, the colonists, and the Arab tribes. At the same time, he was hoping to further develop the new policy towards Algeria that he had been working on ever since his 1860 visit: the reconstitution of the colony as a royaume

\textsuperscript{36} This speech was widely reprinted. For Algerian examples, see Le Moniteur d’Algérie. For metropolitan examples, see the Journal des débats politiques et littéraires (10 May 1865), 1.


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 110.
This reconstitution was important to him because he saw the transformation of the colony into an Arab kingdom as a first step towards rebranding the Second Napoleonic Empire, thereby securing its domestic and international prestige at a moment when that prestige seemed to be faltering. However, his model of Algeria and its relationship with France proved fatally at odds with the vision of most colonists. This chapter examines how Napoleon III sought to both restore faith in his empire and resolve the ongoing conflicts between settlers and the indigenous over Algeria by redefining both “Algeria” and “empire.” It looks at the ways in which a variety of intellectual legacies – from Napoleonic imperialism and revolutionary nationalism to the Saint-Simonian theory of racial progress – helped give shape to the new understanding of empire and Algeria that he proposed. It considers why this model of empire became deeply associated in republican circles with his rule in the final years of his reign even though the colonists’ fierce opposition made it impossible for the emperor to implement or enforce it. And finally, it reflects on how Napoleon III’s imperial vision affected republican understandings of colonial empire, its relationship to metropolitan politics, and its implications for French national identity – even after the Second Empire collapsed.

II. Napoleon III’s Imperial Vision: Defining the French Empire

From the beginning of his rule, Napoleon III had sought to provide a theoretical backbone to the Second Empire that would legitimize it politically. Even in the early years of his political career as a revolutionary and a republican politician, he had worked to develop a “theory of empire” in dialogue with the history of his uncle’s rule, whose legacy he both drew upon and distanced himself from. During his presidential campaign in 1848, Louis Napoleon

39 Napoleon III spent his early years in exile. He achieved notoriety by becoming involved with the Carbonari, an Italian nationalist group. In 1836, he tried to stage a coup against the July Monarchy in Strasbourg. He was arrested
made explicit reference to his connection to Napoleon I as evidence of his fitness to lead the country – even as he promised that he would, unlike his uncle, uphold the values of the republican constitution and preserve the republican state. In a speech to the national assembly in the early part of his presidency, he went even farther, explicitly allying himself with what he identified as his uncle’s politics, maintaining, “The name Napoleon is itself a program. It says: in the interior, order, authority, religion, the well being of the people: on the exterior, national dignity. This is the politics that I have enacted with the support of the Assembly since my election.” Of course, this assessment of Napoleon I’s political program failed to mention the authoritarian nature of the former Emperor’s rule, and made only oblique reference to the extensive military campaigns that characterized it. But the quote shows how from the beginning, Louis Napoleon drew on aspects of Napoleon I’s imperial model to create his own vision of empire, centered on a commitment to order, the suppression of political radicalism, and the guarantee of economic and social security for all classes of society.

After the coup d’état, Napoleon III’s references to his uncle became more frequent and more direct. In the new constitution, he based the government’s organization on Napoleon I’s...
administrative, military, judicial, financial, and religious institutions – even though he still claimed that he was not restoring the empire.\(^{43}\) But even as he continued to rely upon his uncle’s prestige, he worked systematically to redefine Napoleon I’s legacy. He was particularly interested in refuting the popular republican claim that “the empire means war.” In a speech to the people of Bordeaux in 1852, he went so far as to assure his listeners that “the empire means peace.”\(^{44}\) According to Napoleon III, in other words, Napoleon I’s attempt to conquer Europe was not central to his empire; in any event, the Second Empire would not repeat it. In fact, Napoleon I’s importance lay not in his external wars but in the internal peace he established.\(^{45}\) Only under the First Empire, Napoleon III maintained, had the French people set aside their ideological differences and worked for their common interest.\(^{46}\)


\(^{44}\) This statement was a direct refutation of the republican criticism of Napoleon I during the years of expansion. Napoleon III downplayed this legacy, and argued that this new empire would focus on a primarily domestic agenda: “I admit that I will, like the Emperor, have a number of conquests. Like him, I want to conquer dissident parties and conciliate them… We have immense uncultivated territories to cultivate, roads to open, ports to build, rivers to render navigable, canals to finish, our network of railroads to finish. We have a vast kingdom facing Marseille to assimilate to France. We have our great doors to the west to connect to the American continent by communications that we still lack. That is how I understand the Empire if the Empire must be re-established.” As quoted in Gaël Nofri, *Napoleon III, Visionnaire de l’Europe des Nations* (Paris: Éditions François-Xavier de Guibert, 2010), 183.

\(^{45}\) In his description of Napoleon I’s relationship to the French Revolution, Napoleon III noted, “The great movement of 1789 had two distinct characteristics, one social and the other political. The social revolution triumphed despite our reverses, while the political revolution failed despite the victories of the people… At the beginning of the nineteenth century the great figure of Napoleon appeared, and society transformed. Popular anger was appeased, ruins disappeared, and one saw with surprise order and prosperity emerge from the same crater that had almost engulfed us… He worked hardly… to transition between old and new interests; he established the grand foundations that assured the triumph of the political and social revolution in France. But once the Empire fell the discord reappeared.” See Napoleon III, “Les idées Napoleonniennes” in *Oeuvres de Napoleon III: mélanges* (Paris: Henri Plon et Amyot, 1862), 7-8.

According to Napoleon III, the new empire would follow the Bonapartist legacy of domestic peace by outlawing fractious political parties, even as it extended suffrage. Without these parties, elections would no longer cause division; instead, the population would come together to vote on the Emperor’s plebiscites. Like the first Napoleonic Empire, the second Napoleonic Empire would thus leave the appearance of democratic principles and practices in their place – even as it depoliticized the population and put an end to social strife. This depoliticization, Napoleon III claimed, would enable a return to stability and prosperity for rich and poor alike. Napoleon III thus defined the “Napoleonic Empire” as the combination of the “best” aspects of the Revolution – its belief in democratic principles, political expression, and human progress – with the guarantee of order and security.

If Napoleon III drew on Napoleon I to define the Second Empire domestically, his attempt to articulate the Empire’s position, identity, and purpose on the international stage was more complicated. In the early years, two interrelated goals drove this process of articulation: he...

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47 Sudhir Hazareesingh has argued that the Second Empire’s guarantee of male universal suffrage in fact marked the beginnings of the politicization of France. It was under Napoleon III, he maintains, that French men became used to publically participating in the political process. Of course, during the majority of his reign, the extent of individual political power was limited in scope. The Empire’s policy of “official candidature” – in which the state would consistently sponsor one of the candidates running – meant that for many years, only officials connected to the Bonapartists could find their way into office. See Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 27.

48 Napoleon III claimed that his legitimacy as the ruler of France stemmed from the fact that his coup d’état and declaration of empire was supported by the majority of the population in the 1852 plebiscite. See David Baguley, *Napoleon III and his Regime: An Extravaganza* (New Orleans: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 19.

49 Napoleon III’s ideas about poverty reform were influenced by Saint-Simonian thought, though they drew from liberal and paternalistic traditions as well. He believed that labor needed to be organized and disciplined, and thought that industrialization would alleviate the plight of the poor. See Nofri, *Napoleon III, Visionnaire de l’Europe des Nations*, 236.

50 Over time, the argument that the empire would bring internal and external peace became a lynchpin in the theoretical justification of Napoleon III’s reign. The Emperor commissioned songs and pictures to celebrate this commitment, some of which were published in multiple illustrated editions throughout the 1850s. For examples of celebratory poetry and songs, see Arsène Houssaye, “L’Empire, c’est la paix” (Paris: Plon frères, 1852); Céline Domény, “L’Empire, c’est la paix” (Paris: Heu, 1852); Hector Bonnetat, “L’Empire, c’est la paix” (Paris: Imprimerie Typographie de Bureau, 1852).
wanted to restore France’s position in Europe and secure the Napoleonic Empire’s international prestige.⁵¹ He sought to accomplish these objectives in two contradictory ways. On the one hand, he tried to reassure both his subjects and his neighbors that he would not attempt to dominate Europe, or incorporate large parts of it beneath French rule. But on the other hand, he attempted to restore the myth of French imperial grandeur - a myth based largely on Napoleon I’s military prowess.⁵² He tried to resolve the contradictions between these strategies by positioning the French Empire as the defender of nationalities in Europe. Drawing on romantic nationalism, Napoleon III insisted that Europe would only see peace when each group of “people” had its own state.⁵³ The French Empire would help institute this widespread peace and prosperity by supporting nationalist movements across Europe as they sought independence from the large empires to which they were beholden.

In the early years of his reign, Napoleon III thus consistently pursued what he described as the “politics of nationality” or “the liberation of peoples” in conflicts across Europe. In Italy in particular, he deployed French troops to support the independence movement led by Victor-Emmanuel against the Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁵⁴ He criticized European empires like Austro-Hungary as both outdated and oppressive, and claimed that their incorporation of large numbers of diverse peoples, combined with their subsequent failure to rule these peoples in a centralized or systematic way, both impeded historical progress and oppressed the “national minorities” who

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⁵¹ He was also determined to end the strictures imposed on France in the “dishonorable peace” of 1815. See Napoleon III, “Les idées Napoleoniennes,” 325.


⁵³ This commitment to nationalist beliefs predated his reign; they underlay his youthful involvement in the Italian revolutionary movement against the Austrians. See Nofri, Napoleon III, Visionnaire de l’Europe des Nations, 288.

⁵⁴ Napoleon III, La Politique Impériale, 199.
lived beneath their yoke.\textsuperscript{55} By casting the French Empire as the defender of these minorities, Napoleon III defined it as a “progressive” force in European politics, helping to spread freedom and construct future peace in Europe. He thus borrowed directly from the revolutionary conviction that France was a “vanguard” nation, meant to lead other nations in the path of human progress towards the ultimate goals of freedom, equality, and rights for all.\textsuperscript{56} But at the same time, he distanced himself and the French Empire from revolutionary democratic politics; while he supported Victor-Emmanuel’s attempt to reconfigure Italy into an independent monarchical state, he suppressed the Italian republican movement. Napoleon III thus made it clear that he sought to spread not a new set of political ideas but a specific model of state organization. A Europe composed of nation-states, he maintained, would both “found a solid system of European association” and “satisfy the general interests” of the different European peoples.\textsuperscript{57} By contending that the French Empire intended to bring about this future, Napoleon III defined it as a progressive force, bent not on conquest or inciting revolution, but on liberating subject peoples and enforcing international justice.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} Napoleon III, “Les idées Napoleoniennes,” 22.

\textsuperscript{56} By positioning himself as the champion of “nationalities,” Napoleon III was laying claim to the French Revolutionary tradition. Revolutionary Republicanism had in fact conflated the idea of “nation” with the ideals of widespread political participation: for Republicans, the Republic was the natural expression of the nation itself. Napoleon III did not accept this equation, but he clearly identified “nationality” with progressive politics.

\textsuperscript{57} He noted, “We want the peoples to be enfranchised… such that each nation, happy with its independence, contributes to the well-being of all and one sees the old hatreds and rancor between nations disappear… Each country, circumscribed within its natural limits, united with its neighbor in interest and friendship, will enjoy the benefits of independence, peace, and liberty.” See Napoleon III, “Les idées Napoleoniennes,” 84.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Ibid.}, 70. It is worth noting that despite his insistence that France was uninterested in conquering European territory, Napoleon III employed the logic of “nationality” to argue for the incorporation of Nice and Savoy into the French state in the wake of the Italian Wars. See Sylvie Aprile, \textit{La Deuxième République et le Second Empire, 1848-1870} (Paris: Pygmalion, 2010), 289.
Throughout the 1850s, Napoleon III thus sought to define the French Second Empire as a unique kind of state. Internally, it integrated revolutionary principles with the need for stability and security. Externally, it spread its progressive ideology to its European neighbors without threatening their sovereignty or promoting radical democratic movements. In this vision, “empire” thus came to signify above all a mixture of liberal and repressive policies within metropolitan France and a foreign policy agenda based on a messianic understanding of France’s place in the world. However, Napoleon III did not define the French Empire as a grouping of multiple states – in part because he was positioning it against multiethnic empires like Russia and Austria-Hungary. In fact, during the first decade of Napoleon III’s reign, the Emperor usually treated the “French Empire” as functionally equivalent to the “French nation.”

During the early 1860s, the Second Empire moved into a period of political transition. The first decade of Napoleon III’s reign had been marked by increased economic prosperity, a series of successful European wars, and centralized, authoritarian control. But by the end of that decade, there were several shifts that incited Napoleon III to modify the Second Empire’s structure and political identity, and ultimately, to try to recast it entirely. The most important of these shifts was the growing cost and unpopularity of France’s ongoing wars supporting Victor-

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59 He thought it was only comparable to the ancient Roman Empire. Napoleon III was fond of comparing Napoleon I to Julius Caesar. Like Caesar, he maintained, Napoleon I had transferred old political institutions and changed them to fit a new set of political conditions. See Napoleon III, “Les idées Napoleoniennes,” 31.

60 This was distinct from Napoleon I’s vision of French Empire. Like Napoleon III, he used “empire” in opposition to the “republic” or the “monarchy” - to refer to a specific kind of political organization within France. But at the same time, it also signified a way of dealing with conquered territory. For Napoleon I, the French “nation” was thus part of the French empire, but not equivalent to it. See Philip G. Dwyer and Alan Forrest, eds., *Napoleon and His Empire: Europe, 1804-1814* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Geoffrey Ellis, “The Nature of Napoleonic Imperialism,” in *Napoleon and Europe*, ed. by Philip G. Dwyer (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001).


62 Some of these reasons were personal. In 1856, Napoleon III’s son was born, and even in 1860, he was feeling the beginnings of the illness that would later end his life. He thus felt the need to establish an imperial system that was less dependent on his person. See Édouard Leduc, *Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte: le dernier Empereur* (Paris: Publibook, 2010), 106.
Emmanuel II’s nationalist movement in Italy. By the end of the 1850s, Napoleon III’s attempt to help secure Italian independence had met with frustration: the nationalist movement seemed to have taken on republican overtones that he strongly opposed, his Italian allies often seemed to be acting against the interests of France, his armies were expensive, and he seemed to have accomplished little other than alienating the revolutionaries, the Pope and conservative French Catholics alike. When ongoing high military spending caused the nation’s prosperity to contract, the French population became “politicized” once more. Napoleon III’s internal and external model of French Empire came under attack from increasingly vocal opposition groups within France on both the right and the left.

Out of this frustration, Napoleon III began to envision a different identity and shape for the French Empire – one that departed from his earlier policies of promoting national movements across Europe, but that would both secure French glory abroad, appease dissenters at home, and secure France’s influence in the face of expanding competition from England and Germany. On the one hand, he passed a series of measures to “liberalize” the empire. He relaxed censorship, allowed the debates of the Senate to be published, and even fostered the creation of political

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63 Napoleon III’s involvement in Italy led in turn to a failed assassination attempt by a young Italian nationalist. In response to the attempt, Napoleon III passed the highly controversial loi de suréité, which involved a series of repressive measures against republicans meant to ferret out “plots” against the Emperor. Republican journals were suspended, a wave of arrests took place, and a number of opposition members were confined to prison. The Emperor even divided France into five “military” districts and put each under control of a general responsible for surveilling the population. See Vincent Wright, “La loi de sûreté générale de 1858,” Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine, vol. 16, no. 3 (1961), 415.

64 Beginning in 1856, Napoleon III had thrown his support behind Victor-Emmanuel, the King of Sardinia who sought to become King of a united or at least confederated Italy, along with Cavour, Victor-Emmanuel’s prime minister. In 1859, Napoleon III supported the Piedmontese troops against Austria. They had some success, but Napoleon III sought a hasty peace with Austria, upsetting his Italian allies. Victor-Emmanuel, on the other hand, decided to further extend his control over Italy by fighting the Papal armies around Rome. As a result, the Pope excommunicated Victor-Emmanuel, and his relationship with Napoleon III also became strained. In the early 1860s, tensions continued to rise between Napoleon III and his allies in Italy, who continued to act independently of his direction and sometimes against French interests. See Sylvie Aprile, La deuxième république et le Second Empire (Paris: Pygmalion, 2000), 289-291.

65 Sylvie Aprile, La Deuxième République et le Second Empire, 1848-1870 (Paris: Pygmalion, 2010), 297.
parties, at least to some degree. At the same time, Napoleon III also decided that he would extend the borders of the French Empire – not in complicated Europe, but overseas.

The most notorious example of Napoleon III’s attempts to extend French influence overseas was his failed attempt to establish Ferdinand Maximilian as the Emperor of Mexico. This endeavor to interfere in Mexico and establish a government there that would be friendly to French interests began in 1862. France initially entered Mexico as part of a coalition that included England and Spain. Officially, all three powers were reacting to the then-president Benito Juarez’s decision to stop paying the interest on the loans that the three powers had given to Mexico. Napoleon III officially led the expedition in the name of free trade; he claimed that he wanted a government in Mexico that would be open to trading with Europe. But he also hoped that extending French influence in Mexico would extend “Latin” influence across the globe. The venture was initially successful – the French troops managed to defeat the Mexican armies, secure hold of the capital, and rigged an election that at least made it appear that the Mexican people themselves had chosen Maximilian. But it quickly became clear that Maximilian had little support from the Mexican populace; he was too liberal for the conservatives, and too monarchical for the liberals. Moreover, by 1864, the population in the French metropole grew increasingly unsupportive of the war, and in the face of these frustrations, Napoleon III began to withdraw French troops. Without French support, the regime quickly collapsed, and both Maximilian and his wife were executed by the Republican troops in a turn of events that discredited the French state.

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68 There are some debates about whether Napoleon III had always intended to replace Juarez with a monarch from the beginning of the French interference in Mexico.
If Napoleon III sought to extend French influence and markets overseas in Mexico, he also, starting in approximately 1860, began to harbor dreams of supplanting the position that the Ottoman Empire held in the western Mediterranean by taking over its territories and reorganizing the peoples beneath its rule.\(^6^9\) By establishing its hold over the Mediterranean Sea, Napoleon III believed, France could create an alternative center of power, entrenching itself in a strong position against the encroaching reach of the expanding British colonial empire and the growing ambitions of Prussia.\(^7^0\) At the same time, the rising internal conflicts within France itself would diminish as the French people worked together to expand the empire’s frontiers. But while this empire would incorporate a large number of diverse groups of people, it would be quite distinct from the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires that Napoleon III had spent much of his political career criticizing. Instead of oppressing the different groups of people that would fall beneath its command, the French Second Empire, like the first, would help them progress. In the process, the French Empire would become a center of wealth, stability, culture, and prosperity. As Emperor, Napoleon III would stand at the center of this network bridging France with the “Arab nations,” uniting them in a common purpose and leading them towards a common goal.\(^7^1\) By looking outside of Europe, Napoleon III would thus be able to live up to Napoleon I’s legacy of expanding French borders without inciting a widespread European war.

Napoleon III did not try to fulfill this ambition by seeking war overseas, either, though beginning in the late 1850s, he pursued a number of paths to increase French influence in

\(^6^9\) Nofri, *Napoleon III, Visionnaire de l’Europe des Nations*, 378. It is worth noting that Napoleon III did not endorse this plan publically. It is also true that Napoleon III was a man who had many plans, and he tended to vacillate between them. But while Napoleon III’s dreams of taking over the Ottoman Empire never became public, the vision of empire that emerged out of that ambition did. See Napoleon III, “Discours d’Ouverture de la Session Législatif de 1868,” in *Oeuvres de Napoleon III: Discours, proclamations, messages, etc.* Vol. 5 (Paris: Henri Plon et Amyot, 1869), 298.


territories held by the Ottoman Empire. He intervened in the Crimean War to reassert his position as the protectors of Christians beneath Turkish rule. He sent a series of ambassadors to Tunisia, attempting to court the affection and loyalty of the bey. He intervened in Syria during the massacre of the Christian population while the Ottoman administration stood by, re-establishing France’s old position as the protector of Christians in the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, he also secured the autonomy of Libya from Syria. And in Egypt – a highly significant territory in light of its Napoleonic legacy - he sponsored the construction of the Suez Canal, and worked to spread French influence in the Egyptian administration and among its high-ranking inhabitants. However, he focused most of his attention on Algeria, which he hoped to turn into the model Arab state for the new empire that he was attempting to construct.

Napoleon III’s vision for Algeria and the wider imperial network he hoped to establish around it thus emerged out of a set of specific growing domestic and international pressures. But it also was heavily influenced by the tensions and contradictions surrounding understandings of empire and nation in nineteenth-century France. Indeed, Napoleon III’s expansionary ambitions presented a number of problems for an Emperor who defined himself as the champion of “nationality” in Europe. How could a France ostensibly devoted to liberating peoples and guiding them on the path to self-determination justify ruling – let alone conquering – non-French

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72 Ibid., 476.

73 Between April and July, 1860, approximately 10,000 Christians were murdered in Syria. The conflict began as a peasant uprising of Christian Maronites against the Druzes. As the rebellion spread, Druzes began to attack Maronite communities across the country. Napoleon III, invoking France’s role as the protector of Syrian Christians (as established in a treaty dating back to the 16th century) sent in 12,000 troops to end the massacres and restore “order” in the country. Eventually, the British objected to the French presence, and Napoleon III had to pull his troops out and hand the government over to a Christian. See Nofri, Napoleon III, Visionnaire de l’Europe des Nations, 403.

74 Napoleon III was interested in Egypt because of Napoleon I’s legacy in the country. He sent engineers, scientists, and other “experts” there over the course of a number of years to help the vice roy Mohammed Ali modernize. He worked closely with the Saint-Simonians to oversee the construction of the Suez Canal. He even managed to convince the vice roy to send Egyptian troops to fight alongside the French forces in Mexico. See ibid., 407.
peoples? Neither Napoleon III nor the coterie of advisors around him had a clear answer. But the set of solutions he proposed was deeply influenced not only by political problems in metropolitan France, but also by the ongoing conflict in Algeria between the colonist and indigenous populations.

III. France africaine or Algérie française

Napoleon III’s policies towards Algeria and his new vision of empire were also shaped by ongoing debates within the territory about how to govern its different inhabitants. Even before the French conquest, Algeria’s population included a number of ethnic groups who followed distinct customs, engaged in a variety of religious practices, and structured their lives according to different rules. But from the French perspective, it was the presence of a growing number of European colonists that complicated the territory’s administration. French government officials, administrators, and colonists alike disagreed about the roles the different populations should play, the respective rights that each should be afforded, and the nature of the institutions that should administer them. Some contended that the military was best suited to enforce order in a colony that was often beset by indigenous revolts, and that both the colonists and the indigenous should be subjected to its rule. Others maintained that metropolitan institutions and laws should govern the colonists, while a separate set of laws and institutions should govern the indigenous. Still others argued that colonists and indigenous alike should be integrated into the

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76 French policy towards Algeria focused on attracting European colonists to their new conquest, even before the official pacification of the country in 1841. Government officials and administrators justified the need for these colonists in different ways. Some claimed that they would help France consolidate its claim on the territory, while others maintained that Europeans – due to their racial or cultural superiority - would make Algeria prosperous in a way that indigenous peoples never could. Some even invoked the language of the “civilizing mission” and contended that the presence of Europeans amidst the indigenous would help “civilize” native Algerians. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeigueur, Thobie, *Histoire de la France Coloniales des origines à 1914*, 405.
metropolitan administration. Disagreements about how to procure land for the colonists to cultivate further complicated these negotiations. Most colonists went to Algeria to farm, but indigenous peoples already inhabited most of the arable land. In the ensuing struggle over property ownership, settlers quickly began to feel that their interests were radically at odds with those of Algeria’s original inhabitants.77

These ongoing arguments about the relationship between the settlers and the indigenous, their respective positions in the colony, and their connections to the French metropole often took shape as debates about “assimilation” and “association.” In the historiography of nineteenth-century French overseas imperialism, scholars long contended that the French mostly ruled their colonies according to the logic of “assimilation.” Historians contrasted policies to those enacted by the British colonial administration, which, they claimed, largely relied on “association.”78 In recent years, scholars have come to challenge this model. They have shown that the French colonial administration vacillated between the two policies, especially in the period between 1814 and 1870.79 This vacillation, however, was not politically benign for either the indigenous subjected to shifting policies or the administrators debating them. Both ideas carried with them a political charge, as they were enmeshed in contradictory republican and imperial discourses.80


79 The two policies had much in common. Both “aimed above all to legitimize colonial hegemony, absorb the natives and their characteristics into the superior culture of the colonizer, and thereby secure the colonial dominion and state.” But they were “greatly polarized over their preferred methods for carrying out their civilizing mandates… Assimilation… devised policies that brooked no compromises with… local institutions… Association… was conjured up as a strategy for cadenced progress.” See Osama Abi-Mershed, Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 9.

80 Scholars have shown that the theory of “assimilation” emerged out of the universalist ideals of French revolutionary republicanism, which held that “human nature… was a universal impervious to cultural and historical difference,” and as a result, all men should have access to a set of equally universal rights. Universalism itself had a long history in French political thought. Naomi Schor dates it back to the medieval belief that because France was
“Assimilation” could have multiple meanings in nineteenth-century France. Republicans during the Revolution used it to refer to the incorporation of overseas territories into the French metropole: colonies would be ruled by the same laws, marked by the same political institutions, and subject to the same commercial tariffs as the metropole. At the same time, their inhabitants would have the same civil rights as the inhabitants of metropolitan France. However, when Algerian colonists demanded that the French government transform Algeria into a *France africaine* or “African France” by “assimilating” it into the French metropole, they usually wanted the European population to be granted the same civil rights and ruled by the same institutions as those who lived in France itself. They were less clear on the fate of the indigenous – but they did not expect the government to incorporate them into the new regime, or endow them with the same rights as Europeans. Many argued that France should force the indigenous to assimilate into French culture by undermining tribal leaders, enforcing individual land ownership, banning

81 It is clear that the Republican intellectual heritage often served as a bridge between colonists and members of the metropolitan opposition. Jules Favre’s attack on the *Bureaux arabes* in his role as the prosecutor in the controversial Doineau trial condemned “association” in Algeria as a backwards system that supported political reaction. He insisted that the *Bureaux Arabes* – the symbol of the government’s associationist program - were “violent” and “feudal” because their officers were immersed in Arab society without trying to change it. They were thus affected by the Orient’s “despotic rot.” In other words, failing to enforce French political ideals in the colonies would ultimately have a negative effect on their shape within the French polity itself. The publicity surrounding the trial attracted the attention of republicans in Paris, who chimed in to condemn the imperial policy, and insisted that the Arabs needed to be “assimilated” into the French civil administration. See Jules Favre, *Plaidoyers politiques et judiciaires*, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1882), 1: 503-520, as quoted in Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 160.

82 Indeed, there was a basic contradiction that underlay assimilationist thinking. On the one hand, the colonists called for “assimilation” in order to abolish communal property and take Arab land. On the other hand, true assimilation – granting the Arabs political rights – would threaten the colonists’ ability to take Arab land. In fact, it would leave the settlers as a political minority. Between 1858 and 1860, when the French pursued a policy of “assimilation” most directly under Prince Napoleon, this contradiction became particularly clear. See Michel Levallois, *Ismaïl Urbain, Royaume Arabe ou Algérie franco-musulmane: 1848-1870* (Paris: Riveneuve éditions, 2012), 230.
polygamy and sharia law, and subjecting the indigenous Algerians to the French justice system. But even as they proposed to subject the Algerians to French law and authority, they did not plan to grant them French civil rights. Colonists thus modified the principles behind the revolutionary “assimilationist” model – which had been based at least in part on the idea that it was politically problematic for a republican state to rule over a subject population that did not have civil rights - even as they made use of its discourses.

“Association,” on the other hand, was championed by a cadre of officers and officials who had a diverse set of ties to Algeria, including General Émile Fleury, the Algerian administrator and historian Frédéric Lacroix, Colonel Ferdinand Lapasset, and Ismaël Urbain, an administrator of Arab affairs. These figures would come to shape Napoleon III’s approach to Algeria and ultimately influence his vision of empire in the 1860s. Broadly speaking, they contended that France should not seek to directly integrate the indigenous – or to exile or exterminate them, as other colonists proposed - but should preserve the structure of their societies while slowly pushing them to “progress.” These figures called themselves “arabophiles” and in many publications – from journals like the *Revue de l'Orient et de l'Algérie*, *La Revue de Paris*, and *La Revue orientale et algérienne*, to brochures and scholarly treatises –

84 Clément Duvernois was a particularly vehement and widely read proponent of this genre of assimilation theory. He insisted that the Arab property needed to be broken up, and that the tribes needed to be ruled by French law. He insisted that “by freeing them from the land that they are bound to like serfs, by creating individual property among them, by abolishing the tithe, destroying the influence of the caïds, aghas, and other lords, dissipating their prejudices through education at school and close contact: in one word, create a revolution among them, the revolution that our fathers caused among us.” But at the same time, he was unwilling to grant them civil rights. See Clément Duvernois, *L’Algérie, ce qu’elle est, ce qu’elle doit être: Essai économique et politique* (Algiers: Dubos, 1858), 235.
85 Napoleon III’s turn towards them was arguably part of his broader turn towards Saint-Simonian thought during the early period of the liberal empire. See Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 161.
they advocated for a French policy towards Algeria that protected the rights of the indigenous
against the European settler population. Although they rose to political prominence in the late
1850s and 1860s, when Napoleon III’s attention turned more concretely to the Algerian colony,
many of them had been working on what they saw as the behalf of the Arabs since the 1840s.

The “Arabophile” movement – at least in part because of the influential participation of
Ismaël Urbain - was grounded in the political principles of Saint-Simonianism, an intellectual
and political movement in the 1820s and 30s that was popular among the elites. An early
socialist group, Saint-Simonians embraced science and technology as the keys to fixing what
they saw as the social problems of their time. Saint-Simonians were also notable for their
rejection of early nineteenth-century racial theory that insisted that humans emerged out of
separate, unequal races: instead, Saint-Simonians insisted that all humans had a common origin,
but that they progressed at different rates through stages of social organization in response to
particular historical circumstances. All races, cultures, and societies could reach the same
advanced level of civilization, but at any given point, some would be ahead of others. Thus, the
Saint-Simonians did contend that Europeans were superior to Africans and Asians, if not

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87 Levallois, Ismaïl Urbain, Royaume Arabe ou Algérie franco-musulmane, 135.
88 Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) was a late-eighteenth century political theorist who influenced nineteenth-century socialist thought. He did not produce a unifying theory of socialism as later thinkers did, and indeed, many of his writings were contradictory. But in summation, he contended that humans “naturally” cooperated with one another for the benefit of the whole, but that the form of this cooperation – or the shape of “society” – changed over time. He held that there were three stages of social organization: the “theological,” the “metaphysical,” and the “scientific.” During the middle ages or “metaphysical” stage, cooperation had taken shape within the feudal system, in which the feudal aristocracy and religious elites exercised power over the lower classes. But by the eighteenth century, new technology had broken this system, leading to widespread disarray, because the technologies and systems of thought that had disrupted feudal and religious authority had not yet produced a new system of social organization. As a result, French society was marked by disunity, division, and dislocation. But ultimately, he and his followers believed, France would reorganize itself. This new society would substitute the production of industry for feudal power, and “positive scientific capacity” would replace spiritual power. This new society would take the form of a utopian socialist state. Hierarchies would not disappear, but they would be based on merit and education: industrialists, scientists, and intellectuals would lead the other classes of society into a productive future. See Robert B. Carlisle, “The Birth of Technocracy: Science, Society, and Saint-Simonians,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, v. 35, no. 3 (1974), 447; Naomi Andrews, “D’Eichthal and Urbain’s *Lettres sur la race noire et la race blanche*: Race, Gender, and Reconciliation after Slave Emancipation” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* (2011), 246.
necessarily permanently so. They also did not oppose European imperial expansion: in fact, Prosper Enfantin, the movement’s de facto leader in the 1830s, even contended that by intervening in the affairs of “inferior races,” Europeans could improve them and push them towards civilization.⁸⁹ In Saint-Simonian thought, imperial relationships with “inferior” peoples were thus not only morally defensible, but a potentially positive force to bring “backwards” peoples into the historical present.⁹⁰

Following the conquest of Algeria, Saint-Simonians became increasingly interested in “the Orient” as a site in which they could set their theories of progress in motion. The French had already decided that they were going to restructure Algeria; by involving themselves in the process, the Saint-Simonians saw an opportunity to help give shape to a new society.⁹¹ Enfantin even argued that Algeria would be an excellent “testing ground (lieu d’essai)” for social policies that could later be enacted in France once their success was proven in the colony.⁹² He suggested that the French should transport a population of Europeans to Algeria to work in commerce, build industry, and develop agricultural infrastructure alongside an indigenous population of agricultural workers. By cooperating with the indigenous, the European colonists would educate

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⁹⁰ Enfantin, Saint-Simon’s influential disciple, insisted, “All physical circumstances being equal, the best organized species or race civilizes itself first, and henceforth arrests the development of inferior races and species until general association is understood and accepted by all.” In other words, as long as Europe was busy civilizing itself, it would only have a detrimental influence on the non-Europeans whom it came in contact with. But after Europe reached a certain level of civilization, it would help bring that civilization to those around them. See “Note du Père Enfantin sur la civilisation de l’Asie, 19 Août 1827,” in *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon et d’Enfantin*, 13, 167-68.

⁹¹ The fact that Enfantin had been imprisoned by the French government in 1832 also had discredited his branch of the movement in metropolitan France and convinced him to look for progress outside Egypt. First, he and his followers went to Egypt, where they tried to consolidate bonds between East and West by pursuing the construction of a Suez canal and locating a female messiah who they believed was living in Egypt. After a few years, many moved on to the new French colony of Algeria, leaving de Lesseps behind to build the canal. See Mary Pickering, “Auguste Comte and the Saint-Simonians,” *French Historical Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1993), 218.

“backwards” and “despotic” Arab peoples with French science and technology.\(^93\) Together, they would ultimately come to form an ideal modern society without the constraints of outdated European laws.

In the 1830s and 40s, a number of Saint-Simonians moved to Algeria, where they became administrators and technocrats.\(^94\) As Osama Abi-Mershed has shown, even if they were not able to structure the Algerian colony according to their ideals, they came to shape the “dissenting voice” of the colonial administration in the years that followed.\(^95\) They argued that the French government should not transform Algeria into a *France africaine* but should instead try to create an *Algérie française*, articulating a colonial vision of “association” in which the European administration would “modernize” the indigenous populations without forcing them to accept French laws or customs.\(^96\) At the same time, they worked to protect indigenous property rights, maintaining that it was unjust, uneconomical, and impractical to strip the tribes of their land to benefit a handful of European colonists. This set of attitudes put them in conflict with ambitious settlers searching for more land, as well as with those who retained republican sympathies and remained invested in the principles of assimilation.

Of all the Saint-Simonians, Ismaël Urbain arguably came to exert the most influence over the Emperor’s political thought about the colony. He was born in French Guyana to a merchant

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\(^93\) Enfantin explicitly noted that France should structure their relationship with Algeria in the same way that the ancient Romans did. He claimed that the Romans did not actually “cultivate” African soil – though to some degree they owned land and introduced advanced agrarian techniques. Instead, they brought them “a grand intellectual culture by forcing the defeated to learn the universal language of the conquerors and placing before their eyes unknown marvels of the arts.” See Prosper Enfantin, *Colonisation de l’Algérie* (Paris: P. Bertrand, 1843), 22.


\(^96\) Even though the Saint-Simonians believed that the indigenous were “backwards,” they did not think they needed to become French. Instead, they insisted that all peoples would become modern within the context of their own “particular institutional structures.” See Michel Levallois, *Ismaïl Urbain: Une Autre Conquête de l’Algérie*, vol. 1 (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001), 634.
from Marseille and a free woman of color. Educated in Marseille, he joined the Saint-Simonians and accompanied them when they went to Egypt. There, he learned Arabic and converted to Islam; in 1840, he applied for the position of military interpreter in Algeria, where he met and married an indigenous Algerian woman. During the 1840s and 1850s, he became an increasingly vocal advocate for indigenous rights in Algeria and came to occupy ever-more important positions in the Algerian colonial administration. Over time, he became frustrated with the treatment of Arabs in Algeria, especially after the installation of the civilian government in 1858, which he felt served as little more than a thin veil over the promotion of settler interests. But after Napoleon III’s visit to Algeria in 1860 and his widely circulated pronouncement that France’s primary obligation in Algeria was to see to the needs of the Arab population it had conquered, Urbain began to believe that the French government might listen to his ideas. As a result, in 1861 and in 1862, with the help of Frédéric Lacroix, he decided to publish two pamphlets outlining his vision of Algeria, the future of its different inhabitants, and the nature of its relationship to the French state.

Several days after Napoleon III’s decrees returning Algeria to a military administration appeared, Ismaël Urbain’s L’Algérie pour les Algériens circulated in both Algeria and Paris. Published under the pseudonym of Georges Voisin, the pamphlet began by announcing that its

97 Ibid., 32.
98 Ibid., 212.
99 He published about this frustration anonymously, partly through government reports. His Rapport au président de la République traced the history of French Algeria and the Bureaux Arabes, defended the military administration, and pleaded against republican assimilationist policies. See Ismaïl Urbain, “Rapport au président de la République sur le gouvernement et l’administration des tribus de l’Algérie,” Le Moniteur (25 January 1851).
100 While steeped in Saint-Simonian thought, Urbain’s position on Algerian policy did not necessarily intersect with other Saint-Simonians. While most Saint-Simonians believed progressive history and colonial association, they often differed on how policies should be implemented. Prosper Enfantin contended in the 1840s that the military administration should be replaced quickly with a civilian one, because he believed it would hinder the growth of the colony. But in time, many of his former followers like Urbain came to believe that the military administration would protect Arab rights more effectively than a civilian one. See Abi-Mershed, Apostles of Modernity, 96.
author wrote “under the patronage” of the speech given by the Emperor upon his arrival in Algiers in 1860.¹⁰¹ In his preface, titled “The Conversion of the Muslims of Algeria to Civilization,” he defended the Muslims against charges that they were “fatalists” and “fanatics” incapable of change or progress.¹⁰² These attitudes, he maintained, were “reactionary”: progress was a “human law,” so everyone, including Muslims, was capable of it. But “progress” for Muslims would not necessarily mean that they would become French. Urbain cajoled his readers to abandon their dreams to

…arrive at a general uniformity for all, with the same religion, the same customs, and the same habits. No, the dream of monarchies and universal religions do not belong to our time: association is the new formula… Tolerance of one for the other… No nation, no religion can have the arrogance to present themselves as the model of progress… no one can say: my political law, my social organization, my customs represent for humanity the greatest expression of progress…¹⁰³

In other words, the French could expect Muslims to progress beyond their current state. But they could not assume that indigenous peoples would adopt the French model of modernity as they became “civilized” or even maintain that the French model of modernity was superior to another culture’s alternative.¹⁰⁴ Urbain believed that the French could facilitate progress in Algeria.

¹⁰¹ Urbain had many reasons for using a pseudonym, but on the most basic level, he employed one because his superiors disagreed with him. See Levallois, Ismayl Urbain (1812-1882): Une autre conquête d’Algérie, 613.

¹⁰² Much of this discourse emerged in response to the slaughter of the Christian population in Syria. This event had produced an outcry against Islam in France; some writers even suggested that the French should invade the Middle East and burn down Mecca, and drive the Muslim Algerian population into the desert. See Levallois, Ismayl Urbain, Royaume Arabe ou Algérie franco-musulmane, 255. Urbain insisted that the Muslims in Algeria had nothing to do with the events in Syria. See Ismayl Urbain, L’Algérie pour les algériens (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1861), 5. This was not the first time he had defended Muslims against such charges. See “De la tolerance dans l’islamisme,” Revue de Paris (April 1, 1856).

¹⁰³ Ismayl Urbain, L’Algérie pour les algériens (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1861), 11.

¹⁰⁴ He also cautioned his readers that progress was necessarily slow and painstaking – “evolution” rather than “revolution” - and that it would necessarily encounter resistance. See ibid., 16.
However, he also believed that progress would only be possible if the French acknowledged the distinctiveness of Algerian culture and approached the Muslims on their own terms.\footnote{He also insisted that the French government was making more progress at improving the Arab population than colonist critics often implied. He insisted that the only place that the French government was really making insufficient progress was in Arab population and in the establishment of an Arab civil state. See \textit{ibid.}, 138.}

Even with the right policies, Urbain made clear that the process of “civilizing” Algeria would have its challenges: it would require the French state to attract both the fear and respect of its Muslim subjects. Urbain contended that the French military administration would be best equipped to accomplish these goals. While he praised the work of French civil administrators in France, he insisted that the system did not translate well to Algeria. Instead of prefects and councils, Algeria needed military administrators who could act swiftly and decisively, calling on the authority of armed force when they needed it.\footnote{The structure of the French state tended to “enfranchise” individuals; this would only create chaos in Algeria, where the indigenous needed to be centralized beneath the authority of the French state. See \textit{ibid.}, 144, 146.} Moreover, he maintained, the Algerians obeyed the French army more willingly than civil authority, because they respected its military prowess.\footnote{Moreover, he insisted, Algeria acted as a field on which the French army could practice their technique, remain active, and retain their competitiveness. Urbain insisted that using military authority in exceptional circumstances was well within the French legal tradition, and by far the most practical solution. See \textit{ibid.}, 148.}

Urbain also insisted that France needed to combine military force with measures to reconcile the Algerian population to French rule and facilitate its historical progress. He contended that the French should codify measures of toleration that were currently only enforced sporadically: they especially needed to ensure that administrators respected the jurisdiction of Muslim law in cases that only involved the indigenous. They could further garner Muslim goodwill by creating social support systems for the indigenous, building hospitals to treat the sick, and creating a transparent, universal tax code. At the same time, the French also needed to
expand the primary school system, develop the Arab-French normal schools, and improve the extant Franco-Arab college.\textsuperscript{108} The state could extend these educational efforts into the adult population by printing French texts in Arabic. Finally, Urbain emphasized the importance of practical education, and maintained that the French should teach agricultural skills and techniques by creating model farms in tribal lands. These policies, Urbain insisted, would not only benefit the Muslim population: they would also benefit the French state. The indigenous population outnumbered the colonist population: with French guidance, they would also be far better suited to develop agriculture in the colony. Investing in their education and attracting their goodwill would therefore be the easiest way to secure Algeria’s prosperity.\textsuperscript{109}

Urbain concluded his pamphlet by insisting that the French government also needed to recognize that the indigenous inhabitants of Algeria were culturally, socially, politically, and racially diverse, and could not all be treated the same way. By recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of the different groups that inhabited Algeria, he maintained, the French could simultaneously garner more good will from the indigenous, help each group “progress” towards civilization at a faster rate, and make the French possession more productive and wealthier at the same time. The French should thus teach the Berbers living on open plains to improve their farming and grazing techniques, encourage the Berbers that lived in the mountains to develop small industries and crafts, and push the Arabs to expand, extend, and improve their trading networks – instead of expecting each group to pick up new professions.\textsuperscript{110} Finally, the French

\textsuperscript{108} Urbain also insisted that in the civil territories, “fusion” between European and Algerian races needed to be sought by slowly granting the Algerians civil equality, freedom of religion, and respect for their customs. These measures, more than any others, would bring the Arabs living amidst Europeans into the European fold. He thus did support more immediate measures of “assimilation,” in some situations. See \textit{Ibid.}, 154, 156.

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Ibid.}, 135, 189.

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ibid.}, 27. It is worth noting that Urbain’s attempt to “classify” the different peoples who lived in Algeria was in no way unique; even during the Second Empire, colonists and European anthropologists sought to classify them in
should solidify their hold on the loyalty of each group by drafting all young men into military
service, where they would serve alongside the sons of European colonists. Through these
measures, he promised, the French state would both facilitate the indigenous’ historical progress
and assure the prosperity of the territory.

In 1862, Urbain both expanded upon these ideas and modified them in his second
pamphlet, titled *L'Algérie française: Indigènes et immigrants*. If his first pamphlet laid out the
policies that the French Empire should adopt towards Muslims, the second dealt with the legal
position of the indigenous and colonist populations in French Algeria. Urbain began by
explaining the ambiguities of the indigenous position. He noted that after the French annexed
Algeria in 1848, the country was no longer a “conquered” territory. As a result, he insisted, the
indigenous Arabs could not be treated as a “vanquished” people or as foreigners: they needed
some kind of official status. But thus far, their position remained unspecified and their
relationship to the French nation unclear. As a result, indigenous Algerians were subjected to
French rule without having access to any of the rights afforded by the French state. The
French had an interest in clarifying the ambiguities of their legal position, Urbain insisted,

similar ways. During the Third Republic, the government explicitly made use of these kinds of classifications –
which were largely constructed by the French – to better rule over the indigenous. Urbain’s treatment here is
somewhat different because he classified the indigenous both by “racial group” and geographic location, but it
clearly partakes in the same tradition. For a lengthy treatment of racial classification in Algeria, see Patricia Lorcin,

111 This joint service, Urbain maintained, would weaken the antipathy between the two groups, while simultaneously
strengthening both the Arabs’ patriotic resolve and the French army. See *Ibid.*, 158.


113 He notes “Up until the moment that the territory was annexed to France, it was possible to consider the
indigenous as vanquished… But when the land became French, the situation changed radically, because our political
code could not admit that in a part of the Empire there existed a population that was neither national nor foreign,

114 Urbain notes that they are not enslaved, nor have they for the most part been stripped of their wealth. Indeed, they
are equal in French law in that they are entitled to French protection for their belongings, their property, and their
religion. But they have no civil rights, or even clearly defined position in the French state. He indicates that this kind
of inequality is in certain ways similar to the legal inequality between the sexes in the metropole. See *Ibid.*, 9.
because such a move would attract indigenous loyalty.\footnote{Here, Urbain reiterated his arguments about the potential contributions that the Muslims, if loyal, could make to the empire: namely, they could cultivate the land and help fill out the ranks of the French army. See \textit{ibid.}, 79.} This process of clarification, however, would not be entirely straightforward. Indeed, Urbain indicated that France could not give Muslims French citizenship because their laws and social structures were mutually incompatible.\footnote{Urbain tied this incompatibility largely to the role that religion played in the lives of indigenous peoples – even if he did not locate directly in Islam itself. He argued, “As long as the indigenous cannot separate the spiritual and temporal realms, as long as their religion and their religious laws remain in contradiction with our Codes, they cannot be invested with the title of “French citizen.” The Koran must become a purely religious book, without effect on civil legislation.” He went on to note that this progress was not impossible. See \textit{ibid.}, 6.} Instead, Urbain proposed that the state should declare the indigenous “régnoicoles” – a term drawn from the jurisprudence of the \textit{ancien régime} that referred to the inhabitants of a particular kingdom or area. As “régnoicoles,” Algerians would be entitled to the protection of the French state – unlike foreigners or conquered peoples. But at the same time, they would have neither the rights nor responsibilities of French citizenship.\footnote{“Régnicole” is a judicial term from the \textit{ancien régime}, originally used to designate the inhabitants or natives of a kingdom. It was used in contradistinction to “aubain” or foreigner. By the eighteenth century, however, it was sometimes used to refer to Jews and Protestants – religious minorities who could not exercise full rights in France. It is noteworthy that Urbain used this term instead of describing them as either French citizens or French nationals – more common terms in the mid-nineteenth century. By using “régnicole,” however, he could locate the Arab population within the French state without either declaring them French citizens or French nationals. See \textit{ibid.}, 6.}

Urbain acknowledged that this status would mark the Algerians as distinct from and indeed technically inferior to the Europeans in Algeria, many of whom did have the right to French citizenship. But he insisted that legal inferiority of the indigenous should only lie in the rights afforded to them – not in the degree to which they would be protected by the state.\footnote{“We have stated that the indigenous, from the point of view of civil rights, are only the clients… of France. But these restrictions do not place them in a position of subalternity, nor of inferiority, in their relationship with the French who inhabit Algeria… The indigenous are equal, as régnoicoles, to the French who come from Europe, in the sense that they have the right to the same state protection for their liberty, property, and religion. The inequality that exists… is an abstract inequality… that no individual could prevail upon for his personal profit to make an indigenous person feel inferior. The Algerian \textit{indigène} and the French immigrant are both subjects of the French state – to different degrees and with different titles: but the supremacy of the state to the indigenous cannot be invoked by other French subjects… The incapacity that temporarily affects the \textit{indigène} cannot be used against him to exploit him…” See \textit{ibid.}, 10.} In
fact, Urbain reiterated his contention in his first pamphlet that the state should try harder to
defend the interests of the indigenous peoples in the colony. Moreover, he proposed to resolve
this inequality with a set of policies that diverged even farther from his first pamphlet’s ideals.
He insisted that the French state should work to induce the indigenous population to adopt
enough French cultural, social, and political values that they would become eligible for French
citizenship - thus permanently resolving the problem of their ambiguous status in the French
Empire, and rendering a large “settler” population redundant. Urbain concluded with a
warning that this process of integration would be slow. But the second pamphlet nevertheless
broke from the first by implying that the indigenous Algerians would become “French” as they
progressed - instead of finding their own version of “civilization.”

Both of Urbain’s pamphlets emphasized the cultural and social differences between the
French and the indigenous Algerians, and argued that while the French civilization was the more
advanced, it was not immutably superior. His pamphlets also both insisted that the French
should not force the indigenous to abandon their cultural practices and assimilate into French
society overnight. To push them to do so would only create resistance and social chaos. Instead,
France should try to court the affection of the indigenous and help them “progress” on their own
terms. But if Urbain clearly laid out the policies that he felt the French needed to follow to

119 Insisting that the French needed to separate “the interests of the French nation from the interests of French
individuals,” Urbain maintained that the French Empire needed to stop funding the land-grabbing policies promoted
by some colonists that only served to alienate the Algerians further. Urbain went on to imply that the colonizers
themselves had precipitated this apparent conflation of interests in their propaganda. See ibid., 9.

120 Urbain insisted that the tribal chiefs should be left in place and that property should remain collective, at least for
now. “Revolutionizing” Arab society would only create chaos. Moreover, the seeds of democratic thought were
already present in Arab culture; the French should nurture these sentiments, not overthrow the society. See ibid., 45.

121 It is also worth noting that while Urbain criticized the indigenous society, he insisted that their culture and
religion were not inferior to the French. See Ismaël Urbain, “Chrétien et musulmans, Français et Algériens” Revue

122 Ismayl Urbain, L’Algérie pour les algériens, 89; L’Algérie française: Indigènes et immigrants, 71.
reconcile the indigenous and “improve” them, his understanding of the end goal of such policies was more opaque. In his first pamphlet, he implied that the indigenous would continue to maintain their own distinct social, cultural, and political identity even as they moved forward and became “civilized” under French guidance. The Algerians would contribute to the French Empire, but they would not become “French,” or assimilate into the French nation. But if this model explained the indigenous’ temporary position in the French empire, it left their ultimate political fate undecided. Once the French completed their civilizing project and succeeded in bringing the indigenous to the same stage of historical progress as the French, what role would the Algerians play in the French Empire? If they were “civilized” but not French, what kind of political rights would they have?

Urbain sought to answer these questions in his second pamphlet. Notably, the only way that Urbain could find for the indigenous population to lay claim to the rights of political participation in the confines of the French Empire was to have access to French citizenship. But for Urbain, the rights of French citizenship were deeply intertwined with membership in the French nation. So for the Algerians to be eligible for citizenship, they not only had to become “civilized,” they also needed to become at least partly “French.” Urbain did not endorse the “assimilationist” policies championed by the settlers – he insisted that early French initiatives should be gradual, and focus on education and practical instruction rather than the disruption of Muslim custom or law. The ultimate goal of these efforts, however, would be incorporation, not permanent respect of difference. The second pamphlet thus proposed a clear resolution to the ambiguities surrounding the indigenous’ position within the French Empire, and laid out a path.

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towards their political enfranchisement. But it reopened the question of the nature of their relationship with the French nation – would Algeria ultimately become a North African extension of France? It failed to explain the degree to which the indigenous would need to assimilate to gain access to these promised political rights.

Urbain’s defense of the “associationalist” position – with its attendant ambiguities – made wide rounds in political circles in both Algeria and metropolitan France. Though based in Algiers, his correspondence with Frédéric Lacroix – who worked in the central colonial administration in Paris - kept Urbain connected with a wider network of Parisian administrators and governmental officials who were sympathetic to the “Arabophile” position. Lacroix also ensured that copies of Urbain’s pamphlets reached all members of the Senate, along with key members of Napoleon III’s court. He also pushed to have the pamphlets – which were controversial enough to attract attention – republished cheaply so that they circulated widely.124

While Urbain’s pamphlets generated an outcry among settlers and sparked conversation in the Senate, they had their greatest effect on Napoleon III. Beginning in the late 1850s, Lacroix communicated Urbain’s ideas about Algeria to the Emperor – who found them appealing in part due to the newfound interest he had taken in Saint-Simonian principles as he sought to “liberalize” the imperial regime.125 After Lacroix handed Napoleon III L’Algérie pour les algériens in 1861, the Emperor’s engagement with Urbain’s thought further increased.126 Shortly after the pamphlet’s release, he wrote a letter to the Governor of Algeria Pélissier that clearly drew directly on Urbain’s work, noting, “…We must convince the Arabs that we have not come

125 Napoleon III had been introduced to the ideas of Saint-Simonianism by his tutor, Narcisse Vieillard. Saint-Simonian ideas also ran through his early political pamphlets. See Hazareesingh, From Subject to Citizen, 25.
126 Napoleon III began communicating with Urbain – first through Lacroix, and then, after Lacroix’s death in 1863, directly. See Abi-Mershed, Apostles of Modernity, 167.
to Algeria to despoil them, but to bring them the benefits of civilization... The Arabs are vital to colonization.” Over the course of the next few years, Lacroix, Lapasset and Urbain would work alongside prominent figures like the Baron Jérôme David to convince the Emperor that France needed to protect indigenous property, court the affection of its Algerian subjects, and allow the military to administer the territory. In return, the Emperor began to act. In 1863, he pushed the Senate to pass the bill defending indigenous property rights. At the same time, he published a second letter to Pélissier that redefined Algeria and its place in the French Empire. The Emperor’s intervention in these longstanding, vitriolic debates about Algeria, its administration, and the rights of its different populations, brought the arguments surrounding the French territory into a new key.

IV. Le Royaume Arabe

While Napoleon III developed his vision of the royaume arabe over the course of several years, he recorded his lengthiest reflections on the subject in two letters addressed to the governor-general of Algeria, which he published and circulated in the Moniteur universel and in pamphlet form. The first appeared in 1863 during the Senate’s debates over indigenous property rights, and the second in 1865, several months after his return from his long trip to North Africa. Both letters drew upon the memory of the Napoleonic Empire, Saint-Simonian thought about

127 By “colonization,” Napoleon III was referring to agricultural development. Pélissier, needless to say, was somewhat unimpressed with this statement. In his reply on November 25th, he agreed that Arab colonization was important, but insisted that it needed to be complemented by European efforts. See Napoleon III, “Letter to Pélissier, 1 November 1861,” cited from Spillmann, Napoleon III et le royaume arabe d’Algérie, 26.

128 Jérôme David was the grandson of the painter of Jacques-Louis David and the godson of Jérôme Bonaparte. Early in 1863, he published an influential book titled Réflexions et discours sur la propriété chez les Arabes. Influenced by Urbain, he defended his views about Arab property. In fact, many people at court thought that he was the author of Urbain’s anonymous pamphlets. See Levallois, Ismaïl Urbain, Royaume Arabe ou Algérie franco-musulmane, 338.

Algeria, and ongoing uncertainties about the connections between empire, nation, and colony that dated back to the Revolution. In each, Napoleon III laid out a vision of Algeria, while simultaneously reflecting on the nature of the French Empire, its purpose, and its relationship to the different peoples beneath its rule. Each time, he also provoked an angry response in colonist circles that ultimately extended to the Republican opposition in the metropole. In fact, it was the virulence of this response more than Napoleon III’s half-enforced policy changes that would come to shape popular understandings of his model of empire during the last years of his reign and the early Third Republic.

Napoleon III began his 1863 letter with a lengthy exposition on the flaws of the current Algerian administration. He noted that despite ongoing complaints that the land available to settlers was insufficient, European colonists were actually cultivating only a small percentage of the territory set aside for them. The government had far more available land than colonists interested in farming it.\footnote{130} French colonists’ inability to make Algeria prosperous therefore resulted not from too many restrictions on property purchases, but from the fact that the European colonialist project was doomed from the start. There were relatively few Europeans interested in emigrating, and those that arrived were ill suited to the climate, unfamiliar with the soil, and bewildered by the indigenous population.\footnote{131} To make the territory viable, Napoleon III thus believed, the French needed to invest not in European settlers, but in the Arabs themselves. With encouragement, he argued, the nomadic tribes that roamed the countryside could be induced to settle down and farm the soil. Drawing the Arabs towards farm work would be the fastest and least expensive way to improve and enrich Algeria. But to encourage the Arab

\footnote{131} \textit{Ibid.}, 391.
population to buy into this plan, he maintained, the French needed to “convince the Arabs that we have not arrived to oppress or despoil them, but to bring them the benefits of civilization.”

To convey this message, the French should assure the indigenous population of their rights to their land. Any further talk of cantonnement or “resettling” the tribes would only serve to alienate the very people critical to the territory’s success.

Napoleon III did not claim that French colonists had no place in Algeria. But he insisted that the colonists would never form the bulk of the population, and therefore could not make Algeria a prosperous agricultural state. Instead of trying to claim land from the more numerous indigenous, who were better suited for farming it, he contended that Europeans should work as technicians and skilled laborers. By building up the Algerian infrastructure, clearing forests, irrigating farmland, and teaching farming techniques, they could facilitate the imperial project of “improving” the Algerian population and reconciling the indigenous to French rule. The indigenous and colonist populations would thus complement one another instead of competing with one another.

After laying out the roles of both the colonists and the indigenous in Algeria, Napoleon III’s letter went on to redefine the territory itself by declaring that it was “not a colony” but a royaume arabe. Napoleon III’s insistence that Algeria should not be described as a colony was based on the belief that the term “colony” did not just signify a state’s overseas territory; it specifically referred to a territory that the state intended to populate primarily with its own

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132 Ibid., 392.
133 Ibid., 391.
134 The Emperor emphasized that there were three million indigenous Algerians in Algeria in comparison to 200,000 Europeans and 20,000 French citizens. See Ibid., 392.
135 “Lettre au gouverner d’Algérie – 6 février 1863,” in La Politique Impériale, 393.
citizens.\textsuperscript{136} Because Napoleon III thought that the indigenous would remain the primary population of Algeria, he believed that calling it a “colony” would be misleading. His contention that the territory should instead be understood as a royaume arabe or “Arab kingdom,” on the other hand, emerged from his commitment to the “politics of nationality.”\textsuperscript{137} Especially in light of his promise to a group of Arab listeners in 1865 that France did not invade Algeria “to destroy the nationality of a people,” it seems clear that Napoleon III saw Algeria as a country of Arabs who had a cohesive sense of identity.\textsuperscript{138} By calling Algeria a royaume arabe, Napoleon III was thus not only emphasizing the importance of the Arab population in the territory, but also describing Algeria as an Arab nation.

Napoleon’s vision of the indigenous’ and colonists’ respective positions in the new Algeria closely paralleled the ideas laid out in Ismaël Urbain’s pamphlets.\textsuperscript{139} Both Urbain and Napoleon III agreed that the indigenous, and not the colonists, would be central to Algeria’s success or failure. They also proposed similar economic roles for the indigenous and colonist

\textsuperscript{136} Later in the century, colonial theorists would argue that all overseas territories should be referred to as “colonies,” and that only some of said colonies were “settler colonies.” But it is clear that for Napoleon III, “colony” and “settler colony” were synonymous terms. Here, Napoleon III seems to have been drawing on the thought of Ismael Urbain, who argued that to call Algeria a “colony” was to emphasize the importance of the colonists living there over the importance of the indigenous. See Levallois, Ismaël Urbain, Royaume Arabe ou Algérie francomusulmane, 322.

\textsuperscript{137} Napoleon III first used the term in his unpublished letter to Pélissier in 1861, which concluded with the exact same statement that he published in 1863: “Algeria is not technically a colony, but a royaume arabe.” See Napoleon III, “Lettre à Pélissier, 11 January 1861.” Found in Jean Martin, L’Empire Renaissant, 1789-1871. (Paris: Denoel, 1987), 306-308.

\textsuperscript{138} Napoleon III had gone on to compare the Arabs to the position of the Gauls in the Roman Empire. He noted that the Gauls had fought the Romans, but eventually incorporated Roman ideas and practices into their forms of social organization. Even after the collapse of Rome, the French nation – which had emerged out of this confluence of Gaulish and Roman culture and ideas – continued to thrive. He promised that French rule would bring a similar set of advantages to the Arabs; it would preserve their cultural identity while helping them progress. See René de Saint-Félix, Le Voyage de S. M. L’Empereur Napoleon III en Algérie et la Régence de S. M. Impératrice. Rédigé d’après les documents officiels. Précédé d’une notice historique et suivi de biographies (Paris: Eug. Pick, Grande Librairie Napoleonienne, 1865), 110.

\textsuperscript{139} Urbain claimed that the Emperor confessed to “pillaging his pamphlet to write his letter.” See Levallois, Ismayl Urbain (1812-1882): Une autre conquête d’Algérie, 620.
populations. The differences between their proposals lay in the way in which they described the indigenous themselves. Napoleon III, unlike Urbain, did not differentiate between the populations inhabiting the territory. Ismaël Urbain had divided the indigenous population into the Kabyles, the Arabs, the Moors, the Turks, and the Jews; he insisted that they all had unique talents and proclivities and would contribute in different ways to Algeria’s prosperity. Napoleon III, on the other hand, referred to all inhabitants of Algeria as Arabs. His understanding of the indigenous as a single, unified ethnic group was important because it was what enabled him to assume that the territory had a “national” coherence and to classify it as a royaume arabe.

The conclusion of Napoleon III’s letter both reinforced the centrality of the indigenous to Algeria and underlined his vision of the territory as an Arab nation. He noted: “the natives have the same right to my protection as the colonists do, and I am as much the Emperor of the Arabs as I am the Emperor of the French.” The first half of the statement clearly indicated that indigenous and colonist interests were equal in the eyes of the French state. Again, it drew on Urbain’s contention in his 1863 pamphlet that the indigenous deserved protection and consideration equal to that of the French colonists – even if they exercised different levels of political rights. The second half of the statement, however, once again broke away from Urbain. On one level, it was a simple extension of the idea that the Arabs had the same rights to the

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140 There were some differences in the details too. Unlike Urbain, Napoleon III did not indicate that the indigenous would play a key role in the empire’s North African Army. He also devoted less space and attention to the question of how France should educate its Algerian subjects.

141 Ismaël Urbain never described Algeria as either an “Arab kingdom” or an “Arab nation” – at least in part because he recognized that not all of its inhabitants identified as Arabs. He had pleaded for the French state to recognize the indigenous’ cultural differences – but not to treat Algeria as a unified, self-identified nation. But it is worth noting that Urbain’s attempt to “classify” the indigenous Algerian population into different groups was not necessarily less problematic than Napoleon III’s decision to treat them as one, united and undifferentiated group of people. Both of these visions of Algeria were more reflective of European norms, customs, and ideas about the “Orient” than of Algerian people per se. See Patricia Lorcin, Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Race in Colonial Algeria (New York: IB Tauris & Co., 1995), 17.

142 “Lettre au gouverner d’Algérie – 6 février 1863,” in La Politique Impériale, 394.
Emperor’s attention as the colonists did. But it had wider-reaching implications when deployed alongside the idea that Algeria was a *royaume arabe*. If, as the letter contended, Napoleon III was equally the Emperor of both the French and the Arabs, it followed that he was also the Emperor of both the French and Algerian or Arab nations.\(^{143}\) This formulation proposed to re-orient understandings of the North African territory, its relationship to the French nation, and the position of both France and Algeria in the French Empire.

Napoleon III proposed this formulation at least in part to resolve the ongoing debates about Algeria’s status that dated back to the 1848 republican decision to classify the French overseas holding as a “French territory” and divide it into three French departments. These measures transformed Algeria, at least from an administrative perspective, into an overseas extension of the French nation-state.\(^{144}\) But during the subsequent fifteen years, colonists, administrators, and the military had argued over the degree and scope of its integration into France. Napoleon III sought to end this debate by insisting that Algeria constituted a separate, Arab nation that was not part of France at all, nor subject to the authority of French citizens or colonists. Instead, it was part of the French Empire and subject to the authority of the Emperor and his administration.

Napoleon III’s contention that Algeria was an “Arab nation” distinct from the “French nation” marked a deviation from the vision of the Second Empire that he had long promoted. Early in his reign, Napoleon III had treated the “French nation” and the “French Empire” as functional equivalents: he had used the term “empire” to designate a specific kind of political program in France, mobilizing it in opposition to “republic” or “kingdom.” But according to this

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\(^{143}\) Napoleon III’s official title was “Emperor of the French” – a designation that dated back to the French Revolution and emphasized the political sovereignty of the French people organized into the French nation.

\(^{144}\) Guy Pervillé, *La France en Algérie*, 45.
new model, the Empire was a multinational entity, composed of a set of distinct nations ruled by the same central administration. Beneath this new regime, “empire” would refer both to a form of metropolitan political organization and to a way of ordering and relating different peoples beneath one governing body. The model thus collapsed “metropolitan” policies and France’s relationship to “overseas” territories together into one overarching imperial entity. It also extended the reach of Napoleon III’s faltering empire, casting it as larger than the nation itself. France would continue to occupy the privileged position in this constellation of nations, but it would stand beneath a wider imperial structure. Moreover, by symbolically extending his empire’s reach, Napoleon III associated his position with the conquests and expansionary vision of Napoleon I, who had sought to reorganize all of Europe beneath his rule.  

If Napoleon III’s desire to reformulate the meaning of “empire” to signify both a metropolitan system of government and a multinational governing organization testified to his increasing desire to connect his reign with his uncle’s legacy, his new vision of empire remained different from that of Napoleon I in at least one key way. While Napoleon I certainly drew upon and made use of nationalist discourses in France itself to justify his rule and draw support for his military campaigns, he did not treat the other areas of Europe he conquered as “nations.” While he negotiated with the local political leaders of certain states, he did not see the peoples he conquered as groups with distinct identities that needed to be respected. France was thus the

145 Algerian Wars was a particularly convenient site for this reformulation of French imperial identity, since the French had already conquered it. By emphasizing the importance of the territory, instead of ignoring it, as he had done in the early years of his reign, Napoleon III could expand his empire without actually conquering new territory.

146 Indeed, most scholars agree that nationalism was an “accidental” export of the Napoleonic Empire. See Charles Esdaille, ed, Popular Resistance in the French Wars (Basingstroke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

147 He based his decisions about how to assimilate each of the conquered areas into the French infrastructure and French law on an assessment of each area’s potential resources, its strategic position, and the tractability of local elites – not on any acknowledgement of its “identity.” See Geoffrey Ellis, “The Nature of Napoleonic Imperialism,” in Napoleon and Europe, ed. by Philip G. Dwyer (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 100.
only “nation” in the first Napoleonic Empire, and if France was not synonymous with the French
Empire, the Empire nevertheless operated as an extension of the French nation-state. In other
words, even as Napoleon III tried to bolster his prestige by drawing on Napoleon I’s expansive
vision of the French Empire, he also sought to modify that vision. He proposed to establish a
new kind of overarching political organization that could include multiple nations within its rule.

Napoleon III’s attempt to reconcile a “politics of nationality” with his desire to construct
a larger empire was an inherently contradictory undertaking. He specifically criticized the
Russian, Austrian, and Ottoman empires because they failed to respect the rights of different
peoples to rule themselves, and called, at least privately, for their dissolution into nation-
states. 148 How, then, could he claim that an expansive French empire would be able to respect the
rights of nationalities, if other European empires could not? In his letters and speeches, Napoleon
III reconciled this apparent contradiction by describing the French Empire’s expansionary
project as exceptional, since it was both “civilizing” and “progressive.” 149 By indicating that the
French Empire would help the Arab people “regenerate” just as the Romans under Julius Caesar
enabled the Gauls to “develop” into a great people, Napoleon III positioned the French Empire as
the catalyst that would enable Arab nationality to emerge. 150 The French Empire’s control over
Algeria – and, presumably, the other countries in North Africa that Napoleon III hoped
ultimately to annex – would therefore not oppress Arab nationality, but “liberate” it. Napoleon
III resisted calling the French Empire “colonial,” and his model of empire collapsed metropolitan

149 In his proclamation to the inhabitants of Algeria in 1865, Napoleon III noted, “We must be the masters, because
we are the more civilized; we must be generous, because we are the stronger. We must justify the glorious act of my
predecessors... by fostering the growth of civilization...” See “Proclamation aux habitants de l’Algérie (3 mai
1865)” in La Politique Impériale, 436.
and overseas models of empire on top of each other by employing the discourse of nationality. But the model he proposed was nevertheless predicated on the racist logic that had come to characterize European interactions with North Africa ever since Napoleon I’s Egyptian campaign. Napoleon III’s multinational empire was intellectually possible because it incorporated the widely shared belief that Algeria was “behind” France. In other words, even as Napoleon III positioned himself as the “protector of the Arabs,” he reified contemporary understandings of North Africans as inferior to Europeans.  

Napoleon III’s letter to Pélissier, which newspapers across France and Algeria published on 6 February 1863, drew widespread attention. Its argumentation, combined with concerns about the Senate’s pending ruling on indigenous property, set off a wave of anger across Algeria that spread to the metropole. The colonists wrote petitions, protested in journals, posted placards on public buildings, and gathered in public squares to protest both the letter and the measure. In a letter to Lacroix dated on February 21, Ismaël Urbain noted that even administrators had joined the protest: “In Philippeville… the mayor of Saint-Charles sent a policeman to get each colonist to sign a petition while asking them whether they would prefer to stay French or become Arab.” Over the following weeks, administrators, journalists, and ordinary colonists voiced their objections to Napoleon III’s attempt to redefine the position of the colonists in Algeria and reconceptualize the territory, its relationship to France, and its place in the French Empire. Even

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151 This is worth emphasizing at least in part because much of the scholarly literature written about Napoleon III’s royaume arabe in the 1970s tended to portray the Emperor and his advisors as the early predecessors to later anti-colonialist movements. It is clear that both Napoleon III and his advisors believed in the French imperial project, even if they defined it differently than the colonists and metropolitan republicans did. Moreover, while Napoleon III certainly positioned himself as the defender of Arab rights, he did very little to protect these “rights.” See, for example, Spillman, Napoléon III et le Royaume Arabe en Algérie.


153 Urbain à Lacroix, 21 February 1863, CAOM 1X 3/184, found in Levallois, Ismaïl Urbain, Royaume Arabe.
the Governor-General Pélissier expressed grave doubts about Napoleon III’s new plans in his private letters.¹⁵⁴

Napoleon III’s claim that Algeria was “not a colony” but a “royaume arabe” especially attracted colonist anger. A petition in Bône published in a local newspaper on February 27 with 400 signatures condemned the royaume arabe as “a nation without nationality, an agglomeration of savage hordes, all enemies of one another.”¹⁵⁵ It thus insisted that Algeria could not be a nation because none of its people felt united; its peoples were too “savage” to identify with one another. As a result, it implied, the Emperor’s dream of reconstituting the colony as a kingdom-nation was fundamentally impossible. Other colonists were more concerned about the effect that Napoleon III’s declaration would have on colonists’ status in the territory. On 17 February 1863, the Indépendant de Constantine pronounced, “It has been decided! We are the subjects of a royaume arabe and not the apostles of civilization, the initiators of progress among a barbarian and ignorant people. The moral and material consequences of this declaration are immense.”¹⁵⁶ By categorizing Algeria as a royaume arabe, the anonymous journalist thus insisted, the Emperor was threatening colonist identity. Instead of treating the colonists as civilizers of barbarians, the declaration collapsed the differences between colonists and colonized, subsuming the European population into the indigenous one. On February 13, Le Courrier d’Algérie put it even more provocatively: “It is no longer the Arabs who will become French but the French who

¹⁵⁴ Pélissier criticized the roles Napoleon III laid out for colonists and indigenous in the colony. While he acknowledged that the indigenous might help develop Algerian agriculture, he insisted that European colonist-farmers were necessary too. He maintained that colonists would serve as good examples to the Arabs, and help encourage them towards civilization. He insisted that instead of reducing the number of colonists, the government needed to expand its efforts to attract new colonists to Algeria. See Aimable Jean-Jacques Pélissier, “Rapport à l’Empereur,” CAOM GGA 1EE26


¹⁵⁶ The newspaper went on to note that the colonists in the three provinces were petitioning to send a delegation to Paris to contest this appellation and the decree on Arab property in front of the Senate. See “Lettre de l’Empereur,” Indépendant de Constantine (17 February 1863), as quoted in Levallois, Ismaïl Urbain, Royaume Arabe, 369.
will become Arabs.\textsuperscript{157} From these reactions, it is clear that many colonists saw the Emperor’s attempt to reimagine Algeria’s relationship with France and the French Empire as misguided. Some claimed that it simply would not work; others maintained that it would be tantamount to abandoning France’s civilizing project and forcing the colonists to merge with the indigenous population, all while allowing the indigenous to lapse back into “savagery.”

Settlers did not only express their discontent in the colonial press. Over the course of the weeks following the publication of the Emperor’s letter, several prominent settlers produced pamphlets published both in Algeria and in Paris that sought to make a case against Napoleon III’s reconfiguration of Algeria to a metropolitan audience. Because they were seeking a wide audience and wanted to escape political censorship laws, many of these writers did not criticize the Emperor and his letter directly.\textsuperscript{158} Instead, they blamed Ismaël Urbain’s pamphlets for misrepresenting the situation in Algeria to the metropole.\textsuperscript{159} These pamphleteers took upon themselves the task of demonstrating to the Emperor and the metropole that, contrary to

\textsuperscript{157} La Gironde repeated the same claim approximately a week later. See La Gironde (23 February 1863); Le Courrier d’Algérie (13 February 1863); La Presse (24 February 1863).

\textsuperscript{158} It was one thing to publish inflammatory reactions in local papers; but to publish responses that attacked the Emperor in the metropolitan press edged towards political opposition – which, even in this era of liberalizing press laws, was dangerous. In fact, some colonists, like Jules Vinet, specifically tried to differentiate their position from those of colonists that they felt came dangerously close to crossing into political opposition. See Jules Vinet, La Crise algérienne: Quelques mots sur la colonisation. La Lettre de Sa Majesté l’Empereur (Paris: E. Dentu, 1863), 4.

\textsuperscript{159} Urbain’s pamphlet played a ubiquitous role in this literature. Bordet, the editor of l’Akhbar, published a brochure called L’Algérie: Immigrants et Indigènes, whose title clearly played off Urbain’s to emphasize the centrality of colonists, instead of the indigenous, to the colony. Many pamphlets condemned his work directly. Marcel Lucet, the president of the Agricultural Committee of Constantine, began his defense of European colonization by condemning “the deplorable tendencies of the pamphlet Indigènes et immigrants,” claiming that it was responsible for misleading the Emperor. Réméon Pescheux went a step farther, and argued that the pamphlet’s “anti-French” writer was responsible for threatening the metropole’s very ability to hold on to its overseas territory by convincing the Emperor to entrust the Arabs instead of the colonists with Algeria’s future. He noted that many Algerian journals – including 'Akhbar, le Courrier de l’Algérie, L’Écho and le Courrier d’Oran, l’Observateur de Blidah, le Courrier de Tlemcen, l’Écho de Setif, le Zéramna, L’Africain, l’Indépendant, la Seybouse – also had voiced a similar opinion. See Bordet, l’Algérie: Immigrants et Indigènes (Alger; Paris: Challamel, 1863); Marcel Lucet, Colonisation européenne en Algérie: Légitime Défense (Constantine: Marle; Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1863), 5, 11. See Réméon Pescheux, Réfutation algérienne: Vive l’Algérie! malgré la brochure "Indigènes et immigrants" (Constantine: La Librairie Guende; Alger: M. Tissier; Paris: Challamel, 1863), 5.
“Arabophile claims,” French colonization in Algeria was not a failed project. By explaining the promise of European colonization and highlighting the untrustworthiness of the indigenous, they sought to convince the Emperor that reorganizing Algeria as a royaume arabe would be unnecessary and destructive – without virulently attacking his letter.

Most of these pamphlets began by defending European colonization. Some writers, like Jules Vinet, did not deny that it had been unsuccessful. Vinet, however, was quick to insist that the project’s problems stemmed not from its impossibility, but from its mismanagement. He compared French colonization in Algeria to American colonization in the west, and noted that the difference between the regimes was that the Algerian colonists “lacked liberty” and “stability.” The American government attracted colonists by investing them with political rights, giving them tax exemptions, and supporting their endeavors with state funds. In Algeria, on the other hand, the French government consistently neglected the colonists, subjected them to military rule, and failed to grant them a constitution – and as a result, colonists’ efforts had stuttered to a halt. Auguste-Hubert Warnier, on the other hand, was less willing to claim that French colonization thus far had failed. Instead, he insisted that the colonists had accomplished remarkable feats considering how little support they had received from the French state. In three highly visible pamphlets published between 1863 and 1865, he sought to demonstrate to metropolitan audiences that the colonists’ endeavors in Algeria had in fact been the only fruitful

160 Auguste-Hubert Warnier, who eventually became one of the key colonist voices in the debate over the future of Algeria, similarly condemned the “anonymous author” who had “falsified” the statistics and made the colonist project look less successful than it was. Warnier was a former Saint-Simonian who had become increasingly sympathetic to the colonist position during his time in Algeria. This pamphlet was originally published as a series of letters in the metropolitan journal l’Opinion nationale. See Auguste-Hubert Warnier, L’Algérie devant le Sénat, indigènes et immigrants (Paris: Dubuisson, 1863), 26.

161 Jules Vinet, La Crise algérienne, 3.

162 He insisted that French colonists had no more rights than the indigenous did, and received less attention from the state. He noted, “French citizens who inhabit the colony have no rights, either in France or in Algeria…” See Auguste-Hubert Warnier, L’Algérie devant le Sénat, indigènes et immigrants (Paris: Dubuisson, 1863), 4, 45.
outcome of all French intervention in the territory thus far.\textsuperscript{163} But if he disagreed with Vinet about the state of European colonization in Algeria, his criticisms of French policy were quite similar: he argued that the French state had threatened the territory’s viability by disenfranchising the settlers, failing to give them a constitution, and forcing them to contend with unclear laws surrounding property ownership. These problems, he argued, would remain as long as the military continued to administer the territory, as the military was interested in enforcing discipline and security, not in protecting colonists’ rights.\textsuperscript{164} To enable the colonists to transform Algeria into a peaceful and prosperous place, the territory needed to be reorganized permanently under a civil administration.\textsuperscript{165} The government also needed to make more land available to colonists, while extending the rights of French citizenship to them.\textsuperscript{166}

Vinet, Warnier and Réméon Pescheux all also expressed reservations about the Emperor’s desire to entrust Algeria’s colonization to the indigenous. Pescheux dismissed the indigenous as “savages” who could never serve the interests of France.\textsuperscript{167} Vinet did not contend that the indigenous would never be able to contribute to the colony’s prosperity, but he insisted that they were unsuited for agricultural work. He claimed that they were “not a people, but a permanent army, with all of the benefits and weaknesses of real warriors... [they are] miserable slaves, poor farmers...”\textsuperscript{168} Warnier too argued that the Arabs were incompetent farmers, and maintained that the French government had wasted all the money it had invested in them over the

\textsuperscript{163} He deployed statistics to support his celebration of the colonist agricultural and construction projects. See \textit{ibid.}, 9.

\textsuperscript{164} Auguste-Hubert Warnier, \textit{L'Algérie devant l'opinion publique}. (Alger: Molot, 1864), 161.

\textsuperscript{165} Warnier insisted that the Prince Napoleon, despite the fact that he had never actually lived in Algeria, was by far the most effective and enlightened leader that Algeria had ever had. See Warnier, \textit{L'Algérie devant le Sénat}, 2.

\textsuperscript{166} He insisted, like many other colonists, that the land did not really belong to the indigenous anyway. See \textit{ibid.}, 78.


\textsuperscript{168} Jules Vinet, \textit{La Crise algérienne}, 8.
past thirty years.¹⁶⁹ Unlike Vinet, however, Warnier did not argue that the indigenous would never be able to farm. Instead, he maintained that the indigenous’ inability to learn better agricultural techniques stemmed from France’s policy of isolating them from the colonial population. Warnier insisted that the government would never succeed in educating the indigenous until native Algerians were forced to work with colonists.¹⁷⁰ By attempting to curb European colonization, the government was thus effectively ensuring that the indigenous would remain incompetent agriculturalists indefinitely.¹⁷¹

The pamphlet-writers used these expositions of the benefits of French colonization to launch pointed criticisms of the Emperor’s attempt to recategorize Algeria as a “royaume arabe.” Vinet insisted that because indigenous were “children,” France could not entrust them with Algeria’s future. Instead of separating Algeria from France, he maintained, the Emperor should assimilate the territory into the metropole.¹⁷² Warnier went even farther, insisting that Napoleon III’s “royaume arabe” was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the indigenous population. It made no sense, he insisted, to transform Algeria into a “royaume arabe” in the name of indigenous rights when not all of the indigenous were Arabs.¹⁷³ Not only was the indigenous population multiethnic, moreover: it also had no unity of any kind – let alone a sense

¹⁶⁹ He employed a series of charts to support this point. He also insisted that the colonists were not stealing the Arabs’ land, because under Muslim law, the Arabs had no right to it. See Auguste-Hubert Warnier, L’Algérie devant l’opinion publique. Pour faire suite à L’Algérie devant le Sénat, indigènes et immigrant (Alger: Molot, 1864), 3.
¹⁷¹ He noted that the government was consistently afraid that the colonists would exploit the Algerians, but claimed that Algeria’s past had shown that colonists and Algerians could work well together. See ibid., 67.
¹⁷² He concluded: “Algeria is not a simple colony; it is the continuation of France…” Vinet, La Crise algérienne, 16.
¹⁷³ In fact, he insisted, the “real” indigenous of Algeria were not Arabs at all – they were Berbers or Kabyles. These Kabyles, he insisted, “are much closer to our civilization than the Arab; a very serious error has been committed up to this day in failing to distinguish between these two different peoples…” The fact that the Berbers were the “true indigenous,” moreover, meant that their assimilation would be easy. The Berbers had once been subjects of Rome; while they currently practiced Islam, they were once Christians. Moreover, their family life and civil organization was inherently democratic. As a result, they would assimilate easily into French society as long as they could follow colonist examples. See Auguste-Hubert Warnier, L’Algérie devant L’Empereur (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1865), 4-18.
of national identity. As a result, the Emperor should not promise to preserve an “Arab” or any other kind of indigenous identity within the wider French empire – no such identity existed. Warnier and Vinet thus both condemned not only the Emperor’s plan to reduce European colonization; they also attacked the intellectual structure behind that plan. They maintained that Algeria needed to be incorporated into France, not treated as a separate “nation” loosely connected to it through an overarching imperial structure.

Vinet and Warnier, along with other pamphlet-writers who worked hard to publish in Parisian journals and newspapers, succeeded in bringing the debates about colonization, the indigenous, and Napoleon III’s royau me arabe into the metropole. They found particular success in spreading their ideas among ever-more-vocal opposition republican groups in France. Republican newspapers were sympathetic to the colonist position in part because they were ready to endorse any complaints that cast Napoleon III in a bad light. But the affinity between the groups was also due to the fact that most colonists who sought publication in the metropole drew on republican language to reject Napoleon III’s vision of the French Empire and to propose a different model for Algeria’s future. Pamphleteers mobilized the republican

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174 Ibid., 5.
175 Its colonist population should be immediately granted the same civil rights as the ones French citizens exercised in the metropole, while the Arab population should be slowly assimilated beneath French rule. See Ibid., 289.
176 The fact that many journals were published in Paris shows that the colonists were seeking out a metropolitan audience. Warner’s pamphlets were originally published in l’Opinion nationale. Another colonist, Clément Duvernois, defended colonization in Le Temps and insisted that instead of protecting collective Arab property rights, the Senate should divide up communal property. See Claude Duvernois, Le Temps (13 March 1863), 1-2.
177 These connections existed at least in part because a number of the journalists who condemned the act were republicans who had been deported to Algeria for rejecting the imperial regime in 1851 and 1852. The heads of the Courrier de l’Algérie, L’Indépendent de Coran, and the L’Écho d’Oran – three of the more major newspapers in Algeria – were former Republican deportees. See Levallois, Ismaïl Urbain, Royaume Arabe ou Algérie francomusulmane, 369.
179 The petition-writers and journalists who, on the other hand, insisted that the indigenous could never be civilized, and that they should be relocated into the desert or out of Algeria, found a much smaller audience in the metropole.
discourse of assimilation to position the colonists as underdogs in a fight against imperial despotism. The colonists, they maintained, were clamoring for assimilation in order to secure civil rights from a repressive administration that continued to deny them. Assimilation, they insisted, would also liberate the indigenous by freeing them from their despotic chiefs and religion. If Napoleon III remade the territory into a “royaume arabe,” on the other hand, and refused to rule it according to French law and custom, both the settlers and the indigenous would continue to live in oppression.

For the most part, prominent republican journals in France did not specifically intervene in this ongoing debate about Algeria’s future. They did, however, find the colonists convincing enough to consistently offer their publications as a platform for their cause. This was at least in part because printing colonist opinions about Algeria served as a convenient way to criticize imperial policy without directly attacking Napoleon III. But as a result, even by the end of 1863, opposition to the royaueme arabe was becoming a component of metropolitan

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180 Bordet in particular notably contended, “It is not enough to make Algeria French… France must be extended across the Mediterranean.” See Bordet, l’Algérie: Immigrants et Indigènes (Alger; Paris: Challamel, 1863), 3.
182 To facilitate this assimilation, Bordet proposed measures much like those that the other pamphleteers did – Arab tribes needed to be stripped of their rights to collective property, and property needed instead to be divided up individually. The French needed to “destroy” the indigenous aristocracy, much as they had once, long ago, destroyed their own. Ultimately, these measures would enable France to “civilize” the indigenous and incorporate them into French society. See Bordet, l’Algérie: Immigrants et Indigènes (Alger; Paris: Challamel, 1863), 15, 18-22.
183 Not all metropolitan attention was hostile to Napoleon III’s attempt to reconstruct the colony. La Presse agreed with the Emperor’s contention that the European attempt to colonize Algeria was doomed from the start, and applauded his attempt to reformulate France’s relationship with the territory. Mostly, though, it hoped that this restructuring of France’s goals in and vision of Algeria would make the colony less expensive. See A. de Toulget, “Question d’Algérie,” La Presse (5 March 1863), 1. A journalist for Le Siècle travelled to Algeria to investigate and insisted that the colonists had exaggerated the Emperor’s position. See Jourdan, “Beaucoup de bruit pour rien,” Le Siècle (11 March 1863).
184 The Emperor himself seems to have been aware of this strategic use of Algeria. In his letter to the Governor-General Péliissier about the scandal, he noted that some of the attacks on the “royaume arabe” had become opportunities to criticize the regime. See Ministre Sécrétaire d’État de la Guerre à Maréchal Péliissier, February 1864, CAOM F80/123
The colonists’ delegation to the Senate’s debates over Arab property further extended attention to the colonist cause in the metropole, even outside of republican circles. Debates about Algeria’s future — and its implications for the wider French Empire — were not front-page news in Paris. But Napoleon III’s policies in Algeria increasingly became one of the targets of the political opposition.

Even in 1863, pamphleteers like Warnier, Vinet, and Bordet had been successful enough at attracting Parisian attention that Frédéric Lacroix took it upon himself to defend Napoleon III’s letter and condemn the colonists’ position after the vote of the Senate. In his pamphlet, he attempted to break the new republican-colonist alliance by contesting the colonists’ claims that they were acting in the name of “civil rights” and “liberation” for the settlers and the indigenous alike. In fact, he maintained, the colonists were acting “hysterically” and “selfishly”: they objected to the Emperor’s proposals not because those proposals were unjust, he maintained, but because they threatened the colonists’ self-interest. To make matters worse, they had responded to Napoleon III’s letter by unleashing a flood of racial prejudice against the indigenous in the colonial press. They had even attempted to spread their racial hatred across the Mediterranean by publishing it in Paris. This incident, he insisted, had proven more clearly...

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185 At the same time, the colonists also sought to extend knowledge of their cause outside of republican circles as well. They put together a delegation to defend colonization in front of the Emperor and during the debates over indigenous property in the Senate. This delegation included Warnier, the influential lawyer and journalist Jules Duval, and Pélissier himself. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, Thobie, Histoire de la France Coloniale des origines à 1914, 476.

186 La Presse (16 February 1863), 3.

187 He claimed his purpose was “to cast a ray of truth into a situation that some obscured out of self interest and others misrepresented out of ignorance.” See Frédéric Lacroix, L’Algérie et la Lettre de l’Empereur (Paris: Challamel, 1863), iv.


189 Lacroix noted, “France believed that by emancipating slaves, it had destroyed race hatred, and that there would no longer be serfs or pariahs. That is an error: these pariahs and serfs do not exist anymore in far-off colonies; instead, they are at the doors of the metropole, two days away from Marseille… The blacks in Algeria have white
than ever that the colonists did not have the interests of the indigenous at heart, and showed the indigenous needed state protection.\textsuperscript{190}

After condemning the colonists’ response to the Emperor’s letter, Lacroix then turned to critiquing their description of Algeria, along with the model of its future that they had proposed. First, he insisted that despite their claims to the contrary, organizing Algeria’s economic system around European farmers was a fundamentally unsound idea. In their vitriolic response to the Emperor, the colonists had wildly overestimated the success of the colonization project.\textsuperscript{191} Many settlers in Algeria continued to die of fever, most of the lands they cultivated proved to be infertile, and thus far, most colonists had failed to produce enough food to even nourish themselves.\textsuperscript{192} To make matters worse, they had seriously hindered France’s project of civilizing the indigenous and convincing them to accept French rule. Not only had the colonists alienated the indigenous by attempting to steal their land, they had also passed along French vices to them.\textsuperscript{193} He insisted that in the future, the colonists needed, if anything, to be kept further away from the native Algerians.

Lacroix also contended that the colonists had misled metropolitan audiences about indigenous Algerians. He began by condemning their contention that the indigenous “lacked a nationality,” and compared the colonist position on the subject to the Austrian empire’s failure to recognize the national identity of Italy. In other words, the colonists only denied the existence of faces, that is the only real difference. The prejudices that in the Antilles used to distance the whites from the blacks are mobilized in Africa against the Arabs, equally violently, and equally blindly.” See \textit{ibid.}, 7.

\textsuperscript{190} He noted that the colonists did oppress the indigenous. They converted mosques into churches, they expropriated their land without adequate remuneration, and destroyed Arab industry. See \textit{Ibid.}, 10-12.

\textsuperscript{191} He noted that suddenly, “Algeria has become the most fecund and prosperous country in the world!” \textit{Ibid.}, 46.

\textsuperscript{192} He condemned the Baron Dupin for misleading the metropolitan population on these counts. See \textit{ibid.}, 63.

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Ibid.}, 69.
an Arab national identity because it was convenient.\textsuperscript{194} He also objected to the circulating claim that the Arabs were fundamentally weak, and could therefore only benefit from being assimilated into French society. He insisted that with guidance, the Arabs could in fact regain their strength and re-establish themselves.\textsuperscript{195} However, he warned, this progress would become impossible if the colonists succeeding in abolishing the tribal structure and establishing individual property.\textsuperscript{196} Such measures would only succeed in disrupting and alienating the indigenous population. At least for the present moment, the indigenous needed to retain their autonomous institutions.\textsuperscript{197}

Lacroix approached the debates surrounding Napoleon III’s \textit{royaume arabe} more cautiously. In fact, he only used the term once in the entire ninety-two page pamphlet - to note that Algeria was a “\textit{royaume arabe}… as India is a \textit{royaume indien}.”\textsuperscript{198} By comparing the Emperor’s conception of Algeria as a \textit{royaume arabe} to the British system in India, Lacroix simultaneously defended the Emperor’s use of the term, discredited colonist interpretations of it, and domesticated its implications. If both Algeria and India could be called “\textit{royaumes},” as Lacroix contended, then all the term really signified was a territory where the most important population was made up of indigenous peoples. It did not imply, as some colonists had argued, that the Emperor would eliminate the French colonist population, or force them to “become Arab” in some way. According to Lacroix’s pamphlet, the Emperor’s decision to call Algeria a “\textit{royaume arabe}” was thus neither radical nor misguided; it was a simple reflection of the territory’s demographic composition.

\textsuperscript{194} He asked, “What constitutes nationality, if it is not shared customs, law, language, and religion?” See \textit{ibid.}, 15.
\textsuperscript{195} He described the historical, intellectual and social accomplishments of the Arab people. See \textit{ibid.}, 16.
\textsuperscript{196} He also insisted that Arab chiefs could not be attacked as feudal overlords. See \textit{ibid.}, 40.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Ibid.}, 21.
\textsuperscript{198} Frédéric Lacroix, \textit{L’Algérie et la lettre de l’Empereur} (Paris: Challamel, 1863), 43.
Of course, this defense of the Emperor’s use of the term “royaume arabe” necessarily undercut the radical nature of Napoleon III’s vision of an empire that would span across nations. First, by placing Algeria alongside a territory that the British consistently described as a colony and claiming they were both “royaumes,” Lacroix undermined the Emperor’s juxtaposition of “colony” with “royaume arabe.” According to Lacroix, a “royaume arabe” was just a particular type of colony, not a fundamentally different kind of political organization. Most notably, it was not tied to any conception of “nation.” Indeed, Lacroix made it clear that he thought that Algeria would only temporarily remain a “royaume arabe.” He strongly implied that Algeria would one day become more assimilated into France – even if he disagreed with the colonizers about the pace and methods of the assimilation process. In other words, while Lacroix’s pamphlet shared the Emperor’s belief in an Arab national identity, he was not committed to guaranteeing Algeria’s status as a discrete nation.199

As Lacroix’s treatment of the term royaume arabe makes clear, even he – one of the “Arabophiles” who had helped shape Napoleon III’s thought on Algeria – had hesitations about the Emperor’s vision of Algeria as an Arab nation ruled by a multinational French Empire. This hesitation stemmed in part from Lacroix’s underlying belief that the goal of “association” was to reconcile the indigenous to French rule – however slowly. By 1863, even Urbain had begun to think that the indigenous would eventually have to be assimilated into French society to some degree in order to exercise real political rights in the French Empire. Napoleon III’s vision of empire did not seem to leave room for this kind of future assimilation, which left both Lacroix

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199 He claimed that the question was too far in the future to consider directly; at the moment, the French needed to focus on “civilizing” the Arabs and reconciling them to French rule, not on trying to make them French. See Ibid., 43. It is worth noting that this pamphlet was protested when it was released in Algeria. The Courrier de l’Algérie insisted that its writer was a “savageophile.” See Levallois, Ismayl Urbain, Royaume Arabe ou Algérie franco-musulmane, 405.
and Urbain concerned about how the Arabs would ever come to be equal to the French in the eyes of the state. But much of Urbain’s and Lacroix’s frustration with the term seems to have stemmed from the fact that it simply aroused too much opposition. For both thinkers, it was more important to secure the rights of the indigenous than to secure their national identity. They did not share the Emperor’s interest in trying to redefine the French Empire itself as an expansive multinational entity, but simply wanted to protect the indigenous from the colonizers.

Napoleon III’s vision of colonization, Algeria, and the French Empire thus attracted very minimal support in either Algeria or France. And even after the Senate passed the decree protecting Arab property, the Governor-General Pélissier and the colonial administration did very little to put any of its measures in place. Napoleon III wrote the Governor-General a strongly worded letter about this inaction in 1864 and criticized the way the Algerian administration had handled ongoing colonist protests. The Emperor noted that he was “less surprised at the unfortunate [reaction] from the most impassioned section of the Algerian population, than at the administration’s tolerance that let that reaction gain strength.” He admonished the Governor-General that it was his responsibility as the representative of France in Algeria to correct widely circulating misconceptions about the Emperor’s letter, and maintained

200 Urbain à Lacroix, 14 February 1863, CAOM 1X 3/177, found in Levallois, Ismaïl Urbain, Royaume Arabe.
201 In private letters, Urbain noted that it had “been misinterpreted, and used as a weapon to discredit the imperial project.” See Urbain à Lacroix, 14 February 1863, CAOM 1X 3/177, Levallois, Ismaïl Urbain, Royaume Arabe.
202 The only people who seem to have greeted the Emperor’s letter with equanimity were Arab leaders. On February 13, they planned to organize a prayer in mosques across Algeria in honor of the Emperor and its letter, although in light of colonist opposition, they cancelled it. In 1864, they petitioned to erect a statue in honor of his visit in 1860. See “Resumé politique des évènements survenus depuis le 18 Mars jusqu’au 15 juin, 1864,” CAOM F80/1679.
203 A few colonists agreed with the thrust of the letter. Charles Gillotte insisted that the Emperor’s desire to regularize the laws concerning Arab property and the position of Algeria vis-à-vis France was laudable. See Charles Gillotte, Réflexions au sujet de la lettre de l’Empereur (Constantine: Veuve Guende, 1863), 11.
205 Ministre Sécretaire d’État de la Guerre à Maréchal Pélissier, February 1864, CAOM F80/123.
that he had consistently failed to do so. The Emperor also criticized the Governor-General’s unwillingness to protect the indigenous from the excesses of colonist anger.\footnote{He noted, “You let the journals of Algeria publish the colonist petition. Its simultaneous publication in multiple newspapers that did not hide their hatred for military authority, and the commentaries that accompagnied it, revealed an accord with the members of the Opposition who denounced the supposed oppression in Algeria in the Corps Léislatif.” See Ministre Secrétaire d’État de la Guerre à Maréchal Pélissier, February 1864, CAOM F80/123} Despite this apparent disappointment, however, the Emperor did not remove Pélissier from his position – at least in part because events elsewhere had once again distracted him. The Prussian victory over Denmark, the ongoing conflict in Poland, and the unfolding disaster in Mexico all seemed more pressing than the ongoing quarrels in Algeria. Expanding Prussian ambition and increasing expenses abroad also made Napoleon III’s dream of reconstituting the French Empire as a multinational entity bridging the Mediterranean increasingly remote.\footnote{Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeigueur, Thobie, Histoire de la France Coloniale des origines à 1914, 468.} To make matters more complex, a widespread Arab revolt led by Ouled Sidi Cheikh broke out in southern Oran during the summer of 1864. The Emperor’s supporters connected the revolt to the colonial administration’s failure to enforce the policies passed by the Senate. However, the colonists used the opportunity to contend that the indigenous were entirely untrustworthy – and thus rendered the idea of the “royaume arabe” even more unpopular.\footnote{In his report to the Emperor on the revolt in 1864, Maréchal Jacques Randon, the minister of war, noted that the revolt was caused not only by the Arabs’ “religious fanaticism” but also by the temporary switch to the civil administration in 1858 and the unwillingness of the Algerian administration to enforce the Senate decree. See Jacques Randon, “Rapport sur l’insurrection de l’Algérie en 1864,” CAOM F80/1679}

After Pélissier died at the end of 1864, the Emperor replaced him with Patrice de Mac-Mahon, a French general popular for his military success in Crimea and Italy. Mac-Mahon proved equally unwilling, however, to enforce the Senate’s decrees, let alone to popularize the Emperor’s vision of Algeria – even if he did not defy the Emperor’s wishes as directly as Pélissier had. Faced with this continued hesitation and delay and spurred on by a desire to ignore
the rising discontent in the metropole over the wars in Italy, Napoleon III decided to return to Algeria in 1865 and resolve the seemingly endless conflict.²⁰⁹ There – with Ismaël Urbain as his translator - he met with colonial officials, ordinary colonists, military officials, and indigenous leaders. In spite of the violent reaction against his 1863 letter, he encountered a remarkable amount of public acclaim. The colonial administration, determined to make a good impression and shift the Emperor’s position on Algeria’s future, excited the colonists’ enthusiasm for the trip while steering the Emperor towards prosperous towns and impressive public works. At the same time, they tried to limit the amount of time he spent among the indigenous.²¹⁰

It is unclear what changed Napoleon III’s mind about Algeria – the trip, the ongoing opposition to his ideas about the territory, or his mercurial disposition. But upon his return to France, he drafted a second letter about Algeria, this time addressed to Mac-Mahon.²¹¹ In this letter, which he published on November 8, 1865, he backed away from a number of the positions he had laid out in his first letter to Pélissier – even as he made a series of proposals that were more concrete than those he had outlined earlier. He began by establishing his position as pragmatic: he noted that France had possessed Algeria for thirty-five years, and that it was time that the colony began to increase France’s wealth, prestige, and strength – instead of weakening it. In order to accomplish this goal, he maintained, the ongoing conflict over the nature of the territory had to be resolved.²¹² As it stood, its inhabitants were divided into two camps: one “supported the expansion of European colonialism” while the other “defended the sacred rights

²¹⁰ Auguste-Hubert Warnier, L’Algérie devant L’Empereur, 2.
²¹¹ He had also called for another meeting of the Senate to determine the official status of the indigenous in Algeria earlier that year in July. The letter served at least in part to justify the decision-making of that deliberative body. See Levallois, Ismaïl Urbain, Royaume Arabe ou Algérie franco-musulmane, 532.
²¹² Napoleon III, Politique de la France en Algérie (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1865), 1.
of the indigenous.” His 1863 letter had attempted to reconcile these positions, he claimed, and create harmony between the colonists and the indigenous – but the conflict had continued. Compromise was essential to the territory’s success, the Emperor insisted, because it had three identities at once: it was “at the same time a royaume arabe, a European colony, and a French military camp.”213 To secure Algeria’s future, all of these factions would need to learn to work together, because they depended on one another.

To some degree, the letter’s description of the respective positions of indigenous Algerians and European colonists echoed the one that Napoleon III had laid out in 1863. The differences lay in the emphasis; in 1865, Napoleon III saw the colonists as much more important to Algeria’s future than he had two years earlier. Even though he continued to insist that the territory should be understood as a “royaume arabe,” he transformed the implications of the term by claiming that Algeria was additionally a colony and a camp. Within the context of this trifecta, the “royaume arabe” no longer implied that the Arabs in Algeria constituted their own nation. Instead, the term came to operate more in the way that it had in Lacroix’s exegesis of 1863; it simply referred to the parts of Algeria that were mostly inhabited by Arabs. Napoleon III did not withdraw his earlier contention that the Arabs had their own nationality.214 But instead of promising to preserve that nationality, the Emperor indicated that the French needed to “justify the dependence in which they were obligated to keep the Arab people… by enabling them to enjoy the benefits of civilization, and call them to a better existence.”215 In other words, the French could suppress indigenous nationality as long as the administration was actively engaged in civilizing and improving the Arab people.

213 Ibid., 2.
214 In fact, he referred to them directly as “this warlike, intelligent, and mobile nation…” See ibid., 2.
215 Ibid., 3.
Not only did Napoleon III retreat from his position that it was necessary to respect the indigenous Algerians’ national identity, he also took steps to assimilate the indigenous into the French nation. He embraced these measures because he was seeking to regularize the official position of the Arabs in the Empire and keep them from being treated as a “defeated people.” But like Urbain in 1863, he found that the only clear way to give the indigenous rights in the Empire was to invest them with the status of French nationals. He thus declared that for the sake of future peace in Algeria, “…the Algerians [must be] declared French, because Algeria is a French territory.” This did not mean, he noted, that the indigenous would have to accept French law or traditions. They could continue to follow their own customs, unless they asked to become citizens of France. But at the same time, the Emperor also tried to attach all native Algerians more firmly to the French state. He opened up military and civil positions in the Algerian administration to them, argued for greater supervision of the indigenous justice system, and called for the development of indigenous public instruction at all levels. Even as he allowed indigenous peoples to live within their traditional social structures and according to their own laws, he thereby ensured that many would find contact with French institutions inescapable.

These measures did not indicate that Napoleon III had simply switched to an “assimilationist” or “colonist” position. His letter also insisted that Arab tribes needed to be

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216 By the time he made this claim, the Senate had declared the indigenous “French” months earlier. See ibid., 22.

217 Members of the indigenous population could ask for French citizenship if they renounced religious law.

218 He also called for the creation of public assistance programs and orphanages for the indigenous. See ibid., 24-25.

219 While he did not propose to expropriate land from the indigenous to offer to more colonist farmers, he nevertheless undertook a series of measures to attract colonists to Algeria’s towns and cities. He created the beginnings of systems of political representation, and established credit institutions to encourage business development. He hoped that by encouraging colonist industry, he would increase interactions between the colonists and the indigenous. See ibid., 37-39.

220 He asked Ismaël Urbain to edit the letter. See Levallois, Ismaïl Urbain, Royaume Arabe ou Algérie franco-musulmane, 624.
left intact, that communally owned land could not be broken up, and that the indigenous should remain under military administration. But the letter does reveal the degree to which Napoleon III had abandoned the vision of French Empire that he had endorsed in his first letter. In 1863, the Emperor had sought to increase his empire’s prestige and redefine its meaning by expanding its reach beyond France. He began to describe “empire” not only as a form of political organization in the metropole, but also as a way of ordering different peoples beneath one governing structure. By incorporating Algeria (and perhaps other North African nations) into the empire while preserving its distinct identity, he had hoped to associate his rule with that of his uncle while preserving his reputation as a “champion of nationalities.” But under the 1865 model, indigenous Algerians would not, ultimately, retain a separate identity. Instead, they would be slowly assimilated – not just into the French Empire, but also into the French nation. Napoleon III’s letter explicitly laid out the hope that over time, increasingly more Arabs would see the benefit of French liberties and law and choose to adopt French citizenship for themselves. As a result, the “royaume arabe” would start to disappear as Algeria merged with France. This vision of Algeria’s future invested the indigenous with a clearer position and a firmer set of rights than the first one had. But it also collapsed Napoleon III’s earlier distinction between “nation” and “empire.” The French Empire again became contiguous with the French nation: it only signified a particular way of ruling France. Algeria became a temporary anomaly on the nation’s borders, eventually destined to merge with it.

Napoleon III’s second letter was met with more enthusiasm than the first. He found a champion in the author Ernest Feydeau, who promoted the letter in the metropolitan newspaper

221 Napoleon III, Politique de la France en Algérie (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1865), 23.
Some colonists also expressed their approval of the Emperor’s new position: Charles Richard, a retired administrator of Arab affairs in Algeria, contended that the letter’s measures would help create peace and prosperity in the territory. Warnier even took the Emperor’s insistence that the indigenous should be made into French nationals as evidence that he was slowly coming around to the colonists’ side. However, throughout Algeria, most settlers objected to the Emperor’s failure to secure more land for European colonization, his “undue attention” to the indigenous, and, most importantly, his continued use of the term “royaume arabe.” They did not riot as they had in 1863, but they signed petitions and wrote angry newspaper articles. Joseph Guérin, the editor of l’Akhbar, claimed, for example, that the Emperor’s letter – especially his description of Algeria as a “royaume arabe” - was dangerous, because it would lead “inevitably to the declaration of Arab nationality.” He maintained that the very idea of the “royaume arabe” was fundamentally incompatible with Algeria’s status as a French territory. This response – and others like it - makes it clear that most colonists did not distinguish between the Emperor’s positions in 1863 and 1865.

The letter also generated a second wave of criticism aimed at metropolitan audiences. Some of this criticism was new, and took issue specifically with Napoleon III’s decision to declare the indigenous French nationals. A group of colonists sent a series of petitions to the

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223 He did insist that the Bureaux Arabes needed to be abolished. See Ch. Richard, Examen Critique de la lettre de l’Empereur sur l’Algérie (Toulon: Imprimerie E. Aurel, 1865), 10.
224 Warnier continued to object, however, to the Emperor’s unwillingness to see the colonists as farmers. See Warnier, L’Algérie devant L’Empereur, vii.
226 Joseph Guérin, L’Akhbar (9 November 1865).
227 The Marquis de Montpezat criticized both indigenous and European colonization alike, and suggested that Algeria be restructured around a plan of military colonization. See Marquis de Montpezat, De la domination française en Algérie (Paris: H. Plon, 1865), 29.
Senate arguing that while the Europeans in Algeria needed to be assimilated into the metropolitan French administrative and legal systems, the Emperor’s decision to make the indigenous French nationals made no sense. They were too fundamentally alien in terms of their customs, religion, social structure, race, and law. Before they could be invested with French nationality or citizenship, they needed to be assimilated into French culture. The indigenous should be forced to abandon their uncivilized way of life before the French government began to endow them with French rights.  

For the most part, however, these new critiques were drowned out by pamphlets whose complaints largely echoed those of 1863. These writers continued to take issue with Napoleon III’s “royaume arabe” and demanded voting rights, a constitution, a civil administration, and more land. The most virulent of these new critics was Jules Duval – the editor of l’Économiste française who defended colonist interests in front of the Senate in 1863. Like others before him, he condemned many of the Emperor’s administrative policies. And like Warnier, he maintained that the term “royaume arabe” was both technically inaccurate and potentially

229 Henri Didier insisted that the colonists needed a constitution and representation to the Corps Légitim. Didier had represented Algeria to the Constitutional Assembly in 1848, so his republican credentials were clear. Alexandre Duvernois similarly contended that the Emperor’s insistence on ruling Algeria through a military administration was dooming its indigenous population to isolation and backwardness. He wrote a two-hundred page history of French policy in Algeria to explain why true colonization and progress could only be made beneath a civil regime. See Henry Didier, Le Gouvernement militaire et la colonisation en Algérie (Paris: E. Dentu, 1865); Alexandre Duvernois, Le Régime civil en Algérie, urgence et possibilité de son application immediate (Paris: J. Rouvier, 1865).
230 Duval, like Warnier and others before him, couched his criticism in an insistence that he was not writing to defend the perspective of any particular party, but simply to enlighten the Emperor, who continued to be led astray by poor advisors. He noted that he was quite disappointed that the Emperor had failed to ask either his or Warnier’s about Algeria before publishing another letter on the subject, as they had “special competence” on the subject. The Emperor’s authorities, he maintained, were suspect at best – he particularly highlighted the negative influence of Georges Voisin, who he thought was “not really a Christian.” See Jules Duval, Reflexions sur la Politique de l’Empereur en Algerie (Paris: Challamel Ainé, Commissionnaire pour l’Algérie et l’Etranger, 1866), 4.
231 He attacked the Emperor’s continued reliance on a military administration to rule Algeria, and contended that Algeria would only become prosperous when the government centered its attention not on the indigenous but on the colonists – the only population in Algeria that could be trusted. He also repeated the oft-repeated claim that in order to attract more colonists, Algeria needed not only to be placed beneath a civil administration. See Ibid., 13.
dangerous. But he took his criticism of the Emperor a step farther by contending that Napoleon III’s ongoing attempt to redefine the territory was not only misguided, but also reflected the fundamental incompatibility of “empire” and “colony.” Duval maintained that all absolutist governments – whether monarchies or empires – were inherently unable to understand or operate colonies. To thrive, he argued, colonists needed “complete liberty” – a guarantee that absolutist governments were unable to provide. Duval thus blamed “colonial Caesarism” for the failures of Napoleon III’s Algerian policies. For Algeria to succeed as a colony, Duval argued, France needed a different kind of government altogether – not a Bonapartist empire, but a republican regime that would allow for greater freedom of initiative. His critique thus sought to pull apart Napoleon III’s association of “metropolitan empire” with “colonial empire,” implying that they were intrinsically opposed enterprises that required distinct sets of political institutions.

As these responses make clear, despite the fact that Napoleon III’s second letter backed away from the claims of his first in several important ways, colonists and republicans alike continued to criticize it – and seem to have found the Emperor’s new ideas very similar to his old ones. They continued to condemn Napoleon III’s notion of a “royaume arabe” and his belief in Arab nationality – even though his second letter took measures to assimilate the indigenous

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232 Duval was also much more insistent about the insurmountable inferiority of many aspects of indigenous culture, religious practice, and society. He contended that most of the indigenous were morally corrupt, inclined to thievery, slaves to their chiefs, and abusers of women. To overcome these inferiorities, he maintained, the French state needed to take radical steps. He advocated for the dissolution of tribes and the removal of Arab chiefs, but also maintained that the Emperor needed to suppress Islamic radicalism, and punish Arab misdemeanors more harshly. Most importantly, the state needed to place the indigenous in continuous contact with civilized colonists. Only when Muslim children went to school with French children, and Muslim farmers worked alongside their colonist counterparts, would their society begin to change. See Ibid., 29, 30, 96

233 Ibid., 170.

234 He noted that Caesar had a mixed legacy in European history; on the one hand, he “personified genius, superior thought, strong initiative, firm execution, democratic sentiment, commitment to social progress.” To others, however, he symbolized “intelligent despotism, tutelary patronage, popular power, and sovereign autocracy.” But while such a person was an effective conqueror of colonies, he could not rule them effectively. See ibid., 172.
population into France. They claimed that he was not doing enough to support colonists’ efforts, and that the indigenous still occupied too much of his attention. Duval’s condemnation of both Napoleon III’s “royaume arabe” and his vision of empire further consolidated colonist and republican opinions about this new imperial model. Duval propagated an interpretation of Napoleon III’s empire that described its character as inherently oppressive and anti-progressive – a claim that proved popular in an era of rising discontent. And his insistence that Napoleon III’s empire was incompatible with the colonial project itself – which he implicitly portrayed as a republican undertaking – introduced a division between “metropolitan” and “colonial” empire that the Emperor had sought to reject.

Napoleon III would remain in power in France for the next five years, but after 1865, what remained of his desire to restructure Algeria and establish a “royaume arabe” in the territory disappeared. Even after the Senate’s decrees in 1865, Mac-Mahon and the other members of the Algerian administration largely failed to put the Emperor’s reforms into place out of a desire not to upset colonist interests. The Emperor had little time or energy to enforce these measures, as he became increasingly caught up in European politics and the French military disaster in Mexico; he also became increasingly ill. Moreover, between 1865 and 1868, Algeria was struck by a series of natural disasters – earthquakes, fire, and famine. What little attention Napoleon III devoted to Algeria during this period was limited to disaster relief. While the military administration and the Bureaux Arabes would remain in place until the end of his reign, Napoleon III’s plans to improve schooling, modernize farming practices, alleviate poverty,

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235 Ironically, Napoleon III’s declaration that the indigenous were French nationals was taken by some opponents as another sign of his excessive interest in their well-being and not as a concession to settler demands for assimilation.

236 Duval ignored native Algerians: “Algeria will be and must be a royaume française and not a royaume arabe; a French colony and not a European colony; a French garrison and not a French military camp.” See ibid., 176.

and “liberate” the indigenous largely evaporated. His dreams to construct a new kind of French empire also disappeared. At the same time, however, both colonists and opposition members continued to associate Napoleon III with the *royaume arabe* that he had lost interest in. In Algeria in particular, the term became equivalent with the Second Empire itself – although not quite in the way that Napoleon III had originally hoped.

**V. Conclusion: Napoleon III’s Legacy and Other Models of Empire**

Napoleon III, his Bonapartist allies, Saint-Simonians, and Algerian colonists were not the only voices in this ongoing conversation about the meaning and significance of Algeria and its place in the French Empire. During the 1860s, a renewed interest in Algeria led to a new wave of increasingly popular writing about the territory that was less connected to debates surrounding policy decisions. Some – like Lucien-Anatole Prévost-Paradol’s *La France Nouvelle* – still aspired to make an explicit political intervention in the French treatment of the colony. But many of these writers - like Eugène Fromentin and Ernest Feydeau – instead sought primarily to transmit impressions of indigenous peoples to the metropole, or to use Algeria as an orientalized backdrop against which they could heighten their stories’ dramatic tension. Of course, their portrayals of Algeria ultimately had political implications – even if they did not speak directly to the ongoing arguments about how the colony should be organized. Instead, these works helped to consolidate metropolitan impressions of Algeria as a half-savage, mystical, exotic place where the French encountered strange people – depicted, variously, as barely civilized, innately wise, uneducated, violent, or racially inferior. These writers’ visions of Algeria became popular during the last years of the Second Empire. But they would become even more influential after the Franco-Prussian War and the establishment of the Third Republic, as their representations of
Algeria and the people that lived there would help legitimize a new idea of empire, untainted by Napoleon III and his *royaume arabe*.

Prévost-Paradol’s *La France Nouvelle*, aimed primarily at highly educated, elite audiences, became an influential critique of France, French society, and French politics during the last years of the nineteenth century. In this study of French political history, he insisted that mid-nineteenth century France had begun to suffer from “decadence.” He blamed this problem above all on the country’s political organization, which he insisted bred demagogy and despotism in equal measure. He warned his readers that this decadence was particularly dangerous in light of growing Prussian influence over the German states in central Europe and the size of the British Empire. Together, Prussia and Britain would slowly make France, “confined within its traditional boundaries,” into a second-rate power. The solution to these internal and external threats, Prévost-Paradol maintained, was to extend the country’s borders and increase its population. Because France had limited opportunities for expansion in Europe, it would have to follow Britain’s example and increase its reach overseas. He highlighted

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238 Prévost Paradol was a journalist and a moderate liberal during the Second Empire. His book’s popularity was due at least in part to the fact that much of it focused on highlighting the danger that a unifying Germany posed to France – a warning that seemed very prescient after the French defeat during the Franco-Prussian War.

239 Prévost-Paradol insisted that France’s tendency to veer between demagogy and despotism ever since the Revolution had caused its social order to fray. He implied that if France did not adopt a balanced political system and patch the holes in its social fabric it would meet the same fate as Poland. To fix the problem, he insisted that France needed to secure its democratic rights but establish political institutions to keep those rights in check. While this analysis condemned Napoleon III’s politics, it did not insist that monarchy was a problem. Instead, Prévost-Paradol insisted that “democracy” referred to the structure of a society, while “monarchy” or “republic” referred to its government. Either a republic or a monarchy could thus be democratic. He did not address “empire” as a political organization. See Lucien-Anatole Prévost-Paradol, *La France Nouvelle* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1869), 349, 68.

240 He devoted the book to a scathing attack on Napoleon III’s “politics of nationality” which, he insisted, were contrary to France’s interests. France could not use this policy to accumulate more land in Europe, while it enabled both Prussia and Russia – two of France’s key rivals – to amass ever-growing amounts of territory. See *ibid.*, 378.

241 He noted that France was in danger of meeting with the same fate as Athens under the Roman Empire. It would remain, he noted an “intellectual” example, but it would cease to be relevant politically. See *ibid.*, 386.

242 He advised his readers to “take up a map of the world, study it in its totality with intelligent attention… and ask yourself… what France’s part in it is.” See *ibid.*, 397.
Algeria in particular as the point from which the French could begin their expansion. France, he insisted, needed to settle large numbers of its inhabitants to Algeria to transform it into a France africaine. Once its citizens had established themselves, they could then extend their reach farther into North Africa, towards Tunisia and Morocco. Together, these holdings would enable France to secure a position as the primary power in the Mediterranean. In some ways, Prévost-Paradol’s vision of France’s Mediterranean empire was similar to Napoleon III’s desire to extend the Second Empire into North Africa. However, Prévost-Paradol’s French empire would be based not on French imperial control over a set of Arab nations, but on the extension of the French population over new territories. Both Prévost-Paradol’s fear for the French “race,” language, and culture and his concerns about international competition would become more widespread in the wake of the Second Empire’s collapse. His concomitant hope for French national redemption through Algerian colonization would also become an influential alternative to Napoleon III’s discredited imperial model.

Fromentin and Feydeau, on the other hand, were less concerned with intervening in colonial politics. Instead, both positioned themselves as “experts” on Algeria whose knowledge about the colony stemmed from the fact that they themselves had visited it: they proposed to educate metropolitan audiences about the territory. Fromentin’s popular Un été dans le Sahara and Une année dans le Sahel, published in the late 1850s, were above all travelogues: they described his impressions of the desert and the people he encountered there. Both works

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243 He acknowledged that the population that already lived there posed something of a problem to these ambitions, but did not offer any clear opinions as to how the French should deal with them. See ibid., 416.

244 Feydeau did defend some of the principles behind Napoleon III’s royaume arabe. He insisted that indigenous peoples were better off separated from the European population, because the Europeans threatened Arab identity and undermined their morality. See Ernest Feydeau, Alger: Étude (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1862), 177.

245 Eugène Fromentin was both a painter and a writer; his work on Algeria was primarily concerned with the regard. Painterly qualities and impressions infuse Sahara and Sahel; much of their attention focuses on describing the light
positioned the narrator as an explorer, encountering and cataloguing the beauty and strangeness of a semi-populated landscape that he found foreign. Fromentin was not interested in the project of French colonization, or even really in questions surrounding Algeria’s administration. He saw Algeria as a place where the French could go to encounter “the sublime”: it represented a chance to see nature in its most uninhibited form, manifested in both the landscape and its inhabitants.246

Feydeau, on the other hand, published a series of novels about French colonists and their encounters with the indigenous population set in Algeria.247 Feydeau’s work was critical of many French colonists and their desire to remake Algeria in the image of France.248 He saw French colonists as disruptive of Arab society and life, and felt that the French colonial project diminished Algeria’s appeal and charm – though he did believe there was room in Algeria for enlightened Europeans who could guide the Arab tribes towards civilization without oppressing them.249 If his work was ambivalent about the benefits of French rule, however, its representations of indigenous people were deeply shaped by Orientalist tropes.250 He described


247 Feydeau was a novelist whose interest in Algeria seems to have been sparked by Gustave Flaubert’s Salammbô and Théophile Gautier’s 1845 Voyage en Algérie. See Rey-Goldzeiguer, Le Royaume Arabe, 119.

248 He particularly decried the way in which colonists had torn down parts of the city of Algiers to build European-style building complexes in their place. He noted that “Algiers has become less impressive today, and unfortunately, it will continue to diminish in the future. The French city, with its six-city houses, gray walls… takes over, step by step… Note that I do not blame our compatriots who are trying to make themselves at ease… I simply reproach them for destroying beautiful things…” See Feydeau, Alger: Étude, 25.

249 In his lengthy Le Secret du Bonheur, for example, Feydeau described a French settler family who became the protectors of an Arab tribe called the Beni-Haoua whose lands were threatened by a greedy French investor from overseas. The patriarch of the family, who the Arabs call the “kebbir” is a wise man who manages to defray the conflict and keep the tribes who lived near his family from revolting. He also saves their land by purchasing it for himself and giving it back to the tribe. See Ernest Feydeau, Le Secret de Bonheur (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1862).

250 Alger: une étude participates the most directly in the Orientalist project of describing the different racial groups that inhabited Algeria, and categorizing them according to their different “strengths” and weaknesses.” Still, he maintained, the worst groups were “types degraded by a mix of indigenous character and a kind of poorly understood primary education….” See Feydeau, Alger: Étude, 148-149.
the indigenous as “discouraged” and “enervated” races that could not be regenerated but only broken or destroyed. Fromentin and Feydeau might have been more sympathetic to the indigenous than Prévost-Paradol, who largely chose to ignore their existence. But the increasing visibility of this kind of orientalizing popular literature in the 1860s and 1870s would also contribute to a new discourse of empire that could operate independently from Napoleon III’s models, based at least in part on a new vision of the “civilizing mission.”

In the 1860s, a second conversation also emerged around the meaning of “empire” that was only indirectly tied to Algeria or any French overseas territory at all. Instead, it emerged from liberal and republican groups who sought to discredit the Napoleonic regime. These groups attacked “empire” as a fundamentally flawed and corrupt way of organizing power within France itself. While these republican writers received somewhat limited press during the 1860s, the vision of the Empire that they developed would solidify after its collapse in the 1870s. The dominant voices participating in this attempt to condemn empire did not necessarily belong to politicians, but to journalists and novelists writing on the edges of the political sector. The first and most influential of these texts was Victor Hugo’s 1852 Napoleon le Petit. This political pamphlet not only attacked the character of Napoleon III and condemned his 1851 coup d’état; it also sought to discredit the very idea of “empire” itself as a form of political organization in France. Empire, Hugo claimed, was inherently despotic; it necessarily bred either corruption or indifference and disengagement.

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251 See ibid., 281.

252 Hugo noted, “The first Bonaparte wanted to reconstruct the empire of the West, make Europe a vassal, dominate the continent in its strength and the dazzle of its grandeur … Napoleon was a master of the world.” Napoleon III, he went on to insist, also had dreams of domination. He noted that he was already “master, cad, mufti, bey, dey, sultan… cousin of the sun… Paris is no longer Paris, it is Baghdad… M. Bonaparte can do what he likes with property, families, people…” See Victor Hugo, Napoleon le Pétit. (Paris: Actes Sud, 2007), 69, 118.
Perhaps even more than Victor Hugo, the writers Émile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian worked to condemn not only Napoleon III but his uncle, Napoleon I as well. Through a long series of popular, widely distributed novels, they sought to retell the narrative of the First Napoleonic Empire through the eyes of the ordinary people who had lived through it. Taken together, these stories presented the French Empire in clear, unstintingly negative terms. Their extremely popular *Histoire d’un conscrit de 1813* and *Waterloo*, published in 1864 and 1865, respectively, followed a young, partially lame young soldier as he followed Napoleon I’s army across Europe, encountering a variety of horrors along the way.253 This work, in addition to their many others, reiterated a set of key themes. First, Erckmann-Chatrian insisted that Empire in all its conditions was equivalent to endless war. It attracted the uneducated through a series of rousing public ceremonies, and the greedy through the promise of profit from unending conflict. It thus appealed to the basest instincts of the French population, all while stripping the country of its assets to fund its enormous armies.254 To find peace, prosperity, and political justice, the authors insisted, France needed to renounce empire entirely and re-establish the Republic.255

In the face of diminishing support within France and increasing threats to France’s position in Europe, Napoleon III sought to redefine the Second Empire by associating it with Napoleon I’s powerful legacy of expansion. His early definition of “empire” – as a political program emphasizing order and stability within France and the liberation of nations outside of it – was no longer sufficient to capture the imagination and loyalty of his subjects. He therefore


255 The authors indicated that the French people only allowed Napoleon to take over in the first place was due to the absence of education in the countryside. In order to avoid lapsing into despotism in the future, the “people” and the bourgeoisie needed to unite together against reactionary forces, and institute primary schooling across France. See Erckmann-Chatrian, *Histoire d’un Paysan. Contes et Romans nationaux et populaire. Vol. 1* (Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, 1962), 519.
tried to expand the meaning of imperial identity, and to reconstitute the French Empire as both a French political program and a multinational entity. This new “French Empire” would be simultaneously metropolitan and overseas, and it would incorporate different nationalities beneath its rule even as it transcended all of them. Eyeing the weakening Ottoman Empire on the other side of the Mediterranean, Napoleon III dreamed of expanding his imperial reach into North African territories that had long ago belonged to Rome. Using Algeria as his test subject, Napoleon III positioned the French Empire as both a protector of Arab nationality and as a “civilizing force” among the backwards people there. But in the process, he attracted the wrath of the colonist population. Their agitation about his new imperial model spread discontent to metropolitan France itself – and especially to republican circles.

Because of this ongoing opposition, Napoleon III never managed to restructure Algeria, let alone establish a new Mediterranean Empire. But ironically, the model of “empire” he proposed was so unpopular that it proved to have a lasting legacy: republicans continued to react against it long after the Second Empire’s collapse during the Franco-Prussian War. It owed its metropolitan longevity partly to the links that the colonists formed with Parisian opposition leaders in the 1860s. These opposition leaders brought Napoleon III’s Algerian policies to France’s attention by citing them as another example of the Second Empire’s flaws. But its enduring place in French memory also testifies to the degree to which Napoleon III’s attempt to collapse metropolitan and colonial empire together into one unified theory of “empire” succeeded on a discursive level. In the 1860s, when republican authors began to condemn empire as a “decadent,” “militaristic,” “corrupt,” and “oppressive” form of political organization, they did not differentiate between Napoleon III’s metropolitan and overseas empire any more than he did. The legacy of this conflation would trouble politicians in the Third Republic as they looked
overseas to restore French military prestige in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. For many years, they would struggle to untangle these two kinds of empire so that they could promote a new kind of republican colonial expansion that remained untainted by Napoleon III.\textsuperscript{256} This new vision of republican empire emerged out of the colonist publications, republican journals, and writings by people like Prévost-Paradol, and it defined itself in opposition to the Napoleonic vision of empire that preceded it.

Napoleon III’s understanding of Algeria, its relationship to the French nation, and its position in the French Empire had been deeply influenced by the double legacy of French Republicanism and Napoleonic imperialism, along with Saint-Simonian thought and romantic nationalism. And indeed, Napoleon III’s vision of a Mediterranean empire shared its intellectual predecessors’ hesitations and contradictions surrounding the connections between empire, nation, overseas territory, and citizenship. These ongoing questions would also come to shape Republican attempts to explain and justify the expansion of French overseas territory in the 1870s and 1880s – and they would be further complicated by the troubling legacy of Napoleon III himself.

\textsuperscript{256} Intellectuals and novelists like Prévost-Paradol, Fromentin, and Feydeau who had begun to popularize a specifically “colonialist” vision of empire in the 1860s helped make this process of disentangling possible.
CHAPTER 2: WAR, REVOLUTION AND EMPIRE’S COLLAPSE: THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR AND ITS AFTER-EFFECTS

The Franco-Prussian War lasted barely more than half a year – France declared war against Prussia in July of 1870, and by late January of 1871 it had been disastrously defeated. Violence and division sputtered on in the form of internal revolution and civil war for several months, but even this second, more divisive wave of conflict ended by May. Despite its relatively brief duration, however, the war and the Commune that followed it deeply fractured the French political landscape. The defeat brought an end to the empire that had ruled the country for twenty years, but the republic that replaced it did not emerge out of national consensus: it remained intact largely because the Legitimists, Orleanists, and Bonapartists failed to agree on how to set up another kind of state. Over the course of the next ten years, intellectuals, writers, artists, and politicians worked to fill the void left by the empire’s collapse by attempting to popularize alternative models of political organization and visions of the French nation – often in direct competition with one another.¹

The collective memory of the war and the Commune played an important role in the attempt to redefine the French nation, its politics, and its relationship to its colonies in the wake of the Empire’s collapse. In the years following the année terrible, politicians, writers, artists and journalists produced innumerable monuments, museums, novels, and histories devoted to

¹ The exact structure of the new government was only worked out in 1875, and until 1877, it was dominated by Legitimists and Orleanists, who hoped to restore the monarchy. It was not until the President Mac-Mahon attempted and failed to stage a coup d’état in 1877 that public opinion swung definitively in favor of republicanism. See Bertrand Taithe, Citizenship and Wars: France in Turmoil, 1870-1871 (New York: Psychology Press, 2001), 172.
explaining the events of 1870-71. These cultural productions however, did not interpret the year’s events or significance in the same way. The different authors, intellectuals, and artists crafted works that advanced their own understandings of its meaning, which were often tied to their respective ideological positions, personal experiences, and aesthetic preferences. Securing specific interpretations of the collective memories of the war and Commune in turn became central to the ways in which intellectuals and politicians of different stripes attempted to articulate their vision for the French nation. These representations thus worked both with and against each other in broader public discourse, and they competed to give shape to the French collective memory, political organization, national identity, and understandings of empire.

This chapter examines the way that these different popular narratives – published in newspapers, political pamphlets, short stories, and novels – sought to make sense of the events of the année terrible. It focuses on how these narratives about the war and the Commune interpreted both events’ relationship to the Second Empire and the new Third Republic. It argues that authors often used the events to articulate judgments about the relative value of both “empire” and “republic” as forms of political organization. These narratives were thus politicized and deeply contested. Republican writers, politicians, intellectuals, and artists attempted to mobilize private memories of 1870-71 into a collective discourse that would unite the French beneath the new Republican state while their Bonapartist counterparts wove alternative narratives to discredit it and celebrate the empire in its place. Monarchists and socialists tried to use the war’s events to discredit both republic and empire alike. The chapter demonstrates that

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2 In 1896, Barthélémy-Edmond Palat published a bibliography of all of the novels, histories, and memoirs published after the war. It came to over six hundred pages. See Barthélémy-Edmond Palat, Bibliographie générale de la guerre de 1870-1871 (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1896).
this ongoing argument over the meaning of the war and its implications for the French nation served over time to redefine the meaning of “empire” in French political discourse.

The divisiveness of this conversation about the Empire, the Republic, the war, and the Commune was at least partially due to the complex way that the events of 1870-71 intersected with ongoing political tensions and problems. The conflict with Prussia had at first attracted widespread popular support – enough so that the Prefect of Police would later claim that it was the French populace and not the government that had driven the country to war. That may have been partly true, but during the weeks and days leading up to the outbreak of fighting, the bellicose mood was not universal: a number of prominent figures and journals – including the republican Le Siècle and Le Rappel, the socialist Le Reveil, and the liberal Temps and Journal des Débats - advocated for a pacific outcome to the crisis with Prussia. But once war seemed inevitable, even many of those who initially expressed hesitation articulated their support.

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3 The Franco-Prussian War emerged from a conflict between France and Prussia over the candidate for succession to the Spanish throne, which Bismarck used as a pretext to provoke Napoleon III. War was declared on July 19, 1870. For more information, see Michael Howard, The Franco-Prussian War; the German Invasion of France, 1870-1871 (New York: Routledge, 1961); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, 1870: La France dans la Guerre (Paris: Éditions Armand Colin, 1989); François Roth, La Guerre de 1870 (Paris: Hachette, 1990); Geoffrey Wawro, The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

4 This support was in part a consequence of French concerns about the growing power and prestige of Prussia. These concerns had become particularly heightened after the Prussian victory against Austria at Sadowa in 1866, which enabled Prussia to annex Austria’s former allies. Many French politicians and intellectuals saw Sadowa as the beginning of a march towards a unified Germany that would threaten French borders. See Quintin Barry, The Franco-Prussian War, 1870-71. Volume 1. (Solihull, England: Helion & Company, 2007), 17. Some members of the opposition saw the growing strength of Germany as Napoleon III’s fault, because he had promoted the politics of “nationalities” in Europe. Le Temps remarked, “...we never had any illusions about the inevitable dangers of having two large military monarchies neighboring each other... The military empire [Germany] that we have combatted from the beginning... is, for the most part, of our making... Military success is probable; we must hope, and we believe that we can hope without being mistaken. But the political results will be, we believe, illusory... we will never bring Germany back to its old state of division and weakness.” See A. Neptune, Le Temps (16 July 1870), 1.

5 Even on July 13th, much of the Cabinet still sought a way to resolve the crisis over the Spanish succession pacifically. See Le Gaulois, n. 738 (13 July 1870), 1.

6 Le Temps, A. Neptune remarked grudgingly: “...We will not ever regret having pleaded the cause of peace until the last moment, and we will add even that our efforts would have been more energetic if they had been supported by more hope.” See A. Neptune, Le Temps (16 July 1870, 1). For the Journal de Débat’s argument for peace, see F.
Writers, politicians, and intellectuals from across the political spectrum vocally defended the declaration of war, leading the *Petit Journal* to claim: “there has never been a war undertaken amidst such enthusiasm.” This enthusiasm was not limited to the elite – crowds in Paris in particular took to the streets to demonstrate their patriotic fervor. *Le Gaulois* reported that on July 17, two days before war was declared, the crowds swarmed through different parts of the city, shouting, “Down with Prussia! Long live France!” Those that advocated against the war – like the liberal deputy Adolphe Thiers – were widely condemned as cowards and even possible traitors by the more enthusiastic parts of the Parisian press. The only prominent dissident voices in the days when the war seemed certain were those who advocated against what they saw as French overconfidence. Catholic journals such as *l’Univers* and liberal ones such as the *Journal des Débats* argued that “popular” publications had made the population arrogant and led them to underestimate the Prussians. But even those authors who warned that the war would be more difficult than many seemed to expect did not second-guess the wisdom of undertaking it.

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7 The article continued: “The soldiers head towards the frontier with an élan that will be irresistible; the recently created mobile national guard gathers beneath the flags with a bellicose ardor that augurs only for the best; the number of volunteers is very considerable. The population accompanies our valorous soldiers with acclamations and shows them that all of France is ready to rise to support them. It is a marvelous spectacle and a gage of coming victory.” See “La Guerre: L’entrée en champagne,” *Le Petit Journal*, n. 2,755 (18 July 1870), 1.


9 Thiers objected to the declaration of war in the Corps Législatif: “…I would like to explain that I did not rise with the majority of the Chamber because I love my country…. I consider this war very imprudent… I am certain that there will be days where you regret your participation…” As reported in *Le Temps*, 3rd edition (16 July 1870), 1.

10 The Catholic newspaper *l’Univers* noted, “many journals have expressed praiseworthy patriotic sentiments, but have expressed them in the wrong tone. They speak of crossing the Rhine as if it is the same as crossing the Seine by strolling across the pont des Arts, and say that the campaign against Prussia will consist of little more than a promenade towards Berlin… This boastful and bragging talk, this insolence incites pity and embarrassment. It is ridiculous to apply it to Prussia, and odious to permit it in the name of France… What good does it do to dissimulate… Prussia, which before Sadowa was a grand military power, has become over the past four years the most redoubtable enemy that we could encounter… This war will be difficult and will demand great sacrifices, great effort, and perhaps also great perseverance.” See Eugène Vauillot, “France,” *L’Univers* (16 July 1870), 1.
In fact, the first weeks of the war were marked by a rush of patriotic fervor that also produced a mood of political consensus. According to contemporary sources, the streets of Paris resounded with cries of “Vive l’empereur!” as often as with cries of “Down with Prussia!” Ordinary people and popular publications alike rallied around both the Emperor and the Empire in the last weeks of July 1870. Even many members of political opposition groups argued that the French needed to put aside their political differences for the length of this conflict. The liberal Journal de débats opined, “All political dissent must disappear in France at this hour in the face of the grave events that are underway in Europe.” Fears of political dissent translating into disloyalty thus remained. More conservative journals like Le Figaro went out of their way to condemn those who they felt were placing their distaste for the Empire before their patriotic duty to France, warning against radical republican deputies like Léon Gambetta who, they claimed, would prefer to have “two Waterloos instead of the Empire.” But the general enthusiasm for the war and the government’s policies lent little basis to these fears that political differences would undermine the French war effort, at least in the early days.

These sentiments – while perhaps common in wartime – marked a shift away from the political climate that had defined the last few years of Napoleon III’s regime. Beginning in the early 1860s, left-leanig political opposition groups in France had become increasingly critical of the Empire’s policies and institutions and of Napoleon III in particular. With the looser press

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11 This was particularly surprising, as the departement of the Seine had voted almost entirely against imperial candidates in the last round of elections. See Louis Girard, Napoleon III (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1986), 426.
13 Le Figaro argued that the opposition was “perpetually accusing the Empire, either of accepting German unification as a fait accompli, or of resisting the invading pretentions of Prussia. What does it matter to these people if France receives blows as long as their party overcomes its current humiliation? ...[they] cry ‘Two Waterloos instead of the Empire!’” See “Corps Législatif,” Le Figaro (17 July 1870), 1.
laws established in the early years of the “liberal” empire, members of these groups were able to popularize their opinions by publishing them in newspapers.\textsuperscript{15} With more open elections, opposition groups were also able to elect more deputies to the \textit{Corps Législatif} – a trend culminating in 1869, when members of the opposition won the majority of votes in cities across France. Napoleon III’s disastrous intervention in Mexico, combined with his unpopular efforts in Italy and his policies in Algeria, had gone a long way towards undermining the credibility and popularity that he had built up in the first years of his reign.\textsuperscript{16} In the face of this rising opposition, the Emperor found it increasingly difficult to impose his personal will on government policy – as the mixed results of his attempt to establish \textit{a royaume arabe} in Algeria made clear.

Despite the growing opposition, however, Napoleon III’s rule was far from the verge of collapse. In response to the agitation from the left-leaning opposition during the elections, he issued a series of liberal reforms in September of 1869 meant to win over moderates and distance them from their more radical counterparts.\textsuperscript{17} These reforms were in many ways successful; a number of renowned liberals came to serve the regime, including Émile Ollivier, who agreed to serve as Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{18} In 1870, the Emperor issued a plebiscite asking the people whether they supported these reforms and the new constitution – an implicit referendum on the regime. Outside of Paris, the response was very positive: the vast majority of voters voted in favor of the

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\item \textsuperscript{16}Michele Cunningham, \textit{Mexico and the Foreign Policy of Napoleon III} (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 9.
\item \textsuperscript{17}Napoleon III played off the fears of moderates by stressing the dangers of radicals and the social revolution that they might incite. On April 23\textsuperscript{rd}, he proclaimed that “by voting for the plebiscite, the French would forestall the threat of revolution, put order and liberty on a solid base, and make it easier for the crown to be transferred to my son.” See Napoleon III, \textit{Proclamation de l’Empereur} (23 April 1870); Price, \textit{The French Second Empire}, 397.
\item \textsuperscript{18}The elections of 1869 brought great victories to the opposition; 4,600,000 people voted for imperial candidates, but 3,300,000 people voted for either republican or Orleanist candidates. See Girard, \textit{Napoleon III}, 426.
\end{itemize}
Empire, including many moderates and liberals, who had been won over by the reforms. The most negative responses to the plebiscite came in fact from Algeria, where most colonists — who continued to resent and distrust Napoleon III’s attitude towards them - voted against it. The resounding success of the plebiscite enabled the emperor to reestablish the legitimacy of his regime in the face of the 1869 elections that had elected so many members of the opposition. In the eyes of much of the population, he had successfully redefined the French Empire, separating it from the militarized imperial regime of Napoleon I by recasting the evolving system as a domestic political model that allowed for some democratic political participation and even increased overt political dissent, but continued to combine “liberty” with “order.”

The imperial system was still somewhat authoritarian, but the political mood within France had shifted profoundly over the past five years. The political opposition had become noisier and republican radicals like Léon Gambetta who refused to acknowledge the regime’s legitimacy had joined moderate liberal and republican deputies in the Corps Législatif. Napoleon III himself was older and growing physically weaker, suffering from the illness that would kill him several years later. His authority had diminished in the eyes of his opponents, he was no longer able to act unilaterally, and his vision of the political meaning of “empire” encountered ever-more challenges from dissidents seeking to discredit him. The political

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19 Napoleon III only failed to win the majority of the vote in the Seine, the Bouches-du-Rhône, and Algeria, where the majority of the colonists voted against him. See Price, The French Second Empire, 397.

20 A commentator in 1902 remarked “The result was due to some grudges that the colony held against the metropole as well as to the turbulent spirit of the civil population… which had mostly encountered problems where it had hoped to acquire a fortune.” Pierre la Gorce, Histoire du Second Empire, I (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1902), 115.


22 Napoleon III, Proclamation de l’Empereur (23 April 1870)


consensus that marked the beginning of the war was a rare and final break away from this trend towards growing political fragmentation and dissent.

This consensus, however, only lasted as long as French prospects in the war seemed good. As soon as the French troops lost the Battle of Wissembourg on August 4, it began to fray.\(^{25}\) In the days that followed, it quickly became clear that the French loss was not a fluke, and that the Prussians outmatched the French: the French army had a poorly structured command system, fewer soldiers, disorganized supply lines, and an insufficient number of railroads to move the troops to the front quickly enough.\(^{26}\) Defeat followed defeat, forcing Napoleon III to concede his military authority to General Mac-Mahon on August 31, little more than a month after he had assumed command of the armies.\(^{27}\) After the disastrous battle of Sedan on September 2, Mac-Mahon and Napoleon III were forced to surrender, placing themselves and 100,000 French troops into Prussian custody.

When news of the devastating defeat at Sedan and the Emperor’s personal surrender spread, the Empire immediately lost what credibility it had left. Napoleon III’s popularity had always depended on the myth of his uncle’s military greatness, and this display of immense military incompetence completely shattered the mythic links.\(^{28}\) Much of the population in Paris, Lyon, and Marseilles took to the streets, demanding the immediate overthrow of the government.

\(^{25}\) Even the initial losses at the battle of Wissembourg had political ramifications; the Empress-Regent overthrew Ollivier’s ministry and replaced it with one headed by the Comte de Palikao on August 9\(^{th}\). The Emperor did not hear of this change until after it had already happened – the first sign that his authority was unraveling. On August 12\(^{th}\), he was forced to surrender his military authority to General Bazaine. At the same time, his wife plotted to replace him on the throne with his teenage son. See Smith, *The Second Empire*, 57.


\(^{27}\) He had first arrived at the front on July 28\(^{th}\). See Barry, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 1:72, 198.

\(^{28}\) Initially, government officials – including moderate republicans – had attempted to legally transfer power to a “Government of National Defense” made up of Bonapartists. However, they did not move quickly enough; crowds swarmed around the Corps Législatif and the Senate, leading Favre, Gambetta, and other republicans to forestall social revolution. See Price, *The French Second Empire*, 455. Not all journals blamed the Empire for the loss; the Figaro blamed liberalism. See Jules Richard, “Le Chronique du Paris,” *Le Figaro* (5 September 1870), 4.
and the institution of a new Republic. On September 4, the liberal opposition in the Corps Légitimiste staged a *coup d’état* in Paris – at least in part to prevent the popular, more radical revolution that seemed to be brewing in the city - and proclaimed the beginning of the Third Republic.\(^{29}\) The new provisional government primarily included moderate republicans, who quickly organized themselves into the Government of National Defense.\(^{30}\)

If the French loss at Sedan marked the end of the Empire, it did not signal an auspicious beginning for the newly formed republic. Although the majority of the population – reeling from news of the French defeat at Sedan – resigned themselves to the revolution, most people did not support it. The population in the French countryside, the wealthy, and the religious accepted the Republic only as a temporary measure because the country was in crisis.\(^{31}\) The new Government of National Defense even struggled to maintain the support of the urban groups that had brought it into power because they wanted more radical reforms than the ministers were prepared to offer. In part in order to refrain from alienating this base, the government chose to continue the fight against the Germans despite the fact that most of the French army was out of commission.\(^{32}\) This decision – which the government’s desire to demonstrate the military superiority of the republican model of the nation-at-arms also drove – proved disastrous.\(^{33}\) The new government’s

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\(^{29}\) Smith, *The Second Empire and the Commune*, 59.

\(^{30}\) Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 235


\(^{32}\) The concern that the radical groups in Paris would oppose any attempt to surrender was justified when these groups first threatened to – and then decided to – revolt when the government tried to sue for peace in September, October, and early January. See Smith, *The Second Empire and the Commune*, 61.

\(^{33}\) The government’s decision to continue the war was not purely instrumental: some republicans like Gambetta pursued the conflict because they believed that a republican nation-at-arms would be more competent than the professional army. Sedan had discredited the Napoleonic myth that had been at the root of Napoleon III’s appeal; Gambetta and his followers hoped to replace that myth with one centered on the republican army. See Bertrand Taithe, *Citizenship and Wars*, 10 and Alan Forrest, *The legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989). It is clear that this myth was popular; the day after the proclamation of the Republic,
efforts to continue the war had no real success against the Prussian armies. On September 19, the Germans laid siege to the city of Paris and over the next months occupied most of the French countryside. The new republican government was forced to flee to Tours. While the Parisians managed to keep the Prussians from entering the city for several months, in January 1871 the government was forced to surrender.34

In February of 1871, the Government of National Defense organized the Republic’s first elections in order to ensure that a popularly legitimized government would be in place to sign the peace treaty.35 The elections returned a majority of Legitimist and Orleanist candidates, drawn from primarily rural areas.36 The Third Republic’s first elected legislature was thus primarily composed of deputies who disapproved of republicanism – a composition that hardly seemed to assure the Republic’s future. Anti-republican deputies would dominate the Republic’s legislature until 1879. These electoral results satisfied neither republicans nor the different conservative groups who felt confined within a political system they disliked.37 Shortly after assuming office, the newly elected government signed the unpopular peace treaty that included expensive war reparations and the surrender of Alsace and Lorraine. The first major act of the republic’s elected government thus provoked widespread discontent across the country. This treaty also allowed the Prussian army to march through Paris, an event that irritated much of the Parisian population.38

The new government’s decision to convene in Versailles rather than Paris – based in part on its

the editors of *Le Gaulois* spoke of their hope that the Republic would invoke the *levée en masse*. See “La Levée en Masse,” *Le Gaulois* (5 September 1870), 1.

37 Taithe, *Citizenship and Wars*, 172.
deputies’ suspicion of the republican and radical groups that had precipitated the September 4 Revolution in France’s capital - consolidated the Parisians’ resentment.  

The Parisian left, increasingly convinced that the Third Republic’s government was “republican” in name only, denounced the new leadership and proclaimed the beginning of the Paris Commune in March of 1871. The Commune lasted barely more than two months, but its legacy, like the war’s, left a profound mark on France and on the new Republic’s government. The Commune was itself complex: it included a number of different political movements and impulses. Its elected government included deputies whose political allegiances ranged from moderate republican, to neo-Jacobin, to Saint-Simonian, to socialist. This government embraced several reform projects, most of which emerged directly out of Republican and even Bonapartist traditions – they established workers’ cooperatives, nationalized Church property, tried to improve the economic and legal position of women, and established institutions of secular education. Despite the fact that French progressives had long advocated for and even embarked on less ambitious versions of these projects, Communard actions incensed the government in Versailles. It convinced the Prussians to release the French army from prisoner-of-war camps so that it could crush the revolutionaries. During the “Bloody Week” in May, the newly reconstituted army slaughtered at least 20,000 Parisians and arrested nearly 50,000 more. Many of those arrested were incarcerated in work camps in Paris or in New Caledonia.

40 They had been threatening to declare the Commune since October 1870, and in fact had briefly revolted in January of 1871. See Smith, *The Second Empire and the Commune*, 61.
41 Starr, *Commemorating Trauma*, 22.
If the early Republic’s government was tainted by the fact that it was forced to sign a wildly unpopular peace treaty, a major uprising represented even more of a potential threat to its reputation. The government did everything it could to delegitimize the movement: it unleashed a torrent of propaganda painting the Communards as socialists, criminals, and foreign conspirators bent on seducing the working classes, promoting a culture of laziness, and undermining France. As Gay Gullickson has made clear, the government also tried to portray the Communards as simply evil by mobilizing the image of the petroleuse – Communard women accused of setting fire to the city. They portrayed these women as unnatural viragos who posed a profound threat to the French social order, and used their image to help transform the popular image of the Commune itself. This propaganda campaign was largely successful: in the years after the année terrible it was Communist atrocities – not government ones - that lived on in the French popular memory, despite the fact that the government had indisputably killed far more people than the revolutionaries they crushed.

While a conservative government spearheaded the campaign to crush the Commune, Republican deputies also participated in it. Many were eager to portray Communards as either socialist radicals or social degenerates in order to disassociate themselves from the uprising. This move to disavow the Communards did not take place among politicians alone. Even after *Le Temps* was suspended for nearly a month by the government in Versailles for “supporting the civil war,” it opened its first new edition with a note condemning the Communards as “despots” who would have “brought back the proceedings and traditions of the empire.” Only the National

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43 It is difficult to argue that the Communards were intent on establishing a socialist state. They only allowed workers’ cooperatives to establish themselves in buildings abandoned by their owners, and did not touch the gold reserves in the Bank of France. See Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune, 1871* (London: Longman, 1999).


45 Peter Starr, *Commemorating Trauma*, 34.
Assembly, it maintained, could secure the country’s republican liberties.\textsuperscript{46} Given that most members of the National Assembly at the time were opposed to republican liberties in most forms, this claim was contradictory at best. But it shows that moderate and even radical republicans saw the Commune’s legacy as a threat to their own reputation. After all, the Communards had described themselves as republicans and claimed the French revolutionary tradition as their own.\textsuperscript{47} The moderate republicans who only elected a minority of representatives to the new conservative government did not want to be associated with a failed political uprising. As a result, the fact that they shared some of the Communards’ beliefs and views made them all the more desirous of distancing themselves from it. And despite the fact that this propaganda campaign largely succeeded – most of the population remembered the Commune as a socialist, not republican uprising – it is nevertheless clear that some Communard policies and decisions continued to haunt republican memory and politics throughout the late nineteenth century. It further complicated republicans’ relationship to the French Revolution and undermined the strength of some long-held republican beliefs, including the vision of the \textit{levée en masse} or a nation-at-arms.\textsuperscript{48} Finally, it convinced many moderate republicans that in order to succeed politically they would have to embrace a relatively conservative set of political platforms.

As political historians have made clear, the French spent the thirty years following the Commune working out exactly what the new French “republic” meant and how it should be organized. Conservative and liberal republican politicians struggled among themselves and with

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Le Temps} (30 mai 1871), 1.


\textsuperscript{48} Alan Forrest has argued that Napoleon III’s defeat actually led to the reinvigoration of the “citizen-in-arms” ideal associated with the Revolutionary and Napoleonic army, at least during the war. Napoleon III had relied on a small, professionally trained army; its swift defeat discredited contemporary French military strategy and led people to turn back to the Napoleonic period for new solutions. But the Commune, which drew heavily on the rhetoric of the citizen-in-arms, again complicated this legacy. See Forrest, \textit{The legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars}, 113.
other political parties to define their newly constituted government in contradistinction to the defeated Second Empire and the Paris Commune. At the same time, monarchists and Bonapartists sought to undermine the new government’s legitimacy in the hopes of replacing it with a different form of political organization. All of these groups drew, in different ways, on the contested memories of the *année terrible* in order to defend their political beliefs and to articulate alternative visions of French political and national identity. Despite their critiques of both the Commune and socialism, however, these different groups themselves lacked unity, and they did not articulate coherent political positions. Republicans, for example, navigated between democratic impulses, fear of the mob, belief in the guiding power of educated elites, and concern about the continued appeal of monarchism, Bonapartism, and the Catholic Church. The content of their ideology thus remained fluid and evolving. Monarchists, on the other hand, were divided between supporters of different Bourbon descendants and on the question of the French Revolution, while Bonapartists disagreed about whether to defend Napoleon III and his vision of Empire. These different groups worked out their political ideologies as they debated with one another in the decades following the Franco-Prussian War.

This chapter examines the way that ongoing struggles over politics and memory affected understandings of “empire” and the nature of its relationship to the “republic” between 1871 and 1879. It argues that the disagreements over the events of the *année terrible* and their significance helped solidify a diametrical opposition between the concepts of empire and republic—even if the French continued to disagree about the content, value, and significance of the two terms. This

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49 Philip Nord has contended that if republicans shared any creed, it was a commitment to “the emancipation of conscience from the strictures of philosophical or clerical orthodoxy, the emancipation of civil society from the intrusions of the state and corporate authority.” See Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 251.
dichotomy soon created political problems and conceptual tensions for republican intellectuals who believed that the new republic should expand its colonial empire.

This chapter’s analysis of the debates about “empire,” “republic,” and the legacy of the année terrible focuses on three questions. First, how did intellectuals of different political affiliations articulate and defend their visions of France’s ideal political organization and its national identity in the early years of the Third Republic? Second, what role did the memory of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune play in their political understandings? Third, how did these debates affect popular understandings of “empire” in the first decade of the new republic? The chapter considers these questions by examining how these debates played out across newspapers, political pamphlets, and novels published in the early years of the Third Republic. It begins by focusing on debates within metropolitan France before expanding the analysis to consider the role that these debates played in popular understandings of France’s relationship to Algeria and its other colonies.

II. Visions of Empire in the New Republic

In the wake of defeat and civil war, politicians, intellectuals, and writers of a variety of ideological stripes sought to determine the cause for France’s embarrassing defeat and destructive civil war. These attempts were controversial – not least because many blamed the defeat not on German tactics, but on different groups or trends in French society. Some held the army responsible, while others charged only its generals or administrators. Others blamed Napoleon III, or the Second Empire, while some held the Government of National Defense at fault for the final devastation. Still others maintained that there was something deeply wrong with the French nation itself. Due in part to these wide differences in opinion, even by 1880 the French had not reached a clear consensus on the causes for defeat. But if these debates remained
unresolved, they nevertheless shaped the new ways that French intellectuals and politicians thought about the meaning and significance of “empire” and “republic”—even if they continued to disagree about the value and valence of both terms.

This debate over the political and national implications of French defeat took place in a number of different spheres— including newspapers, political pamphlets, almanacs, and literature. These types of writing had different purposes and were often intended for different audiences: some were aimed at the highly educated, while others sought to have a more mass appeal. Some were intended to rally those who shared beliefs similar to those of the author, while others were intended to convince those who were politically on the fence. The writers themselves had different relationships to French politics: some were immersed in the political sphere, while others were not politicians at all. Although these different attempts to influence popular understandings of the Franco-Prussian War and its relationship to French politics thus did not operate in the same way and did not necessarily circulate among the same people, they all contributed to an uneven conversation about the nation’s past and its future.

This conversation also evolved over the 1870s as writers responded to each other’s arguments and reacted to political events. Between 1871 and 1873, the republic was particularly unstable. The Orleanist and Legitimist deputies who dominated the National Assembly openly worked together to restore the monarchy and crown the Comte de Chambord King of France.51

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51 This attempt to restore the monarchy had been troubled since the beginning. The Legitimists did not command enough of a presence in the Assembly to install the Comte de Chambord without the support of the Orleanists. And while the Orleanists were willing to consider such an arrangement because the Comte de Chambord was elderly and childless—and he would therefore pass the throne to the Orleaniste Comte de Paris when he died—they wanted reassurances that that the Comte de Chambord would rule constitutionally. On 5 July 1871, the Comte de Chambord insisted that he would only rule beneath a white flag and refused to make any promises on the constitutional front. In 1873, it briefly seemed possible that an agreement could be reached, but when he again refused to use the republican tricolor flag or make constitutional assurances, their hopes of replacing the republic with a monarchy were derailed.
At the same time, the threat of a Bonapartist resurgence seemed remote, and Bonapartist sympathizers remained quiet.\(^5^2\) In the earliest years, monarchists and republicans were thus poised primarily against one another, and they invoked particular visions of the Second Empire to discredit each other and promote different forms of political organization. The nature of the debates over the war and the Empire changed in 1873, when the likelihood of a monarchical restoration receded and the Bonapartists re-entered the conversation, and once again in 1875, when the deputies took the first steps to consolidate the republican regime.\(^5^3\)

**Republicans**

Although no political groups articulated coherent interpretations of the war and the Commune, there were common concerns that fell along political lines. Republican politicians and intellectuals in particular blamed the Empire and its high-ranking officials for the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War and France’s eventual defeat. By delegitimizing the Empire – and to some extent, the monarchy as well – they hoped to defend the new republican government from

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\(^{52}\) In the years immediately following the defeat, many monarchists – especially Orleanists and Legitimists - saw the Bonapartists as potential allies in a campaign to overthrow the republic. To some degree, the monarchists’ hope for an alliance bore fruit: in 1873, the Bonapartists worked with the monarchists to help unseat Thiers. But the Bonapartists refused to be assimilated into a larger conservative alliance, and, at least within the Assembly itself, sometimes allied with the Republicans against the monarchists. See Kevin Passmore, *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 37.

\(^{53}\) In the early years, the Third Republic lacked a clear governing structure: even after the elections in 1871, its structure remained provisional. The conservatives who predominated in the government had no interest in moving to consolidate the regime, at least at first, because they hoped to overthrow it. It was only after it became clear that a monarchical restoration was impossible that a conservative coalition – dominated by moderate Legitimists and Orleanists – tried to construct a conservative coalition that would protect their interests. The first step towards this coalition was the “Rivet” law, which allowed the president to rule constitutionally. See Grévy, *La République des opportunistes*, 25. In 1875, in the face of a rising Bonapartist threat, Orleanists worked with moderate republicans to draft a series of laws that would come to operate as a constitution, establishing a National Assembly and a Senate, and agreeing that the regime would be called the “Republic.” They thus established a parliamentary regime that they hoped would consolidate the position of conservative elites. See Alan Grubb, *The Politics of Pessimism: Albert de Broglie and Conservative Politics in the Early Third Republic* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 240.
the conservative majorities that threatened to overthrow it by proving that the republic was not responsible for any of France’s misfortunes. This argument emerged early on. In the weeks following the September 4 Revolution, a number of politicians, intellectuals, and journalists from across the political spectrum published vehement critiques of Napoleon III, his military strategies, and his political institutions. These critiques only became more numerous in the face of the elections that took place on 17 February 1871, when the republicans faced a strong conservative opposition in the wake of the highly unpopular peace treaty. But if republican thinkers agreed that the Empire was largely to blame for defeat and civil war, they often articulated different ideas about why the Empire was to blame – and in fact defined the meaning of both “Empire” and “Republic” in diverse, sometimes contradictory ways. They also adopted different strategies for drawing the connections between empire and defeat.

Some pamphleteers focused their critique of the Empire on Napoleon III himself, and sought to demonstrate that he was personally responsible for the events of 1870-71. Eugène Spuller, a republican writer and politician, contended, for example, that because Napoleon III was a dictator who decided French policy from above, he alone could be held to account for the war’s events. He argued that Napoleon III’s pattern of placing his own desires and interests over the needs of the country had weakened France, and left it unprepared for war with Prussia.

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54 In the 1871 elections in particular, the republicans wanted to not only discredit the empire, but the monarchists as well. See, for example, “La France,” Le Temps (13 February 1871), 1.

55 Some maintained that he was a foolhardy dreamer who had led the country astray. “Was it improvidence? Was it perfidy? We don’t know. It is true that Louis-Napoléon was not very logical, and did not usually finish what he started.” See H. Bellamy, République ou monarchie (Angoulême: Imprimerie de T. Maignant, 1871), 11.

56 Eugène Spuller was a republican politician close to Gambetta. He became the editor of République française after the war and was elected to the Assembly in 1876. See Nathalie Baylon, Eugène Spuller, 1835-1896: Itinéraire d’un républicain entre Gambetta et le Ralliement (Lille: Les Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2006), 19.
when it came. The republican politician Émile Dehau echoed the contention that Napoleon III’s selfishness that led to the defeat in his pamphlet “Napoleon III or National Shame” published in early 1871. He claimed that contemporary France’s weak political and military position was the result of Napoleon III’s decision to try to increase his personal prestige by embarking on a series of unjustified wars in the country’s name.58

Even as these authors condemned Napoleon III as selfish, they argued that Napoleon III’s incompetence as a military commander was the most important factor in French defeat. This focus on his military abilities in part reflected republicans’ concern about the continued power of the Napoleonic myth of military greatness. Many republicans saw this myth as responsible for Napoleon III’s rise, and they feared that he might be able to make his way back into power if it remained intact.59 Some writers attempted to dismantle the myth by attacking the legacy of Napoleon I.60 But most did not contest Napoleon I’s military greatness; instead, they argued that Napoleon III had not inherited his talents. Eugène Spuller claimed that Napoleon III was simply too corrupt to be an effective military commander. He charged that Napoleon III – in an attempt to enrich himself – had purposefully diverted the funds he had requested to maintain and arm his

57 While Spuller acknowledged that Napoleon III had ostensibly put in place some reforms to liberalize the empire, he held that for the most part, these reforms were essentially illusory. See Eugène Spuller, Histoire de Napoléon III : l’homme, le système, le régime, les prétendues réformes, les désastres, conclusion (Paris: A. le Chevalier, 1872), 23.

58 He condemned both Napoleon III and Bonapartism for undermining France’s prosperity and prestige. He advocated for a “liberal” republic that would heal France’s wounds and emancipate its people. See Émile Dehau, Napoléon III ou la honte nationale (Paris: Imprimerie Auguste Vallée, 1871), 35.

59 See, for example, Jean Pilori, Gare à l’Empire (Paris: A. Lévy, 1871), 5.

60 Crespy-Noher, for example, compared Napoleon I to Washington unfavorably. See Crespy-Noher, Washington et Napoléon ou la République et la Monarchie en présence (Bordeaux: P.-M. Cadoret, 1871), 16. Félix Oger, a professor of geography at Saint-Barbe and the chair of commercial geography at Bordeaux, sought to show that both Napoleons were poor military leaders because they had ultimately weakened France instead of strengthening it. He insisted that the only legacy that either Empire had left for France was that of territorial loss, as the allies had stripped France of the Republic’s territorial gains when Napoleon I surrendered in 1815, and Prussia had assumed control over Alsace and Lorraine when Napoleon III surrendered in 1870. See Félix Oger, Les Bonaparte et les frontières de la France (Paris: Germer-Bailliere, 1872), 35.
soldiers into his personal accounts. He thus contended that the French army had lost primarily because it was criminally underfunded and underequipped. Émile Dehau took a more systemic approach: he declared that Napoleon III’s attempt to create an army that was both loyal to and dependent upon him had had devastating effects on the military’s ability to effectively fight wars. By limiting enrollment and refusing to create a national army out of fear that such an army might turn against him, he had failed to recruit and train enough soldiers to defend France.

Most authors went beyond personal failure, however, and insisted that the defeat did not just stem from Napoleon III’s personal, political, or military weaknesses, but from the fact that the Empire itself was a fundamentally flawed political institution. The critics thus challenged the legitimacy of the whole imperial system. They did not necessarily agree, however, about why the empire was inherently problematic. Some took a structural approach, arguing that the Empire was an inherently contradictory form of political administration. Achille Eyraud, a well-known writer and journalist, argued that Napoleon III sought to be both a “demagogue” and a “despot” – and that as a result, he was unable to create consistent domestic or foreign policies. Léon Feer, on the other hand, agreed that the Empire represented both demagogy and despotism, but denied that these two tendencies were contradictory: instead, he maintained, that they were “two allies” that had worked together beneath Napoleon III’s rule to undermine France. Others pointed to the Empire’s political culture: Le Petit Journal implied that the empire’s key fault lay in its tendency to promote loyalty over competence. It particularly condemned the use of official candidature, which, it contended, helped create an administrative culture based on conformity.

62 Dehau, Napoléon III ou la honte nationale, 32
64 Léon Feer was an orientalist; this book was his only work on France. See Léon Feer, République et royauté: de la nécessité d’établir le gouvernement de la France sur la base républicaine (Paris: E. Lachaud, 1871), 8.
and personal connections. Such an incompetent administration could not adequately govern the country nor meet the demands of waging a war.\textsuperscript{65}

Other authors charged that the Empire’s failures lay primarily in the fact that it was a fundamentally corrupt form of political organization, which promoted a decadent, immoral culture.\textsuperscript{66} If Eugène Spuller had argued that this corruption stemmed from the Emperor himself, others described it as a systemic problem that spread throughout the entire administration and degraded the French nation.\textsuperscript{67} In an open letter to Gambetta, Jean-Baptiste Vitteaut implied that Napoleon III had spread this corruption deliberately because he had feared an uprising and had therefore undermined the religious and national ties that naturally bound the French people together by promoting an egotistical culture.\textsuperscript{68} Without those ties, they had been unable to unite in the face of a common enemy and defend themselves against the Germans. \textit{Le Siècle} agreed with this diagnosis, maintaining that the Empire was “only a despotism and an orgy. It did not and it could not leave anything behind it other than ruin and shame. We have not had anything


\textsuperscript{66} Eugène Bazin contended that the Empire had corrupted the society of letters, and by extension, Parisian society itself. See Eugène Bazin, \textit{1870-1871} (Paris: Sauton, 1872), 6.

\textsuperscript{67} Léon Feer, who mostly focused on attacking Napoleon III personally, widened his critique here. He referred to the Empire as an “odious” form of government, “established by violence, sustained by brutal force, founded on war, enemy of both peace and liberty. The Empire has only ever brought France to the abyss: it destroyed liberty, morals, and civic and national spirit… the Bonapartist dynasty is made up of foolhardy adventurers who… have only been marked by crime and depravity.” See Feer, \textit{République et Royauté}, 20-21. Auguste Dalichoux similarly argued that the Empire spread corruption throughout French society, especially among the aristocrats and the bourgeoisie. See Auguste Dalichoux, \textit{1871: Les premières phases d’une decadence}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Paris: Rue de Seine, 1871), 15. An anonymous pamphlet-writer agreed, noting, “Caesarian monarchy… was the monarchy of decadent times of great social corruption.” See \textit{La république et la monarchie} (Lille: Imprimerie et librairie Camille Robbe, 1873), 57.

\textsuperscript{68} He argued, “the causes of our national decadence are multiple and profound… the strongest, which weighs most heavily along with Bonapartist corruption and hypocrisy, and the Orleanist cult of material interest… is egoism.” This egoism, he avowed, was the result of the decline in religious belief that Napoleon III in particular helped precipitate. He alleged that the Republic would need to embrace Catholicism in order to be successful – and in fact went so far as to aver that Republicanism was the type of political organization most compatible with Christianity. He insisted that all kinds of monarchy – and Bonapartism in particular – replaced the figure of Christ with the figure of the monarch, and thereby misdirected the religious feelings of the people. In a republic, he maintained that the people would focus on God. See Jean-Baptiste Vitteaut, \textit{À Monsieur Gambetta: Réflexions sur les causes de notre décadence et les conditions essentielles de la démocratie}. (Paris: J. Dejussieu, 1872), 7, 19.
but an immoral comedy in France for the past twenty years…” Like Vitteaut, the author thus tied what he saw as the Empire’s moral failures to the outcome of the conflict with Prussia, and implied that the government had been destined to end in disaster.

While some republican pamphlet-writers defined the Empire as a unique form of political organization and attempted to discredit it alone, others tied its failures to older conservative forms of government. Some linked the Empire explicitly to the French monarchy by describing the empire as a “type” of monarchy – and then argued that all forms of monarchy were equally intrinsically despotic. Raymond d’Aiguy, an officer at Lyon’s court of appeals, for example, described the Bonapartists, the Legitimists, and the Orleanists, as “three monarchies” and held them all responsible for “dishonoring [the nation’s] name, debasing its flag, and plunging it into an abyss of ruin and devastation.” While G. Barthélemy, a republican politician, did distinguish between Bonapartists, Legitimists, and Orleanists, he maintained that the differences between them were ultimately negligible, because all three were “synonymous with tyranny, absolutism, and despotism” and each would ultimately bring ruin to the French nation. A third anonymous writer acknowledged that Bonapartists, Legitimists, and Orleanists represented three distinct political ideals. But he went on to claim that all “were equally false and equally bad.”

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69 Dupaure, “Paris. – 3 février,” Le Siècle (4 February 1871, 1)

70 Albert Osmonville argued that the problem with the Empire was that it was a type of monarchy, and as such, it had stripped France of its wealth, spirit, and citizens. See Albert Osmonville, Ce que coûte un monarque (Lyon: Jevai et Bourgeon, 1871), 5. Émile Second similarly described both Empire and Monarchy as “royal” governments “marked by infamies without number, debauchery, shame, corruption, and tyranny.” See Émile Second, Histoire de la décadence d’un peuple, 1872-1900, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie André Sagnier, 1873), 141.


73 The Bonapartists, he contended, represented “autocratic but popular and democratic monarchy,” whereas the Orleanists represented “liberal or constitutional monarchy,” and the Legitimists represented “traditional or absolutist monarchy.” See La République et la monarchie (Lille: Imprimerie et librairie Camille Robbe, 1873), 19.
The naturalist E. Jourdeuil tied the Empire and older forms of monarchy together in a somewhat different way. He did not argue that the Empire was a form of monarchy; instead, he alleged that with the advent of Louis XIV, the monarchy itself had come to operate as a type of “Caesarism.” Caesarism, he asserted, “was dictatorship transformed into a permanent system of government; discretionary sovereignty… establishing regular power in the interests of the rulers and not the ruled… it is violence governing opinion, and force violating right… it is everything that one wants, except for what is liberal, what is noble, and what is just.”75 In other words, the empire was not a form of monarchy; the monarchy had become a form of empire. As a result, if imperialism represented a fundamentally illegitimate way of organizing power, the monarchy shared all of its problems. And while Jourdeuil acknowledged that the monarchists had little directly to do with the defeat of 1870-71, he promised that if they came to power, it would only be a matter of time before the country encountered another disaster.

If Republican writers sought to use the events of the war and the Commune to discredit the empire – and often the monarchy as well – they simultaneously promoted the republic as the form of government that would rebuild France through its opposition to the hated Empire. However, they did not necessarily describe its solution to France’s problems in the same way. The republican opportunist Louis Andrieux, for example, promised that unlike Napoleon III, the new republic would bring peace and prosperity to France and to Europe.76 Moreover, he claimed, by spreading the message of fraternity to all people, it would succeed in “invading” Europe,

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74 La République et la monarchie (Lille: Imprimerie et librairie Camille Robbe, 1873), 20.
76 Louis Andrieux was a lawyer heavily involved in the Opportunist government of the early 1870s as a prefect of police and later as a deputy to the National Assembly. Later in his career, he also founded Petit Parisien, a popular journal. See Louis Andrieux, La Paix et la République (Lyon: Chez tous les librairies, 1871), 12; Louis Andrieux, Souvenirs d’un préfet de police (Paris: Jules Rouff, 1885)
undermine all remaining Empires, and enable France to recover the territory lost to Germany.\textsuperscript{77} In this vision, the new government would solve France’s problems by embracing and promoting a progressive ideology based on equality and pacifism. Raymond d’Aiguy, on the other hand, contended that the republic would solve France’s problems by “sweeping away everything that makes us blush… We will not see again that unbridled luxury… or odious speculation… we will not see money reigning as master… we will not see corruption descending from on high to spread everywhere…”\textsuperscript{78} D’Aiguy thus promoted a vision of the republic as a sober, morally pure form of political organization that would eliminate the “decadence” and materiality that had characterized imperial France. In addition to insisting that the republic would purify French society and culture, moreover, he argued that it would also create a more effective army by instituting a universal draft.\textsuperscript{79} This message was thus less pacifistic than Andrieux’s; both maintained that the republic would enable France to regain its lost territory, but d’Aiguy implied that France would do so with a more effective army – not by spreading its ideology across Europe. Both agreed, however, that the new republic would be able to foster the development of progress and prosperity in the way that less representative forms of rule would not.

Many writers tried to reach across political divides to their conservative counterparts and disassociate the republic from the Commune by describing the new government as a

\textsuperscript{77} Andrieux, \textit{La Paix et la République}, 14. Most writers were not this optimistic about the ability of the republic to resolve its differences with Germany pacifically. But several hoped that with the republic, the French would at least be able to win the support of other “Latin nations” who would support them if war with Germany came again. They thus hoped that republican ideology would bring them alliances. See A. de Richecoeur, \textit{Ce que doit être l’alliance des races latines} (Paris: Amyot, 1871); César Orsini, \textit{L’Alliance latine} (Paris: Amyot, 1872).

\textsuperscript{78} D’Aiguy, \textit{Guerre de 1870 et ses consequences}, 54. This idea that the republic would bring peace was also reiterated in more popular publications designed specifically to attract a mass audience. One “Republican almanac” “made for the largest number,” promised its readers that while monarchies of all types would bring endless war, the republic would bring freedom, prosperity, order, and peace. See \textit{Almanach républicain du Réveil de l’Ardèche} (Privas: Imprimerie du Réveil de l’Ardèche, 1871), 55.

\textsuperscript{79} D’Aiguy, \textit{Guerre de 1870 et ses consequences}, 55.
conservative political institution that could best promote order and stem the rising tide of radicalism. In order to defend this point, these writers explicitly divorced the Republic – and democratic forms of political organization – from social and political radicalism as well as from the Empire. F. Boussenot thus claimed that it was the Second Empire, and not the new republic, that was responsible for the Commune. He contended that the empire had allowed “radicals” of all types to flourish, and that these radicals had simply seized the opportunity offered by the Empire’s defeat to revolt.  

The republic, on the other hand, had crushed this uprising – putting an end to the radical politics that the Empire had allowed to flourish. Other authors took a more theoretical approach, and tried to redefine popular understandings of the relationship between republicanism and radicalism. One anonymous writer argued that the republic was a political regime defined by restraint. He condemned the way that conservative writers “confused [the Republic] with the Terror and the Commune,” and claimed that it had little more than nominal connections to either revolutionary movement. Both were tied not to the Republic, but to the monarchy and the empire. On the most basic level, the Terror, the Commune, the monarchy, and the empire were united because they were all equally defined by “excess.” Moreover, he insisted, the monarchy and the empire necessarily led to revolt because they were fundamentally unjust and “raised to the status of dogma imposed, like Islam, by the sword.” Oppressive personal rule necessarily led to resentment and anger, which in turn resulted in uprisings and in legal, moral, and material disorder. He insisted that the Third Republic would not have these problems.

81 Ernest Paradis even divorced the republic from its associations with anti-clericalism, declaring that the Republic was the only form of political organization that fell in line with Christian teachings. Ernest Paradis, Monarchie et république par un paysan (Paris: André Sagnier, 1873), 27.
83 Ibid., 11.
Because all parties were included in the government, they were forced to cooperate with one another and work for the higher good of the nation. As a result, parties could not either oppress or undermine one another. The Republic, he thus concluded, enforced moderation and order.  

Although this anonymous writer’s description of the relationship between monarchy, empire, and revolution was laid out in unusual detail, many other republicans echoed his general contention that monarchy, empire, and revolution were bound together. E. Jourdeuil, for example, maintained that the republic represented “the rule of law.” All other forms of government, on the other hand, were on some level “arbitrary,” which inevitably stirred resentment and distrust among the people. Only a well-run republic based on the collective will of the national population, he argued, would be effective in convincing people to live according to the rules of a well-run society.  

Eugène Bazin took the argument even farther: he asserted that the republic would be best able to suppress radical and degenerate movements because only democratically-organized societies promoted an atmosphere of “public virtue” in which such movements would be unable to thrive.  

Eugène Courmeaux, on the other hand, insisted that the Republic was the only form of government that could prevent revolution because it alone was not exclusionary: both the monarchy and the empire were in “perpetual conflict with national sovereignty.”  

Achille Eyraud similarly promised that the republic would bring peace because it

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84 He argued that there was a place for conservative deputies in this republic; he just asked them not to undermine the government. See Ibid., 20, 29. Other pamphleteers repeated this idea. See La République et la monarchie (Lille: Imprimerie et librairie Camille Robbe, 1873), 44.

85 Jourdeuil’s position was unique: he argued that the current republic was not legitimate because it did not stem from the people. He instead wanted a republic with a hereditary president to accommodate the conservative wishes of the people. See E. Jourdeuil, Du césarisme en France (Paris: Librairie Muzard, 1871), 15, 22, 31.

86 Eugène Bazin, 1870-1871 (Paris: Sauton, 1872), 133.

87 He went on to state that while monarchy had had a certain place in its time, it was now outdated. See Eugene Courmeaux, République ou Royauté: Lettre à M. le Rédacteur du journal La Champagne (Reims: Chez tous les
alone could represent the different wishes from people across the country; the monarchy and the empire, on the other hand, were by nature exclusionary and thus bred discontent.88

These differing portraits of the empire and its relationship to the military defeat, the Commune, and other forms of monarchical government highlight some of the divisions within the emergent republican coalition in the early 1870s. They reveal the diversity of republicans’ concerns in the wake of defeat, and demonstrate their contradictory ideas about what the new republic should look like. Even as these writers invoked similar tropes, they often interpreted them in distinct ways. Some authors who condemned Napoleon III’s military strategies thus replaced the Napoleonic military model with the republican ideal of the nation at arms, while others replaced it with a vision of a universal peaceful republic.89 Authors who painted the Empire as an inherently despotic institution usually underlined the democratic nature of the Third Republic and avowed that it alone could represent the nation.90 But others, like Léon Feer, contended that the Empire had been despotic because it had relied on the “demagogic” practice of universal suffrage, and they claimed that the new republic would ensure order precisely because it would be less democratic and would rely on indirect suffrage.91 Some writers who

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88 Achille Eyraud maintained that there were many different types of republics, including moderate, radical, and socialist. These different kinds of republics had radically different aims and organizations. All of France’s attempts at organizing any type of republic thus far, however, he maintained, had failed. This was because the republic’s supporters had continued to make the same mistakes as the monarchy and the Empire: they had governed not based on the wishes of the people in general but on the wishes of Parisians. The Third Republic, however, incorporated the voices of people from all over France. See Eyraud, République ou Monarchie, 44, 79, 119.

89 Disagreements about the value of the military did not line up along “moderate” and “radical” lines but instead on divisions within the republican tradition – some of which embraced the idea of a citizen-at-arms and others of which saw the republic as the first step towards universal peace. See Grévy, La république des opportunistes, 42.

90 This contention was generally made by more radical republicans, who were committed to establishing universal male political participation in France. See, for example, Dehau, Napoléon III ou la honte nationale.

91 Feer, République et royauté, 145.
emphasized Napoleon III’s corruption presented the republic as a conservative type of political organization that would preserve order in France. But some also used the spectacle they painted of imperial decay to promote a vision of the republic as an open society that would promote public virtue by giving everyone a voice. These pamphlets thus reflected the disagreements between republican factions in the early years of the republic. The moderate republicans were concerned about the legacy of both the Revolution and the Commune and wanted to win liberals and Orleanists over to their cause, whereas the radical republicans were more concerned about establishing representative political institutions that reflected republican values.

There was nevertheless considerable overlap between these republican pamphlets. All sought to discredit the Second Empire by tying it to the events of 1870-71. Perhaps most notably, many republicans used a negative vision of the Second Empire to condemn monarchical systems by tying the two kinds of political regimes together. If the Empire was responsible for the defeat and civil war, and it shared many commonalities with the monarchy, then republicans could argue that the monarchy – much like the Empire – would lead the country to disaster. As a result, many did not define the Empire as a unique political regime, but tried to convince their readers that it was merely one example of authoritarian government. At the same time, they promised their readers that the republic would heal the wounds of the past and ensure its future greatness.

**Monarchists**

Monarchist voices – and especially Legitimist ones - also joined in this pamphlet war over the meaning of the war and its relationship to both the Empire and the Republic in the early

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92 See, for example, Vitteaut, *À Monsieur Gambetta*; Jourdeuil, *Du césarisme en France*.
93 See, for example, Bazin, 1870-1871; Eyraud, *République ou Monarchie*.
1870s, although they framed their arguments differently. If republicans tied the Empire to the defeat and the Commune and then used that constellation to discredit the monarchy, most monarchists were less concerned with the empire’s role in the war and the Commune than with the emergence of the new republic. Many implicated both the Second Empire and the Third Republic in the events of 1870-1871, but they usually focused on discrediting the September 4 regime. This orientation reflected the political organization of France in the aftermath of the war. In those years, the chances of a Bonapartist resurgence were remote, but the republic was the de facto government of France. As a result, monarchists had an immediate interest in discrediting the republican regime, especially in the years leading up to 1873, when they still hoped to restore the monarchy. However, there was more than one “monarchist” position on the war, empire, and republic after 1870-71: the monarchists were, if anything, even more divided than the republicans – between Legitimists and Orleanists as well as Ultras and moderates.

In the weeks immediately following the declaration of the republic, some monarchists threw their support behind the new regime and, much like the republicans, held the Empire responsible for France’s problems. In early 1871, Alfred de la Guérônnière published a pamphlet

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95 In the years following the defeat, the monarchists (especially Orleanists and moderate Legitimists) saw the Bonapartists as potential allies in a larger campaign to overthrow the republic. To some degree, the monarchists’ hope for an alliance bore fruit: in 1873, the Bonapartists worked with the monarchists to help unseat Thiers. But the Bonapartists refused to be assimilated into a larger conservative alliance, and sometimes allied with the Republicans against the monarchists when they felt it suited their interests. See Passmore, The Right in France, 37.

96 This attempt to restore the monarchy had been troubled since the beginning. The Legitimists did not command enough of a presence in the Assembly to install the Comte de Chambord without the support of the Orleanists. And while the Orleanists were willing to consider such an arrangement because the Comte de Chambord was elderly and childless – and would therefore pass the throne to the Orleaniste Comte de Paris when he died – they wanted reassurances that that the Comte de Chambord would rule constitutionally, which he largely refused to give. On 5 July 1871, the Comte de Chambord insisted that he would only rule beneath a white flag and refused to make any promises on the constitutional front. In 1873, it seemed possible that an agreement could be reached, but when he once again refused to use the republican tricolor flag or make constitutional assurances, their hopes of replacing the republic with a monarchy were derailed. A number of Orleanists were also always uncertain about the wisdom of a Legitimist restoration. See Baquiast, La Troisième République, 19; Grévy, La République des opportunistes, 24.

97 Passmore, The Right in France, 18.
that condemned the Empire in terms that would have been familiar to many republicans. He
argued that Napoleon III was a “degenerate Caesar” who “illuminated chimeric mirages for the
crowds. But the reality [of his rule] was only a reaping of crimes, revenge, proscriptions, and
spoliation followed by a final ruin.” In other words, Napoleon III had manipulated ordinary
French people into believing in the greatness of his rule, all while he persecuted his enemies and
personally enriched himself. De la Guéronnière then went on to declare, somewhat mystically,
that this immoral behavior, combined with the fact that the Second Empire “began with a crime,”
doomed Napoleon III’s reign to end in disaster. In other words, France’s defeat in the war was
essentially a punishment for Napoleon III’s evil actions. De la Guéronnière’s language was
more religiously charged than that of his republican counterparts – he compared Napoleon III to
Satan and described his regime as an “abomination” – but his vision of the Emperor as a corrupt
puppet master who led France into disaster had much in common with their judgments. The fact
that he ended his pamphlet with a call to support Adolphe Thiers to ward off the Bonapartist
threat demonstrates the diversity of monarchist responses to the events of 1870-71.

Most monarchist pamphlets, however, did not stress the evils of Napoleon III. They
sought instead to show the limitations of the republic by linking it to the events of 1870-71 and
sometimes to the Empire itself. Some of the most conservative monarchists averred that the
empire and the republic were similar types of government that had been equally discredited by
recent events. The Marquis Renaud d’Allen maintained that it was “Napoleon III and the

98 This pamphlet originally circulated through the Club des Patriotes de Marseille. Members of the club decided that
it should be distributed widely, and published it in several editions. It was also reviewed by journals in Belgium and
99 He went so far as to state that nothing good had come of Napoleon III’s reign. All of his policies – especially his
foreign policies – had ended in disaster. See Ibid., 27.
100 Ibid., 6, 87. Adolphe Thiers was elected “Head of State” in the early elections of 1871. He was an Orleanist
liberal who, over the course of his three-year tenure, came to support the new Republic. However, his conservative
inclinations made him more palatable to many monarchists at first. See Grévy, La République des opportunistes, 26.
republican party that had brought the country to its unfortunate position.” He argued that many of Napoleon III’s most reprehensible decisions – his wars with Italy, his invasion of Mexico, and his refusal to stop Prussian expansion – were made at the behest of the republicans. These decisions, he insisted, led to French defeat. He thus concluded, “The monarchy of St. Louis, of Henry IV and of Louis XIV made us the greatest people on earth, and gave us magnificent conquests; the Republic and the Bonapartists, however, brought us the scaffold, massacres, civil war, ruin, and invasion.” In other words, the monarchy was responsible for France’s once-powerful position in Europe, while the Republic and the Empire had dismantled that position. An anonymous Catholic pamphlet writer took the parallels between Empire and Republic even farther: he held that Napoleon III represented a simple outgrowth of the Revolution because (like the revolutionaries) he supported radical groups and ideas, persecuted the Church, and showed “satanic tendencies.” The Empire’s resulting disorder and immorality, he alleged, led directly to a French defeat that had permanently discredited both Empire and Republic.

Most monarchist pamphlet-writers, however, drew distinctions between empire and republic, and in some cases, they were more critical of the empire than of the republic. Henri de la Broise, for example, described the empire as a fundamentally illegitimate form of government because, unlike both the monarchy and the republic, it did not rest on a “principle.”

Cambier similarly argued that the empire was essentially a “dictatorship… condemned by its

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101 Renaud d'Allen, L'Empire, La République, la Monarchie devant la nation. (Marseille: H. Seren, 1871), 4.
102 He noted, “That is how the republicans, as much as Napoleon, lost France, by approving all of the mistakes he made and by combatting all of the useful measures he wanted to undertake. If Bonaparte had been a great man, everything the radical party might have done would not have made him deviate from his route; but he was an ordinary man.” See D'Allen, L'Empire, La République, la Monarchie devant la nation, 8.
103 D'Allen, L'Empire, La République, la Monarchie devant la nation, 14.
105 Henri de la Broise, République ou Monarchie? (Laval: Mary-Beauchêne, 1871), vi.
origins.” He denounced Napoleon III by claiming, “on the exterior, he unified the enemies of France; on the interior, he favored socialism and divided society. After unifying Italy, his penchant for unifying foreign peoples became a true passion.” He also declared that Napoleon III’s “theory of nationalities” was largely responsible for Prussia’s growing size and strength, thereby suggesting that the empire was directly responsible for the German victory.

If both de la Broise and Cambier dismissed the Empire out of hand, their discussion of the “republic” was more nuanced. Neither maintained that all republics were bad but instead tried to show that the republican system was unsuited for France. De la Broise contended that the republic could be an acceptable form of political organization but claimed that in France it was tied to a violent revolutionary legacy. “The republic in France,” he argued, “is only the production of the Revolution and its most complete expression.” Because he saw the Revolution as a destructive movement that emphasized individualism and undermined authority, de la Broise believed that adopting the republic would unsettle society. Cambier agreed that countries like the United States were suited to republican government. However, he asserted, the republic had no place in France, because the monarchy had brought it centuries of prosperity. As a result, French republicans were malcontents who wanted a government based on “the distrust of law, the abandonment of work, the right to guns and copious drinking, and also the right to rise up periodically…” Like de la Boise, Cambier thus argued that French republicanism was disorderly and led to disasters like the Revolution and the Commune.

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108 Cambier, République, empire ou royauté, 7-9.
109 Republicans also included functionaries who wanted to advance their careers and those who “dreamed of an alliance of peoples founded in a universal republic.” The latter were “Bismarck’s auxiliaries.” See Ibid., 10, 147.
Many authors echoed de la Broise’s and Cambier’s critiques of French republicanism’s radicalism and violence. But some described republicanism’s position in France differently, arguing that the key issue lay in the fact that republican values were not compatible with those of the French nation. One anonymous writer claimed, “Each people… has its character, as each individual has his temperament… Temperament modifies with age, but it never changes totally. What is the character of France? Its habits, one could even say its needs are the result of a monarchical constitution that has lasted for more than one thousand years.” He maintained that France’s inability to fend off its invaders and its weakening position in Europe resulted from its adoption of an ill-suited republican government that would produce similar disasters in the future if France did not accept the monarchy. A. Labat agreed, declaring that the French nation could not morally support a republican form of government. He declared, “The republicans… proclaim themselves socialists or regenerators of society, but every time they touch the social edifice, they shake its foundations.” Instead of remaking the French nation, republicans had thus only proven able to unsettle the one they encountered. Labat insisted that France needed a monarchy to avert “social destruction” and to avoid the fate that had befallen Poland.

If monarchists thus argued that both the empire and the republic had led France into disaster, some also claimed that the monarchy could incorporate republican principles. Most of these pamphlet-writers were Legitimists rather than Orleanists, but they painted Legitimism as a

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113 The sense that the republic undermined social, familial, and religious order appeared across a number of pamphlets. See, for example, Broise, *République ou Monarchie*, 38.
moderate political movement.\textsuperscript{114} Labat insisted, for example, that while both the empire and the republic had weakened France and left it without European allies, a monarchy could preserve France’s social fabric by uniting the country with its “glorious past, [and] bringing back its traditions while keeping all of the conquests of its first revolution.”\textsuperscript{115} This new monarchy, he explained, would be a constitutional regime that would enable France to move forward by uniting its diverse political traditions. At the same time, such a monarchy would strengthen France’s position vis-à-vis the rest of Europe by “creating alliances.”\textsuperscript{116} Henri de la Boise had similarly condemned the republic and maintained that the monarchy alone would regenerate France because it could ensure the nation’s stability, restore its internal order and combat certain republican political traditions such as centralization and factionalism. He nevertheless claimed that the monarchy would establish a constitution and work in concert with a National Assembly to rule the country.\textsuperscript{117} Even conservative monarchists recognized by the 1870s that they had to accept some republican ideas. One anonymous supporter of divine-right monarchy, for example, condemned the republic in no uncertain terms - noting, “the republican form of government is so ill-suited to us that the word “republic” is seen as the synonym to disorder in the thought of the multitudes.” Yet this vehemently anti-republican author also conceded that divine right monarchy would necessarily have to incorporate a system of national representation.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{114} Passmore, \textit{The Right in France}, 18.
\textsuperscript{115} He further noted, “French society, so profoundly shaken, would find its foundations once again with confidence and security… The principles of authority, religion, and discipline will retake their rule and create a generation of men in place of a people of comedians.” See Labat, \textit{République et Monarchie}, 9, 11.
\textsuperscript{116} Labat, \textit{République et Monarchie}, 8.
\textsuperscript{117} He argued that France suffered primarily from four problems: 1) the loss of moral ideas and virtues like devotion, sacrifice, and obedience, which resulted from the weakening of religious principles 2) the growing distrust of authority 3) individualism and egoism and 4) materialism. See Broise, \textit{République ou Monarchie}, 6, 63, 97, 104.
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Monarchie et République} (Lyon and Paris: Félix Girard, 1871), 11, 8.
Monarchists’ pamphlets thus echoed some republican critiques of the Second Empire: most held the Empire responsible for the French defeat – if not for the Commune. Several even went so far as to condemn the Empire as a form of political organization in terms that would have been familiar to many republicans. There were nevertheless important differences between the two groups. In general, monarchists focused less on the failings of the Empire or even on the war itself: they tended to condemn Napoleon III and his military strategies out of hand before devoting most of their attention to the republic and its relationship to the Commune. They thus consistently linked the republic to radical movements and social disorder. Some even condemned republicans as “enemies of France” and the republic as “diabolical.”

But for the most part, the monarchists took a conciliatory tone towards at least some republican ideas as they attempted to attract undecided Orleanist monarchists. They described the Legitimist candidate to the throne as a constitutionally-minded monarch who would respect some republican traditions while setting the most destructive ones to rest – even as they continued to describe his claim to the throne as based on divine right. This strategy would break down in 1873 when the Comte de Chambord refused to rule constitutionally. Even in 1871, these pamphlets reflected sharp disagreements. Some moderates such as Alfred de la Guéronnière advocated for a temporary acceptance of the republic, while others discounted the idea of popular suffrage completely. These divisions would crystallize among the increasingly marginalized monarchists over the rest of the decade.

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119 See, for example, Hamon, Les ennemis du peuple ou les périls de la France, 72.

120 This disagreement over whether a restored monarchy would be “constitutional” or not was one of the major divisions between right-leaning Legitimists, moderate Legitimists, and Orleanists. Ultimately, these divisions would ultimately keep the right from unifying against the republic. See Grubb, The Politics of Pessimism, 66.

121 Some scholars have maintained that the divergences between monarchists’ beliefs about popular suffrage made fusion between them impossible from the beginning. See Baquiast, La Troisième République, 19.
Although republicans and monarchists alike connected the empire to the disastrous events of 1870-71, both groups were most interested in defending their forms of political organization against each other. The republicans thus constructed a negative vision of the Second Empire in order to highlight its connections to other monarchical systems and thereby demonstrate the virtues of the new republic. Monarchists, on the other hand, condemned both the empire and republic in order to promote a monarchical restoration. Both groups nevertheless rejected the official understandings of “Empire” promulgated by Napoleon III throughout his reign. Napoleon III had described the empire as the moderate way between republic and monarchy. He had maintained that it balanced liberty with order and security, based its legitimacy on the support of the people, and ensured the development of both peace and prosperity. The republican and monarchist pamphlets dismissed these claims by highlighting the empire’s incompetence and corruption. At the same time, critics on both left and right co-opted his contention that the empire represented a “middle” political way, arguing that their own conceptions of the republic or the monarchy were actually more moderate. This rhetoric would become stronger in the middle of the decade, when the Bonapartists began to be perceived as a new threat.

III. Napoleon IV and the Declaration of Chislehurst

For the most part, the Bonapartists did not participate in the first wave of this pamphlet war over the memory of 1870-71 and its relationship to the Empire and the Commune.¹²² This

¹²² There were some exceptions. One writer argued that socialism and imperialism were related ideologies that offered France a path out of its current crisis. The Second Empire, he argued, was the “expression of the principles of 1789… [it] gave France political equality beneath a strong government capable of maintaining order. Socialism… is a purely economic system: it proposes to do economically what the first Empire did politically: it proposes to level civil interests.” See L’Empire et le socialisme (Paris: Amyot, 1872), 8. A second pamphlet positively linking the Empire to socialism was published at approximately the same time. It encouraged radicals to turn their hopes away from republicans and back towards the Bonapartists. See Albert Richard and Gaspard Blanc, L’Empire et la France nouvelle: appel du peuple et de la jeunesse à la conscience française (Brussels: Victor Devaux, 1872).
was in part because the party was scattered. Napoleon III was in exile and increasingly ill: there was also no organized imperialist organization within France itself.¹²³ The situation shifted in the mid-1870s. In 1873, Napoleon III died after a failed surgery to remove the kidney stones that had been plaguing him for years.¹²⁴ And in March of 1874, the Prince Napoleon reached the age of majority in a highly publicized ceremony in Chislehurst, England.¹²⁵ The Bonapartists thus were able to replace a candidate tainted by the events of the war with a charismatic young man. In the wake of this event, a number of Bonapartists mobilized to reclaim the empire and restore its reputation. Eugène Rouher founded the group *L’Appel au peuple* that worked (rather successfully) to elect Bonapartist candidates to the National Assembly – a surge made possible in part by the growing sense that a monarchical restoration was unlikely. He and his followers began to advocate within the Chamber for a national plebiscite that would allow the French people to choose between the republic, the monarchy, and the empire.¹²⁶ At the same time, a number of new imperialist publications tried to popularize Bonapartist ideas and promote the Bonapartist cause. By 1877, there were 104 Bonapartist deputies in the National Assembly.¹²⁷

In response to these developments, monarchists and especially republicans mobilized against what they saw as the rising threat of a Bonapartist restoration.¹²⁸ Ultimately, their concerns proved unfounded – Napoleon IV had trouble unifying his supporters, and he was never

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¹²⁵ It was attended by a number of ministers who had worked for the regime under Napoleon III, including Rouher, Pinard, and Gressier. See Charles Blachier, *Le Prince impérial* (Paris: Guérard, 1877), 67.


¹²⁸ While the Orleanists in particular were willing to work with the Bonapartists in 1873 to unseat Adolphe Thiers, the relationship between the two groups cooled quickly after the Bonapartists refused to support the monarchists' attempt to place the Comte de Chambord on the French throne. See Passmore, *The Right in France*, 37.
able to mobilize his popularity before dying fighting the Zulu in Africa in 1879.\textsuperscript{129} But between 1874 and 1876, a second wave of political writing about the Franco-Prussian War, the Commune, the empire, and the republic emerged.\textsuperscript{130} This second wave of debate took a somewhat different form than the first: it was dominated by republican and Bonapartist writers, both of whom attempted to construct a vision of French politics largely in opposition to one another. And perhaps most importantly, it was this second wave of conflicts over the relationship between the empire, the war, and the republic that would solidify republican understandings of “empire” as a form of government. This vision of empire would ultimately also help shape how the republicans discussed the new republic’s relationship to France’s overseas colonies.

Bonapartist pamphleteers writing in the mid-1870s sought above all to reframe the conversation about the Empire, its virtues, and its relationship to the war. They wanted to combat republican and monarchist claims about imperial culpability and promote a more positive vision of empire. They employed a number of different strategies to accomplish this task. Some challenged the contention that the Empire was responsible for France’s entry into the war and for its ultimate defeat. Paul de Cassagnac, one of the most influential Bonapartist deputies in the Third Republic, argued that Napoleon III did not desire to go to war with Prussia at all, but was forced into it by republican deputies. France proved unable to withstand the force of the Prussian army, so after putting up a valiant fight, Napoleon III sacrificed himself by surrendering in order

\textsuperscript{129} The prince couldn’t even unify his own family. Napoleon III’s cousin, Jerome Bonaparte – who had served as the minister of Algeria in the 1860s – ran for the position of Corsica’s deputy to the National Assembly against Eugene Rouher. He successfully defeated Rouher, and subsequently often sided with the moderate republicans – and not the other Bonapartists – in the National Assembly. See Price, \textit{The French Second Empire}, 465.

\textsuperscript{130} The most important of these journals was L’\textit{Ordre}, which was managed by Eugène Rouher, one of Napoleon III’s key advisors during the “authoritarian” empire, along with \textit{Le Pays} (later called \textit{L’Autorité}), which was edited by Paul de Cassagnac, another key supporter. Other journals included l’\textit{Estafette, le Petit Caporal, La Nation, Le Droit du peuple,} and \textit{La Patrie}. See Lachnitt, \textit{Le Prince imperial}, 244.
to save his soldiers’ lives.\textsuperscript{131} Cassagnac thus described the Prussian army as a force of nature – an insurmountable threat that the French could not turn back - and depicted Napoleon III as a valiant man with few choices. At the same time, he implied that the republicans were ultimately responsible for the defeat, because they had started a war that the country was unable to win.

Alfred d’Alembert took the argument about the republicans’ responsibility for French defeat a step further. Unlike Cassagnac, he did not claim that Napoleon III was opposed to the war: instead, he maintained that while the Emperor did not seek war with Prussia, he saw that the conflict was unavoidable.\textsuperscript{132} When Napoleon III sought to prepare the country for a confrontation by building a large army and putting away reserves, however, the republican-dominated Chamber of Deputies refused to allocate funds for such an enterprise.\textsuperscript{133} As a result, France was unprepared when the conflict erupted. Radicals in Paris took advantage of Napoleon III’s defeat – which they themselves were largely responsible for precipitating – to stage a revolution. D’Alembert argued that the revolution’s success reflected Parisian opinions rather than the views of most French people, who continued to support the Empire.\textsuperscript{134} He thus blamed the outcome of the war on decisions made by the republicans and portrayed the republicans as radicals who imposed their will on the French people from above and lacked popular legitimacy.\textsuperscript{135} He asserted that the very idea that Napoleon III had “betrayed” France or that he was personally

\textsuperscript{131} Paul de Cassagnac, \textit{Histoire populaire abrégée de Napoléon III} (Paris: Lauchaud et Burdin, 1874), 70, 75.

\textsuperscript{132} Albert Duruy stated similarly that everyone wanted the war, and that Prussia would have defeated France under any government. See Albert Duruy, \textit{Comment les empires reviennent} (Paris: E Lachaud., 1875), 64, 82.

\textsuperscript{133} Alfred d’Alembert, \textit{Quatrième Dynastie: Le Bonapartisme - Son Passé, Son Avenir} (Paris: E. Lachaud, 1873), 69. The claim that the republicans were responsible for defeat because they had refused to pass Napoleon III’s military reforms spread widely. See also F. Derecq, \textit{Les légions napoléoniennes} (Paris: chez tous les librairies, 1874), 13.

\textsuperscript{134} D’Alembert, \textit{Quatrième Dynastie}, 72, 82.

\textsuperscript{135} Cassagnac similarly delegitimized the September 4 revolution: he described it as a crime “meditated and prepared in advance by incorrigible wrongdoers who directed demagogic conspiracies against the Empire: Sedan was the occasion, and not the cause.” See Cassagnac, \textit{Histoire de la Troisième République}, 1.
responsible for defeat was little more than republican propaganda.\footnote{D’Alembert, \textit{Quatrième Dynastie}, 79.} Although D’Alembert’s long exposition on republican politics during the last years of the Second Empire was somewhat unusual, a number of other authors echoed his and Cassagnac’s contention that it was the republic, and not the empire, that was most responsible for French defeat.\footnote{See A. Chatel, \textit{Électeurs aux urnes! Appel au peuple} (Paris: Typographie Tolmer et Isidor Joseph, 1876), 55; Fernand Giraudreau, \textit{Vingt ans de la despotisme et quatre ans de liberté}, 3 èd (Paris: Lauchaud et Burdin, 1874), 124.}

Most Bonapartist writers, however, chose not to dwell on the legacy of the war. Even writers like Cassagnac and d’Alembert tended to reframe the narrative of the 1871 defeat by placing it within a longer narrative of a glorious imperial history dating back to the Napoleonic conquests of the eighteenth century. Many writers alternatively tried to restore the Second Empire’s reputation by emphasizing the non-military aspects of Napoleon III’s record. In an 1873 pamphlet, for example, Constant Perrin argued that the prevailing French view of Napoleon III was inaccurate because it focused on his “unhappy struggle” but failed to remember the great things he had brought to France, including “universal suffrage, the Grand Exposition, the major thoroughfares constructed in cities, the axe brought against pauperism, the respect and glory acquired by the flag.”\footnote{Constant Perrin, \textit{Pourquoi Napoléon IV} (Paris: E. Dentu, 1873), 9.} This amnesia, he maintained, was the result of “ingratitude,” and it was dangerous to France’s future because it endangered the country’s best hope for recovery - the young Prince Napoleon.\footnote{If restored to power, he would continue his father’s work by solving the “great social problems of our time” while encouraging the nation’s commerce and manufacturing. See Perrin, \textit{Pourquoi Napoléon IV}, 32.} If Perrin emphasized Napoleon III’s political reforms and cultural achievements, the Comte de la Chapelle highlighted his economic record by pointing to the prosperity that the Emperor had brought to ordinary people. He asserted that this record showed
that Bonapartists alone could represent the country’s economic interests. Both writers thus reminded their readers of what they saw as Napoleon III’s greatest accomplishments and argued that the Empire was the form of political organization best suited to contemporary France.

Many of these Bonapartist pamphlets did not focus on Napoleon III’s personal record, but instead defined “Empire” abstractly as a system of government that could solve France’s present-day problems. Albert Duruy, for example, stated that France was not suited to either monarchy or republic because its kings were prone to “abuses” and its republics to “excesses.” The Empire, he declared, curbed both problems because it “borrowed the monarchy’s strength of resistance and the republic’s strength of initiative… [and was] simultaneously authoritarian and democratic.” It thus provided a middle way between two extremes that had long torn the country in opposite directions. Duruy argued that the Empire was poised to take this middle way in industry as well as politics because it alone could navigate between the needs of industrialists and workers. The republic, conversely, failed to meet the needs of either economic group because the forces of “anarchy” and “oppression” determined its policies. This state of affairs was not destined to last long, Duruy predicted, because the people were turning back to the Empire and to Napoleon IV, its obvious torchbearer. Duruy’s defense of empire thus avoided referring to Napoleon III and instead attempted to show how Bonapartism could solve contemporary problems. But his idea of empire as the “middle way” was not new: it borrowed

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140 He warned that the monarchists wanted to strip the people of their suffrage, and claimed that the Empire had emancipated them. See Comte de la Chapelle, Les représentants de l’appel au peuple (Paris: Amyot, 1875), 8, 11.

141 Here, he was also invoking the idea of “national temperament” that many monarchists had also described.

142 Duruy, Comment les empires reviennent, 26.

143 It was unable to contain the different political and social movements that comprised French society and had therefore nearly lost control to its most radical strand in the Paris Commune. When the Republicans responded to that event by attempting to crush all political dissent, they created a climate of fear that undermined France’s economy and social fabric. See Duruy, Comment les empires reviennent, 29, 52, 53.

144 Duruy, Comment les empires reviennent, 106.
heavily from Napoleon III’s attempts to give theoretical shape to the imperial system early in his reign. And in fact, Napoleon III’s vision of empire as the “middle way” appeared in many Bonapartist pamphlets: much as he had in the 1850s, they argued that the empire promised both popular sovereignty and political order in state institutions, as well as economic prosperity for workers, farmers, artisans, and the bourgeoisie alike.¹⁴⁵ For the most part, Bonapartists thus defended older ideas about empire instead of offering new ones.

Many of these pamphlets grounded their portrayals of empire in the figure of Napoleon IV, whom they described as the embodiment of the virtues of the Bonapartist tradition. They provided very little information about his individual character or actions, and instead used him as a symbol or cipher for imperial values.¹⁴⁶ They assured their readers that he was a thoughtful, mature, highly masculine young man who was wise beyond his years, thus combatting the notion that he might be too young to serve as head of state.¹⁴⁷ They also sought to locate him firmly in the Bonapartist tradition. Léonce Dupont explicitly linked him to his great-uncle, noting that he “evoked… the great figure of Napoleon I… The prince imperial has not in any way worn out the prestige that is attached to the founder of his race.”¹⁴⁸ Alexis Doinet took a less genealogical approach, instead emphasizing the prince’s ideological purity by describing him as the “incarnation of the imperial regime,” and promising that he would rule “a government regimented by a Constitution with a democratic base… controlled by an elective Assembly, and


¹⁴⁶ See, for example, Cassagnac, Histoire populaire abrégée de Napoléon III, 76.

¹⁴⁷ They also emphasized his education, arguing that he was prepared to reign. See Blachier, Le Prince impérial, 72.

contained by a second Assembly.” Doinet thus promised that the young heir would continue the Napoleonic tradition of promoting national suffrage, while simultaneously upholding order through authoritarian measures. The pamphlets’ rhetorical strategy of tying the prince explicitly to his forebears and their traditions contributed to the broader Bonapartist strategy of reinvigorating the model of Empire that Napoleon III had promoted.

Bonapartist pamphlets were not solely defensive, however. If some sought to discredit the republic by linking it to defeat, others went farther and argued that the republic was not a legitimate government. Writers like Fernand Giraudeau contended that the republicans’ claim to represent the people was disingenuous, because they refused to organize a referendum on France’s political organization. Until the republicans allowed the people to decide whether they wanted a monarchy, republic, or empire, he declared, they could not claim that the republic was based on universal suffrage. Adolphe Caillé compared the republicans’ unwillingness to organize such a vote to Napoleon III’s decision to allow the people to ratify the Empire by plebiscite. Gustave Cuneo d’Orant even insisted, “Of all of the regimes that have been tried in France, the Empire has always been founded by the people. Only the Emperor has always recognized the sovereignty of the people and the unique source of all legitimacy.” The Republic, he argued, had always been imposed on the people by a minority.

149 Doinet, Une mission à Chislehurst, 15, 6.

150 Giraudeau, Vingt ans de la despotisme, 135. See also Alexis Doinet, Une mission à Chislehurst (Bordeaux: Imprimerie Bordelaise, 1873), 11; Duruy, Comment les empires reviennent, 98; La declaration de Chislehurst et ses consequences logiques (Versailles: Imprimerie G. Beaugrand et Dax, 1874), 4.

151 This attempt to equate universal suffrage with imperialism ran through many Bonapartist pamphlets. See Ad. Caillé, Impérialistes et royalists (Saint-Maixent: Imprimerie de La Sèvre, 1873), 9.

152 D’Orant, Le peuple et l’empereur, 6.

153 Ibid., 63.
republicans would not agree to organize a plebiscite simply revealed that they knew they did not have the will of the people behind them.\footnote{154}

In the mid-1870s, most Bonapartists thus sought to restore the vision of Empire that Napoleon III had promulgated early in his reign – at least in terms of his internal politics. They portrayed the Bonapartist Empire as a regime that expressed the will of the people, combined “liberty” with “order,” and kept anarchy at bay. They also emphasized the economic prosperity that France had experienced under the Second Empire, maintaining that the Empire embraced the tenets of economic liberalism without ignoring workers and the poor. They connected this vision of a restored Empire to the young prince Napoleon, who would use his youth to regenerate the nation.\footnote{155} Rhetorically, the pamphlets thus primarily served a defensive purpose – even as they criticized the republican state: they did not put forth a new vision of empire, but tried to restore its reputation in the face of republican and monarchist attacks.

Like both the republicans and monarchists, however, the Bonapartists struggled to sustain a united front. Writers such as the Comte de la Chapelle and Gustave Cuneo d’Orant portrayed the Empire as a fundamentally democratic regime, based on popular suffrage.\footnote{156} Others such as Alexis Doinet and the Comte H. de Charency instead portrayed it as a regime that emphasized order and security.\footnote{157} Still others - A. Bradier and Charles Blachier, for example - argued that the Empire would support economic growth by adopting the economically liberal policies of free trade.

\footnote{154} Many compared Napoleon IV favorably to the republicans in this regard; they emphasized his democratic sensibilities, and promised he would listen to the people. One anonymous pamphleteer described him as the “champion of national will.” See \textit{La declaration de Chislehurst et ses consequences logiques}, 48.

\footnote{155} Charles Blachier event went so far as to compare him to Christ, explaining, “Like the child from the Bible, he grew in strength and wisdom.” See Blachier, \textit{Le Prince impérial}, 25.


trade and colonial reform. Their claims were at odds with A. Chatel and Paul de Cassagnac’s, who described the Empire as an economic regime that embarked on great public works to add to ordinary people’s prosperity. These differences represented the fundamental tensions that emerged from the divergent positions that Napoleon III himself had embraced during his regime. In the 1850s and early 1860s, he had ruled as an authoritarian leader, but by the late 1860s, he had transformed the Second Empire into a kind of constitutional monarchy. He also abandoned much of his earlier economic protectionism as he turned towards free trade. In other words, even as Bonapartists defended Napoleon III’s Empire against attacks, they did not necessarily agree on which aspects of his regime to endorse.

New Critiques of Bonapartism: Monarchists and Republicans

This new wave of Bonapartist defense of the Empire set off a second conversation about the war and its connections to contemporary French politics among republicans and monarchists. The monarchist pamphlets published in the wake of Napoleon III’s death and Napoleon IV’s coming-of-age differed from earlier monarchist writings because they treated the Bonapartists as a direct threat, even when they contended that imperialism’s apparent rise in popularity was only a “mirage.” They also concentrated less on the connections between the Empire and the war.

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159 Chatel, *Électeurs aux urnes*, 54.
160 The first decade of Napoleon III’s reign was marked by increased economic prosperity, successful European wars and centralized, authoritarian control. But he then switched courses. On the one hand, he passed a series of measures to “liberalize” the empire. He relaxed censorship, allowed the debates of the *Sénatus-Consulte* to be published, and fostered the creation of political parties to some degree. At the same time, Napoleon III also decided that he would extend the borders of the French Empire – not in complicated Europe, but overseas. See Sylvie Aprile, *La deuxième république et le Second Empire* (Paris: Pygmalion, 2000), 289-291; Price, *The French Second Empire*, 120.
162 *La Majorité du prince imperial et l’appel au peuple, par un conservateur* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1874), 5. Despite this claim, conservative journals like *Le Figaro* show that Orleanists, at least, were concerned about the effects of Bonapartist propaganda, and tracked its movement across the countryside. Even if they dismissed Bonapartist efforts
Instead, they focused on the possible reasons behind this surge in Bonapartist popularity and then worked to disabuse their readers of any remaining affection they might have for the Empire.

Most monarchist writers – like some of their republican counterparts writing in 1871-72 - attributed the new popularity of Bonapartism to the enduring power of what they called the Napoleonic myth. They did not agree, however, on either the myth’s content or the reasons it remained so powerful. One anonymous writer simply stated that Bonapartist prestige persisted because the French remembered Napoleon I’s great victories and little else about either him or his nephew.\textsuperscript{163} Another anonymous commentator insisted that the Bonapartist myth consisted really of two myths: the myth of military grandeur, which was drawn from the first empire, and the myth of economic prosperity, which was drawn from the second. Both of these myths, he argued, were actually untrue: the First Empire led to military defeats, not victory, and the relative prosperity that characterized Napoleon III’s years was a legacy of policy decisions undertaken by earlier monarchical governments.\textsuperscript{164} Despite their inaccuracy, he warned, these myths remained dangerous because they appealed to the French “imagination” and “egoism.”\textsuperscript{165}

If some monarchists found the persistence of the Napoleonic myth dangerous, for the most part they did not focus on criticizing either Napoleon I or Napoleon III.\textsuperscript{166} In fact, some even went so far as to defend Napoleon III’s personal character (if not his political institutions)

\begin{footnotes}
\item[163] Les doctrines et les faits de l'Empire proposés à la méditation des catholiques bonapartistes (Agen: Imprimerie Demeaux, 1876), 35.
\item[164] La Majorité du prince imperial et l'appel au peuple, 28.
\item[165] Le parti Bonapartiste et ses hommes par un conservateur (Paris: Librairie André Sagnier, 1875), 7.
\item[166] There were some exceptions to this: one writer sought to warn Catholics away from imperialism and convince them to turn to Legitimism by depicting Bonapartism as an atheistic and immoral political creed. See Les doctrines et les faits de l'Empire proposés à la méditation des catholiques bonapartistes (Agen: Imprimerie Demeaux, 1876).
\end{footnotes}
in the face of republican attacks.\textsuperscript{167} Instead, they criticized the contemporary Bonapartist party and claimed that it could not effectively rule France – a tactic that the monarchists had also used against the republicans in the early 1870s. One anonymous writer thus highlighted the youth and inexperience of Napoleon IV to explain why he was not prepared to rule well or responsibly.\textsuperscript{168} Another anonymous writer agreed, noting that the prince imperial “seemed even younger than he was.” He maintained that Napoleon IV’s youth was problematic in light of the composition of the Bonapartist party. Most of the party’s key leaders and strategists, he argued – especially Eugène Rouher and Paul de Cassagnac – were corrupt. In fact, these leaders were responsible for the worst decisions and policies undertaken in Napoleon III’s regime. Because these men would dominate the inexperienced Napoleon IV if he took office, the writer declared that a Bonapartist restoration would be disastrous. He concluded by warning Legitimists and Orleanists alike to rally against Bonapartist political propaganda in order to prevent inevitable disaster.\textsuperscript{169}

Despite the warnings in their longer pamphlets, the monarchist response to the Bonapartists’ rise was relatively muted in the popular press. Although some journalists identified the imperialist surge as dangerous and warned their readers that a Bonapartist restoration would have negative consequences for France, most did not directly refute Bonapartist political or historical arguments.\textsuperscript{170} Republican writers, on the other hand, responded more vociferously in

\textsuperscript{167} One anonymous pamphleteer argued, “…the Emperor… was always worth more than his entourage.” See Le parti Bonapartiste et ses hommes, 40.

\textsuperscript{168} He exclaimed, “A prince barely out of childhood! A family that is not and will never be entirely French.” See Napoléon IV et Henri V (Paris: chez tous les librairies, 1873), 28.

\textsuperscript{169} Le parti Bonapartiste et ses hommes, 13, 44.

\textsuperscript{170} Liberals and Orleanists did take steps to solidify a conservative republic in response to what they perceived as the Bonapartist threat. In the wake of the prince imperial’s coming of age ceremony, the Journal des débats began to argue that the country needed to establish a solid government. But for the most part, they directed their efforts towards campaigning for a constitution instead of confronting Bonapartists in the press. See Francis Charmes, “Paris: mardi 17 mars,” Journal des débats (18 March 1874), 1; Grubb, The politics of pessimism, 198.
both the press and political pamphlets to the reemergence of imperial political propaganda. Many republican writers, moreover, engaged with Bonapartist arguments about the recent war and its relationship to both the Second Empire and the new republic. They worked to popularize the negative view of the empire that they had put forth in the early 1870s, to defend the republic as the legitimate government of France, and to discredit the Bonapartist *Appel au peuple* campaign.

Several pamphlets directly addressed the Bonapartist argument that the republicans were responsible for France’s defeat. Yves Guyot in particular condemned Bonapartist attempts to cast blame on the dissident republican deputies who had objected to Napoleon III’s military policy in the last years of his reign. Napoleon III alone could declare war and peace, Guyot argued, and he had placed himself at the army’s head when the war began. The military defeat was thus his responsibility, and Bonapartist claims to the contrary were simple obfuscation.\(^{171}\) Aristide Couteaux offered an expanded version of the same argument: by explaining the interworking of the Second Empire’s government, he tried to show that the republicans who had attempted to defy Napoleon’s military reforms had been powerless in the face of the imperial will. Their opposition had not amounted to any serious changes. As a result, he reasoned, the Emperor alone was responsible for the military decisions and preparation measures undertaken.\(^{172}\)

Some republican writers also responded to Bonapartist claims that the republic had fostered the political radicalism of the Commune. In the early 1870s, republican writers had denied that the republic and the Commune were linked, even suggesting that the Commune had more in common with the Empire than with the new regime. But in the mid-1870s, they went

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farther by claiming that the Second Empire was the primary cause of the Commune’s eruption. Louis Herbette argued that the imperial policy of suppressing political dissent while supporting workers’ organizations (in order to bribe the lower classes into supporting the regime) had given rise to politically radical groups. These groups felt no loyalty to the French nation, moreover, because Napoleon III had convinced them that the middle and upper classes were their enemies. The Emperor’s “divide and conquer” strategy thus led the poor to stage an insurrection when the opportunity arose. Moreover, because contemporary Bonapartists had allied with the remnants of the Communard leadership, a restored imperial government would combine “authoritarian” and “communist” principles. Herbette concluded by noting that conservatives expressed concern that the republicans would unleash “social peril” by upending social hierarchies and destroying the social fabric, but it was the Bonapartists and their communist allies who truly threatened French society. The contention that the Bonapartists harbored socialist and communist groups spread through a number of pamphlets. One anonymous commentator went so far as to accuse the Empire of “founding the Internationale.” These republicans thus tied the Empire to both the military defeat and the social revolution that followed in its wake.

173 The emergence of this critique seems to have stemmed in part from the fact that several vocal Communards with communist sympathies flocked to the Bonapartists after the Republican destruction of the Commune. This visible minority of imperialist sympathizers made it easier to link the Commune with Napoleon III and the Bonapartist regime. See Passmore, The Right in France, 40. For example of socialist or communist pro-Bonapartist writing, see: L’Empire et le socialisme (Paris: Amyot, 1872); Albert Richard and Gaspard Blanc, L’Empire et la France nouvelle: appel du peuple et de la jeunesse (Brussels: Victor Devaux, 1872).

174 Louis Herbette, Bonapartisme et bonapartistes (Paris: André Sagnier, 1875), 62, 56, 64, 66.

175 One anonymous writer even poised the Commune as a Bonapartist plot to reinstate the Empire. See Assez de l’Empire! II: Les Bonapartistes démasqués (Paris: Le Chevelier, 1875), 29. For other examples of republicans who linked the Empire to the Commune and argued that the Bonapartist party aligned with communists, see H. Bellamy, L’Empire: Causerie (Angoulême: Lougel, 1875), 21; Jules Girard, Les charlatans de l’appel au peuple (Paris: Le Chevalier, 1874), 19; Georges Jehan, Les abus du despotisme (Paris: Imprimerie Moderne, 1877), 10; Charles Garnier, Histoire abrégée du dernier Empire (Lyon: Imprimerie Louis Perrin et Martinet, 1875), 15.

176 Le Dernier Empire (Paris: E. Dentu, 1875), 58.
Republican pamphlets and articles published in the mid-1870s did not simply refute Bonapartist arguments; they also reiterated earlier claims about the Empire and its connection to the war that republicans had put forth in 1871-1872. But they often staked out more radical positions in the mid-1870s. Some, for example, made increasingly inflammatory statements about Napoleon III’s character.¹⁷⁷ Charles Garnier, for example, posited that Napoleon III lost the war because he had never truly been loyal to France. He was not really French, Garnier complained, but an Italian who was only interested in his own fortunes.¹⁷⁸ Another pamphlet-writer shaped his history of the war through a highly negative biography of Napoleon III that contended he was illegitimately conceived and skilled mainly in conspiracy and deception. He described the late emperor as a “debauched, cold, indecisive dreamer, inclined to utopias, and of mediocre intelligence… he had neither scruples nor remorse.”¹⁷⁹ While republican pamphlets in the early 1870s had often described the emperor as “incompetent,” “selfish,” and “despotic,” most had not questioned his loyalties or his bloodline quite so openly.

The charge that the Empire had “corrupted” France and thereby made the nation unable to resist the invading German armies also reemerged in the republican pamphlets of the mid-1870s. Like earlier writers, some tied this corruption to Napoleon III. Édouard Talbot maintained that because Napoleon III was a dishonest man, he allowed debauchery and vice to spread throughout France, and thereby led the country towards “decadence.”¹⁸⁰ But most alleged that

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¹⁷⁷ Édouard Talbot, for example, depicted him as a bloodthirsty tyrant who incited civil war and murdered his opponents in his spare time. See Édouard Talbot, Silence homes de décembre. Laissez passer la justice de l’histoire, 3rd ed, (Auch: Imprimerie Charles Lecocq, 1877), 7.

¹⁷⁸ Garnier, Histoire abrégée du dernier empire, 12.


¹⁸⁰ Talbot, Silence homes de décembre, 16. According to the introduction, the writer, Édouard Talbot, was the editor in chief of the newspaper L’Avenir du Gers, and Jean David was the mayor of Auch.
the corruption stemmed from the political structure of the Empire itself. Louis Herbette contended that the Empire, in order to maintain its despotic power, had tried to make the people forget about their lost political rights by guaranteeing them material well being. He averred that the Empire substituted “license for liberty; refined pleasure and luxury for moral progress; … the stomach for the brain” and kept the people subdued by providing them with “bread and circuses.” These policies thus degraded popular morality and the very fabric of French society. Charles Garnier similarly argued that the Empire had promoted the “light press,” “impious novels,” and “shameless theater” to keep the people from discussing serious political issues. As a result of these policies, the people became politically apathetic, and turned towards scandalous and immoral behavior. Most republican authors therefore insisted that corruption went beyond Napoleon III, and implied that all imperial governments (including the one Napoleon IV hoped to install) would ultimately adopt similarly degrading policies.

Like their earlier counterparts, many republican writers also took aim at the Empire’s military reputation. These later pamphlets, however, tried to show that its military problems extended beyond the Franco-Prussian War, and stemmed from the fact that the Empire was a dangerous, bellicose regime. H. Bellamy, for example, maintained that Napoleon III had sought out wars in order to mask problems at home throughout his reign. At first, he met with some

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181 An anonymous pamphlet claimed, “Immorality flowed out of the Tuileries and into all classes of society. Journals and theaters lived only off scandals… The administration was all-powerful. As a result, there was no more initiative.” H. Bellamy similarly argued that the Emperor established a luxurious, frivolous, and dissolute court whose values infiltrated into French culture and led to widespread “effeminacy.” Bellamy, L’Empire: Causerie, 18. Georges Jehan compared Napoleon III’s court to that of Louis XV. See Jehan, Les abus du despotisme, 6.

182 Herbette, Bonapartisme et bonapartistes, 69, 74, 82.

183 He blamed the Empire’s corruption on its systematic promotion of urbanization that had drawn people out of the “honest atmosphere of the countryside.” See Garnier, Histoire Abrégée du Dernier Empire, 5.
success, but his military incompetence meant that this strategy ultimately led to disaster. An anonymous writer similarly reminded his readers that Napoleon III had squandered French resources by engaging in numerous fruitless military conquests before foolishly committing to the fatal fight against Prussia. Both writers thus described the Franco-Prussian War as an example of Napoleon III’s bellicose and incompetent behavior rather than an isolated fluke, and implied that the Second Empire had been committed to endless war.

Some writers insisted that the Empire’s problematic relationship to war went beyond Napoleon III, and should be traced back to the inflated military reputation of Napoleon I. Édouard Talbot, for example, acknowledged that Napoleon I led France to some inspiring military victories, but argued that his Empire, like Napoleon III’s, had collapsed in French defeat. The two rulers were thus not as different as they seemed. Henri Martin took this argument even farther in a pamphlet that showed that both Napoleon I and Napoleon III created ineffective imperial systems that led France into unwinnable wars and always eventually led to territorial losses. Martin then launched a personal attack on both the military policies and the

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184 Bellamy, *L’Empire: causerie*, 7; Édouard Talbot similarly claimed that Napoleon III quarreled with his neighbors in order to bring “glory to his new dynasty,” but his habit of purloining money from his troops made it impossible for him to fund and equip his army at the most important moment. See Talbot, *Silence homes de décembre*, 18.


186 J. Chanaud went so far as to condemn nearly all of Napoleon III’s military decisions. He sought to show that Napoleon III’s policies in Mexico specifically helped contribute to French defeat because the Emperor squandered money, supplies, and lives on a cause that was effectively unsupportable and useless. See J. Chanaud, *Le Premier et le Second Empire. Simples Réflexions d’un Ouvrier* (Paris: Libraire Universelle de Godet Jeune, 1876), 50. See also M. George, *Ce qui coute un empire* (Paris: Imprimerie Moderne, 1877), 4.

187 H. Bellamy, for example, contended that like Napoleon III, Napoleon I could not keep peace with his neighbor and provoked an unwinnable war that led to disastrous foreign invasion. See Bellamy, *L’Empire: causerie*, 4.

188 Talbot, *Silence homes de décembre*, iii.

189 He argued that the Revolutionary armies in the 1790s had made a series of territorial gains, but Napoleon I’s arrogance pushed him past the territory France could hold. As a result, Napoleon I lost everything. Napoleon III similarly embarked on a foolish war with Prussia and lost Alsace-Lorraine. See Henri Martin, *Les Napoléon et les Frontiers de la France* (Paris: Germer-Bailliére, 1877), 8, 11. J. Chanaud made a similar argument, contending, “After depopulating the French nation of close to three million of its children, after all the massacres… all the blood
character of Napoleon I, maintaining that he was an unrealistic “dreamer” who had endangered the French people with his fantasies. André Lefèvre offered a more expansive critique still, portraying Napoleon I as little more than a bloodthirsty warrior who, because he was not French, looked after his own interests instead of the French nation. His rise to power and his rule, Lefèvre argued, had been a disaster for France whose consequences had continued long after his rule – at least partly because people had forgotten how many people he killed.

If Bellamy, Talbot, Martin and Lefèvre took aim at the Napoleonic myth of military greatness, Louis Herbette attacked Bonapartist political philosophy. He attempted to dismantle the Bonapartist claim that the Empire represented a “middle” way between the republic and the monarchy, liberty and order, and liberalism and socialism. The Empire’s position was not in the “middle,” he insisted, but made up of contradictions. The Bonapartists pretended to recognize Principles of religion and of the Revolution, of national sovereignty and imperial legitimism, of discipline and liberty, of hierarchy and equality, of social revolution and conservatism… and hundreds of others that take on innumerable combinations.

Because many of these principles were inherently at odds with each other, he claimed that it was impossible to embrace all of them at the same time. And in fact, he declared, the Empire simply

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uselessly spilled, Napoleon I, to satisfy his unbounded ambition and to reestablish the throne of Caesar, left France diminished… he left us the hatred of many peoples of Europe who the French Republic had won over.” See Chanaud, Le Premier et le Second Empire, 17. An anonymous writer similarly claimed that the legend of Napoleon I’s reign was misleading because “errors, crimes, despotism, and disasters disappeared into the distance beneath the vague radiance of military glory.” See Le Dernier Empire (Paris: E. Dentu, 1875), 5, 8, 20.

190 Martin, Les Napoléon et les Frontiers de la France, 7.
191 He described Napoleon I as “conceived as a Corsican… French in name, as he never was in spirit.” See André Lefèvre, Petit histoire de Napoléon I (Paris: Librairie du Suffrage Universel, 1875), 5.
192 He argued, “The faults, crimes, and disasters were relegated to the shadows… as for those terrible battles that depopulated the world for fifteen years, removing two million French citizens… to only bring back to mutilated France a collection of flags, doesn’t that make Napoleon the rival of Caesar and Charlemagne?” See ibid., 29.
193 He traced this idea to Napoleon III himself, who he identified as the Bonapartist theorist because of his Idées napoléoniennes. See Herbette, Bonapartisme et bonapartistes, 13.
194 Ibid., 55.
made use of whichever principle seemed most expedient in a particular situation. Imperialism was therefore not a moderate political philosophy marked by compromise but a chimeric one that professed to be all things to all people. He accused both the Empire and the Bonapartist party of trying to appeal to different people by making contradictory promises to different communities. The unifying principles that defined imperialism, he concluded, were “force” and “ambition.”

Finally, republican writers sought to discredit contemporary Bonapartist political practices such as Rouher’s *Appel au peuple* campaign. They objected to Bonapartist calls for a general plebiscite on the nation’s political organization, claiming that such a move would not be truly democratic. Eugène Laffineur argued that plebiscites were illegitimate because “national sovereignty is the expression of individual liberty… it is inalienable and imprescriptible. The monarchy rests on the negation of national sovereignty. The Empire… is the abdication of national sovereignty consecrated by a vote.” In other words, the republic alone was based on national sovereignty because it alone allowed for the freedom of the rights-bearing individual. All other forms of political organization were unjust, which meant there was no reason to force the people to choose a type of government through plebiscites. Jules Girard similarly noted the

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195 *Ibid.*, 23. André Lefèvre took this argument a step farther by linking the problems with Bonapartism as a political philosophy to Napoleon I. He insisted, “Napoleon depraved the French spirit. His false conception of the modern world established militarism, functionalism, and official clericalism on our soil… We are imbued and infected with Napoleon.” The policies that Napoleon III had put in place, Lefèvre charged, still informed contemporary French politics and undermined the cause of true liberty. See Lefèvre, *Petit histoire de Napoléon I*, 31.

196 Henri Béraud, for example, argued that the *Appel au peuple* “falsified the principle elements of universal suffrage” because the imperial government only used plebiscites when the people felt threatened. He insisted that the people only voted for the Empire when they had either been forced into or duped into accepting it. Plebiscites thus preyed on the fears of the people, but they could not really express the national will. See Henri Béraud, *Comment les bonapartistes pratiquent l’appel au peuple* (Paris: chez tous les librairies, 1874), 4.


idea of an “appel au peuple” as the Bonapartists practiced it was a contradiction in terms because it used universal suffrage only to ask the people to surrender their political rights.\textsuperscript{199}

There were a number of commonalities between the republican pamphlets written in the early and mid 1870s. Later pamphlets reiterated the early charge that the Empire was responsible for French defeat. Many continued to focus on the corruption of both Napoleon III and the Second Empire, arguing that Napoleon III was essentially a criminal, and as a result, his regime was illegitimate. Their persistent concern with the Empire’s popular military reputation demonstrates that despite all expectation, Napoleon III’s defeat at Sedan had not entirely dismantled the Napoleonic myth of military greatness. The fact that so many of these pamphlets set out to disprove this myth demonstrates that republicans and monarchists believed that the Bonapartists were still able to use it to attract support in the mid-1870s.

It is nevertheless clear that republican writers in the mid-1870s were developing new concerns. Whereas a number of republican writers in the early 1870s linked the Empire to other forms of monarchy, republicans said almost nothing about monarchy later in the decade. Nor did they associate the Empire with any other form of government: they treated it as unique. They also dealt less directly with the events of the Franco-Prussian War – unless they were addressing Bonapartist attempts to reject responsibility for French defeat. At the same time, many went out of their way to tie the Second Empire and the contemporary Bonapartist party to the Commune. Perhaps most notably, most later republican writings focused on demonstrating that the Empire was a defective political system that had always led France into disaster. There were important differences between the writers’ accounts of the empire’s flaws, however. Some emphasized the failures of its leaders, while others condemned its political ideology, its relationship to war, or its

\textsuperscript{199} Girard, \textit{Les charlatans de l’appel au peuple}, 7.
domestic policies. Despite these differences, these writers constructed a more unified description of the Empire than their predecessors in the immediate aftermath of the war. They criticized the political structures and ideology of empire that Napoleon III had tried to establish throughout much of his reign. He had portrayed the Second Empire as the “middle,” moderate way between republic and monarchy, maintaining that it balanced liberty with order, based its legitimacy on the support of the people, and ensured the development of both peace and prosperity. In the last years of his regime, he had also described the Empire as a military power, following in the footsteps of Napoleon I to create an overseas empire. The republican pamphlets turned those claims on their head. They contended that the empire was despotic and disorderly, bellicose and militarily incompetent, and never based on the will of the people. They simultaneously condemned the contemporary efforts of the Bonapartist party as dishonest and misleading.

In addition to condemning the Empire, these writers developed a positive portrayal of the republic. They argued that the republic was actually a moderate regime that would allow all political groups in France political representation. Some republicans also appropriated the language of “order” and “security,” arguing that the republic could best ensure stability because it was based on mass political participation. They promised that republican institutions would root out imperial corruption and decadence and thereby create a new, stronger nation. They also asserted that only the republic was based on national sovereignty because it allowed for true universal suffrage (for men). Republicans thus used the events of the Franco-Prussian War to

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200 See, for example, George, Ce qui coute un empire, 4; Bellamy, L’Empire: causerie, 20.
201 James Lehning has contended that the belief that mass participation in politics would lead to order and stability became central to the republican vision of politics in the early Third Republic. See Lehning, To Be a Citizen, 6.
202 See, for example, Chanaud, Le Premier et le Second Empire, 158; Herbette, Bonapartisme et bonapartistes, 96.
show that the Empire’s claims about itself were fundamentally misplaced, and to demonstrate that it was the republic, not the empire, that embodied France’s positive qualities.

This republican shift away from the specific events of the war and towards a broader condemnation of the Empire was linked to shifting political patterns in France. By 1874 it was clear that the monarchists no longer posed a direct political threat to the republic, and in 1875 the National Assembly approved a series of laws that would act as a constitution – an important step towards stabilizing and legitimizing the regime.\(^{203}\) As a result, republicans were under less pressure to defend their role in the war. It was now the Bonapartist resurgence that posed a direct threat to the republic’s newfound stability.\(^{204}\) Republicans thus had new reasons to argue that the problems with the Second Empire were not just linked to Napoleon III – who was already dead – but were endemic to imperialism itself. They therefore sought to show that all Emperors, including the would-be Napoleon IV, promoted policies that undermined French interests.

If these shifts in representation reflect France’s changing political landscape, they also reveal the ways in which the conceptual categories of “empire” and “republic” progressively hardened against one another in the early 1870s, especially in republican thought. Although many Bonapartists continued to emphasize the connections between the Empire and certain republican ideals, republicans disavowed these connections by defining the empire and the republic in stark, contrasting terms. Republicans did not always agree on the content of these dichotomies, but the broad structural opposition became sharper as the decade progressed and as republicans no longer felt the need to defend the republic against monarchism. The opposition between Empire and republic would create conceptual complications, however, when

\(^{203}\) Grévy, La république des opportunistes, 27.

republicans – and liberals – sought to maintain Napoleon III’s overseas Mediterranean Empire centered in Algeria. How could a liberal republic continue to construct an empire?

IV. Literature and Political Disputes

This argument over the relationship between the empire, the war, and the republic did not transpire solely within the realm of newspapers and political pamphlets. It extended into literature and poetry as well. Literary interpretations of these events often had a less openly political purpose and sometimes conveyed ambiguous messages. Fiction, however, had become a prominent form of cultural expression in late nineteenth-century France. In an age of expanding literacy and relatively inexpensive print, a growing number of people could access novels, which they often preferred to other forms of written work. Popular writers could therefore engage larger audiences than other kinds of writers. Class, geography, gender, and ideology shaped and limited the extent of any individual author’s appeal, but the most popular nevertheless succeeded in producing books that reached across the country and across different readerships as well: their interpretations of the empire and the war therefore reverberated widely.

The literature about the events of 1870-71 nevertheless took a different shape from more explicitly political writing - in part because republicans were responsible for producing the most notable literary work, at least in the decade following the war. It therefore did not usually have the same debate-like, conversational qualities that characterized political pamphlets and

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206 Karine Varley, Under the Shadow of Defeat, 106.

207 The library reform movement had taken off starting in 1860, as private groups such as the Franklin Society began to build libraries in the cities for workers and the lower middle classes. Moreover, an ever-growing network of bookshops also both sold and lent books in more remote towns, making books ever more accessible. Writers also published their stories in the feuilleton section of newspapers, which further increased their circulation. See Lyons, Reading Culture and Writing Practices, 57.
newspapers. While many writers wrote stories about the events of 1870-71 and the Second Empire, several were particularly influential – in part because they already had established literary careers.\footnote{As Claude Digeon has pointed out, a large number of stories emerged in the early 1870s immediately following the war. Many of these stories focused less on the national war and more on the exploits of franc-tireurs – who they presented as glorious resistance fighters who embodied the republican tradition. See Claude Digeon, La crise allemande de la pensée française, 1870-1914 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de la France, 1959) 52, 72.} Victor Hugo (1802-1885), Émile Erckmann (1822-1885), Alexandre Chatrian (1826-1890), Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897), and Émile Zola (1840-1902) were among the most prominent of these writers. Their writing provides insight into popular republican interpretations of the Empire after the Franco-Prussian War and reveals the degree to which visions of the Second Empire spread from republican political writing into the cultural realm.

Victor Hugo, Émile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian (who wrote together under the name Erckmann-Chatrian), Alphonse Daudet and Émile Zola entered the national conversation about the Empire and the Franco-Prussian War from diverse places. All were recognized writers who had achieved some degree of prominence before the outbreak of the war. But whereas Hugo and Erckmann-Chatrian were renowned novelists with established reputations, Daudet and Zola were part of a younger generation that had only begun to attract attention in the Parisian literary world during the 1860s.\footnote{Victor Hugo cemented his reputation as a novelist with the publication of Notre Dame de Paris in 1831 and as a poet by the early 1840s. Erckmann-Chatrian conversely wrote their famous novels about the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars in the early 1860s. See Marieke Stein, Victor Hugo (Paris: Éditions Cavalier Bleu, 2007), 55; Erckmann-Chatrian: romanciers républicains défenseurs des droits de l’homme (Paris: A. Leroy, 2000); Henri Mitterand, Zola, Tome 1: Sous le regard d’Olympia, 1840-1871 (1999), 410; Anne-Simone Dufief, Alphonse Daudet: romancier (Paris: Editions Champion, 1997), 83.} Their literary styles were also dissimilar: Hugo and to some extent Erckmann-Chatrian belonged to the romantic school, whereas Daudet and Zola belonged to the new naturalist movement.\footnote{The naturalist movement was a school of literary writing that usually worked under the assumption that art should refer to “actual” life and experience in order to convey its higher aesthetic truths. See Émile Zola, Le Roman Experimental (1890), 16; Digeon, La crise allemande de la pensée française, 1870-1914, 156.} Romanticism usually emphasized emotive writing that conveyed
ideas. Naturalists, on the other hand, generally strove to represent “reality” through depictions based on eyewitness accounts and newspaper articles.\textsuperscript{211} The tones of the authors’ writings were therefore distinct, as were their approaches towards the events that they were describing.

Even their relationships to republicanism were not identical. Victor Hugo and to some degree Erckmann-Chatrian belonged to the older, revolutionary republican tradition of 1848.\textsuperscript{212} Victor Hugo in particular had established himself as the iconic symbol of republican resistance to Empire in the weeks immediately following Napoleon III’s coup-d’état in 1851.\textsuperscript{213} Zola, on the other hand, shared the positivist, scientific outlook that many Opportunist republicans of the early 1870s embraced – even as he took more radical social and cultural stances than most of republican leaders.\textsuperscript{214} Daudet’s republicanism, on the other hand, was much more conservative than any of the other authors’. His family was legitimist in political persuasion, and in the 1860s, he worked as a secretary for Morny, one of Napoleon III’s secretaries, to support his literary career. He was less than an entirely committed Bonapartist, however, even in the 1860s, as he married into a moderate republican family.\textsuperscript{215} In the wake of the defeat of the Second Empire, Daudet became very critical of the imperial government and began to describe himself in letters

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{211} Daudet lived in Paris during the siege, and implicitly invoked his eyewitness experience in many of his stories. Zola, on the other hand, conducted highly publicized and extensive research. See Anne-Simone Dufief, \textit{Alphonse Daudet: romancier} (Paris: Editions Champion, 1997), 83; Frederick Brown, \textit{Zola: A Life} (1995), 637.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Digeon, \textit{La crise allemande de la pensée française}, 150, 173.
\item \textsuperscript{213} Hugo opposed Napoleon III ever since his election as president of France. After the coup d’état, Hugo was forced to flee the country, where he published a book called \textit{Napoléon le petit} that narrated the history of Napoleon III’s attempt to reestablish the Empire. In it, he portrayed Napoleon III as a scheming tyrant who lacked the talent of his more famous uncle. See Victor Hugo, \textit{Napoléon le petit}. Edited by Jean-Marc Hovasse (Paris: Actes Sud, 2007), 29.
\item \textsuperscript{214} He believed in progress, the power of science and technology, and the universality of democratic principles. He was also, even before the Dreyfus Affair, skeptical of the French army, the Catholic Church, and the influence of both institutions. He was even a semi-committed believer in social justice – he wrote about the abuse of workers, though he had little sympathy for either the Commune or the Socialists. See Julie Moens, \textit{Zola L’Imposteur: Zola et la Commune de Paris}, vol. 1 (Bruxelles: Editions Aden, 2004), 53; Lehning, \textit{To Be a Citizen}, 185.
\item \textsuperscript{215} Anne-Simone Dufief, \textit{Alphonse Daudet: romancier} (Paris: Editions Champion, 1997), 308.
\end{itemize}
to friends and family as a “republican.” However, his anti-Semitic and nationalist sympathies continued to place him firmly in the right wing of the republican party. But despite the differences in the writers’ political positions and literary styles, their portrayals of the Second Empire shared a number of similarities. They also resembled other descriptions of the Empire that were taking shape in more explicitly political republican writing.

In 1872, Victor Hugo published *L’Année Terrible*, a collection of poems that chronicled the events of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune that followed it, trying to capture the French experience of 1870-1871 in its totality. But despite the scope of its ambition, it painted a relatively neat vision of the relationship between empire, defeat, and republic. Hugo declared that Napoleon III was personally responsible for the war’s outcome and implied that it was the inevitable result of his immoral political tactics and unjust policies. He portrayed Napoleon III as a greedy dictator who forced his way into power and spent his entire reign grasping at opportunities to increase his influence and reputation. He held on to his position by driving the populace into the ground and keeping them impoverished and illiterate. Under his rule, the French people lost their sense of identity and historical purpose, which explained why they were unable to effectively unite against their invaders in 1870. Hugo did not believe, however, that the ultimate fault for the events of 1870-71 lay with the people who had been unfortunately deceived by the Emperor. In fact, he argued that Napoleon III had purposefully precipitated the

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218 He in fact implied that the defeat was the necessary outcome of a tyrannical regime that was founded on deception and crime. See Hugo, “Sedan,” in *L’Année terrible* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1872), 19.
221 Hugo, “Janvier,” in *L’Année terrible*, 133.
conflict and ensured its unfortunate outcome as a final expression of his rapacity and desire to prove himself the equal of his uncle.\textsuperscript{222} Lacking his uncle’s tactical skills, Napoleon III launched a war against a country with a better army, which led to a devastating defeat. For Hugo, then, the loss was due primarily Napoleon’s unreasonable ambition.\textsuperscript{223}

In the earliest poems – some of which were written during the war itself - Hugo placed great faith in the ability of the politically ascendant republicans to remake France and help its people reclaim their place as the world’s “guiding nation.”\textsuperscript{224} However, the Commune’s violence shook this faith, especially after calls to refrain from reprisals against the Communards went unheard.\textsuperscript{225} He blamed the Commune on the Empire’s legacy, contending that Napoleon III promoted ignorance, anger, and “darkness” among the people, which in turn led to violence and slaughter.\textsuperscript{226} But at the same time, he also despaired at the division between republican radicals and the republican state. The collection ended on an uplifting note, affirming the hope that as the repressive institutions give way to democratic ones, newfound liberty would unify the people and remind them of their shared devotion to France.\textsuperscript{227} But Hugo also recognized that the Commune continued to haunt the promise of the reconstituted nation.\textsuperscript{228}

\textsuperscript{222} Hugo maintained that the only thing that Napoleon III really had in common with his uncle was that both had staged military coups. See Hugo, “Sedan,” in \textit{L’Année terrible} (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1872), 25.

\textsuperscript{223} Indeed, for Hugo, the French military was largely irrelevant. He argues that France’s military has never been the source of its strength, which lies instead in its republican virtue. The country epitomizes progress, liberty, and the advancement of the human spirit, and it is these qualities that would enable it to “conquer” other nations. Hugo avers that France’s best hope to regain what it has lost lies in its ability to promote republican thought and values on the other side of the Rhine. See Hugo, “Octobre,” in \textit{L’Année terrible}, 50; Hugo, “Juillet,” in \textit{L’Année terrible}, 311.

\textsuperscript{224} Hugo, “Février,” in \textit{L’Année terrible}, 144.

\textsuperscript{225} Hugo, “Avril,” in \textit{L’Année terrible}, 170.

\textsuperscript{226} Hugo, “Mai,” in \textit{L’Année terrible}, 211.

\textsuperscript{227} Hugo, “Février,” in \textit{L’Année terrible}, 137.

\textsuperscript{228} Hugo had a complex relationship with the Commune. He was elected as a Parisian deputy to the National Assembly in February of 1871, and was living in the city when the Commune broke out on March 18\textsuperscript{th}. He left the city that day – “fleeing the revolution he had helped inspire” – ostensibly to settle the estate of his deceased son.
Erckmann-Chatrian’s novel *L’Histoire du Plébiscite*, also published in 1872, offered a similarly critical portrayal of Napoleon III and of his relationship to the war.\(^{229}\) The novelists portrayed the Emperor as a tyrannical, dishonest figure who cared above all for himself and his own prestige. They argued that his key goals consisted of enriching himself and his dynasty, securing his authority over the country, and extending the reach of his power.\(^{230}\) As a result, his government rested on little more than a complex system of bribes and threats.\(^{231}\) They declared that he both procured and sustained his imperial power by catering to corrupt elites and depriving the populace of the information and education that might have enabled them to challenge his authority. He was thus able to trick much of the French populace into supporting his regime, even as he exploited most of the nation.\(^{232}\)

Like Hugo, Erckmann-Chatrian also laid the blame for French defeat primarily at Napoleon III’s feet.\(^{233}\) However, they connected Napoleon III’s personal choices to a broader...
critique of imperial institutions in which the Emperor’s authority depended on the loyalty of career officers and generals. Whenever the Empire was at peace, these officers became unhappy, because they were unable to gain promotions or military honors. To prevent these self-interested officers from deserting the Empire, Erckmann-Chatrian argued, Napoleon III provoked the conflict with Prussia. The war was thus essentially a political ploy necessitated by the Empire’s political structure. But even as the imperial system inevitably exposed the country to unnecessary conflicts, Napoleon III failed to prepare for the confrontation. Despite the fact that he requested funds for new weapons and army maintenance, he used most of those resources to enrich himself. The army was therefore badly under-equipped. The Empire’s corrupt governance system also had a devastating effect on the army command because the imperial army based promotion on connections instead of merit. These problems were exacerbated by the incompetent Emperor’s decision to place himself at the army’s head, effectively ensuring the French defeat. In order to win the conflict, the novelists suggested, France needed an army based on a universal draft instead of an army built to keep the emperor in power. Erckmann-Chatrian thus tied the nation’s humiliating loss both to Napoleon III’s personal choices and to the political and military structures that helped ensure his authority.

234 George averred, “Peace is good for merchants, business-owners, and peasants; but the officers… are in bad humor, they need advancement.” See ibid., 15.

235 Ibid., 137.

236 George noted, “The real cause of our sorrows is the army; that the army does not belong to the nation, but to the Emperor, who gives out ranks, honors, pensions and benefits; that the interest of such an army is always contrary to the interest of the country and the people, because the army needs war to obtain advancement.” See ibid., 228.

237 They held Napoleon III responsible not only for the defeat at Sedan, but also for Bazaine’s surrender at Metz. They implied that Napoleon III instructed Bazaine to surrender after the September 4th revolution. See ibid., 173.

238 The narrator noted, “Ah! If our officers had been as highly trained, and our soldiers as firmly disciplined as the Germans, Alsace and Lorraine would still have been French… If we want to recover what we have lost, everything must be changed…. We must have a large, national army…” See ibid, 128.
Like Hugo, Erckmann-Chatrian implied that the Empire had deleterious effects on the French nation. They accused the Empire of undermining popular morality and social cohesion, averring that the corrupt political system encouraged many to behave selfishly and to put their own interests before those of their country. They particularly criticized the Emperor’s reluctance to introduce mass education, insisting that the citizens who lacked education also lacked the discipline and focus necessary for serious pursuits. Erckmann and Chatrian were more optimistic than Hugo about the republic’s ability to solve these problems, however, in part because their narrative largely ignored the Commune. They claimed that a new political system that privileged merit over political connections could create politicians who would put France’s needs above their own.²³⁹ Mass education would meanwhile end the cycle of revolution and *coup d’états*, secure French patriotism, and improve the army.²⁴⁰ Their vision of France’s future was not entirely, rosy, however. They concluded by warning that a corrupt elite class attached to monarchy and imperialism threatened to overthrow the republic.²⁴¹

Alphonse Daudet’s collection of short stories called the *Contes de lundi*, which were written partially during the war and published in 1873, staked out a more complex position on the relationship between the empire, the defeat, and the new republic. If Hugo and Erckmann-Chatrian both held Napoleon III responsible for what they saw as French decline and defeat, Daudet implied that the Empire’s policies and institutions were to blame. He described France

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²⁴⁰ Desjardins, another sympathetically portrayed republican figure in the text, predicted. “If instruction was given to the people… we would have national armies, good generals, good administrators; we would not have given the right of declaring war and peace to an imbecile, we would have never attacked the Germans, and the Germans, seeing us ready to receive them, would not have attacked us. All of our defeats, divisions, interior agitations, revolutions: the massacres in the streets, the deportations, class hatreds, all of this comes from ignorance; and this abominable ignorance comes from the egotistical people who have ruled us for seventy years. Good sense, justice, patriotism should tell them to instruct the people, but they prefer to ally themselves with the Jesuits…” *see ibid.*, 237.

under the Second Empire as divided and disorderly. The empire’s autocratic political culture led in his view to a deadly combination of radicalization and apathy. At the same time, its attempts to modernize the French countryside precipitated a widespread crisis of faith, which he described in “Les Fées de France.” This “conte fantastique” focused on the trial of a *petroleuse*, who introduced herself as a “fairy of France” and offered this explanation for German victory:

> We have all seen our well-fed, sneering peasants open their huts for the Prussians... [they] no longer believe in sorcery, and also no longer believe in [their] country… If we had been there, none of the Germans who entered France would have returned alive… That is how one makes a national war, a holy war. But in a country that does not believe anymore… such a war is no longer possible.  

“Fairies” clearly symbolized a mystical faith in country, nature, religion, and nation, which the *petroleuse* argued has disappeared. Without this mystical faith, France was unable to unite effectively against Germany, and wage a “national” war; indeed, some disaffected peasants even decided to aid the Germans. The speaker went on to attribute this lack of belief to the scientific textbooks, secularization, industrialization, and urbanization that had begun to infiltrate all parts of French life. These “modernizing” forces, she claimed, fractured traditional understandings of the world, and ruptured old ties, thereby rendering the French populace cynical and divided.

According to Daudet, this crisis of faith, combined with political radicalization, made the populace unwilling to defend France against the Germans. While some indulged in misguided chauvinism, others placed politics before the nation, or abandoned patriotic feeling.  

Daudet indicated that the Parisian lower classes in particular harmed the war effort. Some acted as spies, and smuggled French strategic plans out to the besieging German army, while others undermined

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243 Daudet, “La Mort de Chauvin,” in *Oeuvres complètes illustrées*, vol. 3, 36;
the morale of the soldiers defending the city. In the countryside, peasants opened their doors to German soldiers. The empire’s irresponsible military leadership exacerbated these problems. Daudet’s stories were full of officers who flee the battlefield, abandon their troops, or surrender dishonorably – betraying well-intentioned ordinary soldiers.

Daudet was careful to indicate that the social conflicts that he identified as responsible for the French defeat did not reflect essential problems within the French nation. At the same time, his depiction of the relationship between the Second Empire, the Franco-Prussian War, and the Third Republic was ambivalent. This was partly because his stories implied that the Second Empire damaged French republicanism by disenfranchising republicans and disconnecting them from the nation. In “La Défense de Tarascon,” Daudet painted a satirical picture of republican townspeople in southern France who refused to fight to defend the Empire. Only when the Empire fell did they recognize the conflict as a “national war.” Even then, they lacked commitment: they joined singing societies instead of the military and marched in parades instead of fighting. Accustomed to political inaction, they lost their sense of patriotism and became unwilling to defend their country. Daudet’s stories demonstrated confidence in the French character; he described it as a national refinement reflected even in the French language. This character transcended France’s structural problems, Daudet implied, so the French would recover if they could embrace their own national essence. But his work left unresolved the question of the republicans’ ability to precipitate this return to the traditional nation.

In the 1870s, Émile Zola published no novels that explicitly engaged with the events of the Franco-Prussian War. But he began writing his Rougon-Macquart series as a cycle of novels in which he intended to chronicle the history of Second Empire France through the experiences of one extended family. Although nearly all of these novels examined aspects of the Empire’s institutions and politics, *Son excellence Eugène Rougon* (1876) was one of his most explicitly political efforts. It focused on the political career of Eugène Rougon, a figure loosely based on the Bonapartist leader Eugène Rouher who was responsible for the *appel au peuple* campaign. Zola used Rougon to establish an image of the Second Empire that would culminate in his 1890 novel *Le débâcle*, which explicitly treated the events of 1870-71. Zola’s subject matter did not exactly resemble that of the other writers, but his portrayal of the Empire and his interpretation of its effects on the French nation shared a number of commonalities with their works.

Like Erckmann-Chatrian, Zola portrayed the Empire as a highly corrupt government that primarily depended on a contradictory set of personal connections and bribes. Several prominent men dominated its politics. Each of these men kept a set of followers, who worked to improve their leader’s political leverage, and in return received administrative posts, military promotions, or money. This system was both highly contested and deeply unstable because the administrators and deputies who took part in it were constantly jockeying with one another for favors and positions from the imperial court. The only people who were able to maintain

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249 Many of the main characters were also based on real people. See Henri Mitterand, *Zola: L’homme de Germinal, 1871-1893* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 235.


251 Rougon’s group, for example, included a colonel, two deputies, and a minister. See *ibid.*, 58.

252 When Rougon fell from Napoleon III’s graces, his group of supporters fell with him. See *ibid.*, 429.
positions of influence were those who displayed unwavering loyalty to Napoleon III and never questioned any of his decisions. As a result, most high-ranking officials were little more than incompetent yes-men who spent their days flattering the Emperor.253 In Zola’s view, the imperial administration was therefore staffed by poorly qualified people who were more interested in extending their own power or in increasing their own wealth than they were in adequately performing their duties.254 Nearly all of them placed their own interests before the best interests of France and sometimes before those of the Empire itself.255 The government thus accomplished little more than squandering precious resources and oppressing those who opposed it.

Zola also implied that the Empire’s corruption spread beyond its political system into the culture of French ruling elites. He depicted these elites as highly dissolute, contending that they spent most of their time attending expensive parties, drinking too much alcohol, and sleeping with women to whom they were not married. They lived in a social atmosphere that thrived on perpetually unfolding financial and sexual scandals, which they discussed incessantly at least in part because they could not openly discuss real political or economic questions. Although they made temporary alliances with one another, they lacked any real sense of solidarity, so their alliances quickly broke down.256 They largely ignored the needs of ordinary French people, who they either pressed into submission or coopted into their wider culture of bribery and

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253 Most of these “yes-men” were only loyal in appearance; as soon as they fell from favor, they turned against the Empire. During Rougon’s fall from power, his followers declare themselves to be republicans, Orleanists, and legitimists – whichever form of government they think is most likely to help them get ahead. See ibid., 166.

254 Zola makes it clear that all of Rougon’s followers earn honors and money because of their loyalty to him, and they in fact do very little in their actual positions. See ibid., 369.

255 Even Rougon – who never directly turns against the Empire – places his own interests above those of the Empire when he does not report the coming assassination attempt on Napoleon III. See ibid., 358.

256 Ibid., 130, 405, 126.
This self-centeredness and frivolity, Zola implied, blocked France from material progress during Napoleon III’s reign: only a handful of exceptionally dishonest people benefited from the apparent material prosperity. Zola did not directly address the Franco-Prussian War or the Empire’s connection to it in *Eugène Rougon*, but he made it clear that the Empire broke down the unity of the French nation by promoting a degenerate, self-centered, materialistic set of values that spread through wide swaths of French culture.

Hugo’s, Erckmann-Chatrian’s, Daudet’s, and Zola’s critiques of the Second Empire’s politics and culture were far from identical, and yet those that focused on the events of 1870-71 agreed that the Empire was responsible for the French defeat because it had fundamentally weakened the country and left it unprepared to face the Prussian armies. But they interpreted the nature of French weakness in different ways. Hugo and to some extent Erckmann-Chatrian laid most of the blame at the feet of Napoleon III himself, arguing that the Emperor had promulgated depravity and immorality, oppressed ordinary French people, and undermined the unity of the French nation. Erckmann-Chatrian, however, connected their criticism of Napoleon III to a broader condemnation of the Empire’s key political structures and institutions, which they condemned as incompetent and corrupt. Daudet took an even more structural approach that suggested that that the Second Empire’s modernizing policies, combined with its repressive

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257 One of Rougon’s followers, for example, successfully petitions to have a railroad line moved out of its normal course so it would come directly by his house. See *ibid.*, 390.

258 In the story, those who know how to work the system – like the Charbonnels, who sue to inherit their cousin’s fortune – succeed in becoming wealthy; those without connections inside the government suffer. See *ibid.*, 366.

259 Their interpretations of this loss were not identical either. Hugo emphasized Napoleon III’s incompetence, while both Erckmann-Chatrian and Daudet criticized the army command as frivolous and ineffective. Hugo, on the whole, was relatively uninterested in what caused the defeat, and merely contended that the country should have never gone to war in the first place. See Hugo, “Octobre,” in *L’Année terrible* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1872), 50; Hugo, “Juillet,” in *L’Année terrible*, 311.
politics, were primarily responsible for French decline. Zola, on the other hand, attacked the Empire’s political culture for its selfishness, frivolousness, and decadence.

These fictional representations of the Empire’s negative effects on France inspired different levels of optimism about the post-war republican state and its ability to remake the nation. Daudet’s vision of republican France was comparatively bleak because he believed that the processes of “modernization” that he associated with the Empire were irreversible. If anything, the Third Republic embraced these modernizing processes with more enthusiasm than Napoleon III. Both Hugo and Erckmann-Chatrian, by contrast, expressed faith in the ability of republicanism to remake the nation by uniting and educating the people. They portrayed imperial corruption and republican virtue in diametrical opposition to one another and then maintained that the republic would ultimately rebuild the country. Their optimism about France’s future remained somewhat tempered, however, as they reflected on recent events. Hugo expressed reservations about the republican credentials of the new Versailles government after its treatment of the Communards, and Erckmann-Chatrian worried about the continuing political power of French elites. But unlike Daudet, their doubts focused on the ability of the new government to fulfill the republic’s promise rather than on the broader processes of social modernization.

Some of the differences between these works reflected distinct ideological strains within republican ideology. Daudet’s skepticism about science, modernization and even popular politics resembled the views of conservative “Opportunist” republicans who sought to establish a democratic system that protected elites from the dangers of mass politics.260 His emphasis on placing national unity before politics also coincided with their attempt to reconcile a divided

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260 As James Lehning has made clear, the tension between espousing democracy and fear of the crowd ran deeply through conservative republican thought in the wake of the Commune. See Lehning, To Be a Citizen, 14.
country.\textsuperscript{261} At the same time, Hugo’s and Erckmann-Chatrian’s message of national redemption in the wake of defeat echoed that of radical republican reformers determined to recast the French nation in a new mold.\textsuperscript{262} Even within republican novels and poetry, in other words, the political disagreements that marked other republican writings remained clear.

In spite of their differences, the poets and novelists shared a number of perspectives. All four writers portrayed the Empire as a fundamentally corrupt political system that did not effectively protect the people. They also all believed that the Empire had deleteriously affected the French nation by dividing the people and creating social chaos. Both of these claims rejected the vision of Empire put forth by Napoleon III and reaffirmed by Bonapartists who defended the imperial system throughout the 1870s. The novelists also repeated arguments that appeared in the decade’s more explicitly political republican publications. Perhaps most importantly, these writers all depicted the republic as a political structure diametrically opposed to the Empire. Where the Empire represented despotism, the republic represented democracy; where the Empire embodied corruption, the republic promoted virtue. By arguing that the republic and the empire had nothing in common, they sought to demonstrate that the republic would solve the problems that the Empire created and therefore transform French weakness into new national power.

Despite the divisions among various republican factions, a semi-coherent understanding of the Second Empire took shape during the 1870s in both republican political writing and popular literature, evolving through debates with monarchists and Bonapartists. This “republican vision” defined the new republic as opposite to the previous empire. This definition was of

\textsuperscript{261} Some reviewers praised Daudet’s stories for precisely this quality, arguing that they transcended politics and thus would help reunite the nation. See, for example, Emmanuel des Essarts, “Les Contes du lundi,” Le Bien Public, April 3, 1873; Jules Lemaître, “M. Alphonse Daudet,” Revue Politique et Littéraire (March 1883).

\textsuperscript{262} Even within the National Assembly, Hugo was on the far left. See Grévy, La république des opportunistes, 102.
course inaccurate—the republic borrowed political practices and economic policies from its predecessor. But by the end of the 1870s, the republicans had popularized this diametrical view, defining “empire” as a problematic system of government that contradicted France’s ideal political practices and values. Their success was due partly to the fact that by the end of the decade, they had secured the republic against monarchist and Bonapartist challenges. Even before Napoleon IV’s death in 1879, the Bonapartist threat had begun to fade.

The republican condemnation of empire nevertheless posed problems for republicans who began to rethink and also defend France’s imperial relationship with its overseas colonies in the 1870s. Napoleon III had portrayed the Second Empire’s relationship to its overseas territories as a fundamental part of its imperial identity, especially in Algeria. The Emperor’s attempt to combine “continental” and “overseas” empire into one unified theory of “Empire” had now collapsed and yet the new republic still controlled overseas colonies. Further challenges would therefore emerge for republican politicians and writers who would have to reconcile their republic with an empire that was now expanding in new directions.

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263 The tides swung definitively in the republicans’ favor after President Mac-Mahon’s failed coup d’état. See Taithe, Citizenship and Wars, 172.
CHAPTER 3: ALGERIA, EMPIRE, AND COLONIZATION IN THE WAKE OF 1870-71

In 1877, Alphonse Daudet, the popular French author known for his short stories about Algeria and the Franco-Prussian War, published a novel titled Le Nabab. It chronicled the life and death of a fictional character named Bernard Jansoulet, who was born in poverty in southern France, made a fortune overseas in Tunisia, and returned to France to enter Parisian high society during the height of the Second Empire. The novel used its account of Jansoulet’s life to paint a negative vision of Second Empire politics and society, describing the imperial elite as selfish, superficial, effete, and overly sexualized.¹ Like Zola’s Son Excellence Eugène Rougon, published the year before, Le Nabab indicated that the imperial government itself was largely responsible for France’s spreading social corruption.² Daudet implied that the Second Empire used unethical political practices to organize and consolidate its power: it commanded loyalty by delegating authority to dishonest officials who gained their positions through some combination of bribery, personal connections, and rigged elections.³ The political system thus encouraged

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¹ Daudet centers the book in part on the figure of an Irish doctor, Jenkins, who medicates the upper classes with arsenic to keep them youthful and energetic. Unfortunately, this arsenic also slowly poisons them. The book’s narrator, an honest and semi-impoverished banker, described this elite as “pale with glittering eyes, saturated with arsenic like greedy mice, but insatiable for poison and for life.” They were “depleted, exhausted people, anemics burnt out by an absurd life…” See Alphonse Daudet, Le Nabab: Moeurs parisiennes, 26 Ed. (Paris: C. Charpentier, 1878), 61.

² Like Zola’s Son Excellence Eugène Rougon, many of the novel’s characters were thinly veiled portrayals of prominent government officials. One of the novel’s main characters is the Duke du Mora, based on the powerful Duke du Morny. Daudet described him as “the most brilliant incarnation of the Empire. What one sees from a distance is not a solid or insecure base… but the fine, gilded, carved spire. Mora was what was seen in France and throughout Europe of the Empire. If he fell, the monument would find itself bereft of its elegance…” See ibid., 353.

³ The novel details an election in Corsica in particular, and makes it clear that the position would always go to the candidate who bribed the right people. See ibid., 228.
cronyism and scheming among French elites – values that ultimately came to infiltrate the French upper classes more broadly. In many ways, the novel’s portrayal of the Second Empire thus echoed those that appeared in other republican novels in the years following the Franco-Prussian War. Le Nabab worked to discredit Bonapartist politics by tying the imperial government to a series of social problems that it in turn implied were responsible for France’s recent defeat. But unlike some contemporary republican writers, Daudet linked France’s “decadence” not only to the Second Empire’s internal politics, but also to its relationship with Tunisia and “the Orient.”

Daudet’s novel implied that the Second Empire and Tunisia were connected on several interrelated levels. First, it indicated that many members of the imperial government were financially and politically dependent upon “Oriental” rulers like the bey of Tunis. Moreover, it suggested that French elites obsessively flocked towards Ottoman officials and “Orientalized” figures like Jansoulet. For Daudet, this obsession was a problem: because he saw North Africans were effete and immoral, he believed that their infiltration of Parisian society served to amplify its decadence and corruption. But perhaps most noticeably, Daudet implied that the Second Empire and Tunisia shared many of the same values and customs: he described Tunisia as “enervating” and “depraved,” but also consistently styled the Second Empire in the same terms.

Many of the novel’s main characters have either made fortunes or hope to make fortunes by associating with important Ottoman officials; over the course of the novel, many become embroiled in a disastrous financial scheme surrounding a Parisian bank and the bey of Tunis.

Daudet implies at multiple points throughout the novel that Europeans who spend time in North Africa or the Middle East end up taking on “oriental” characteristics. The most obvious example of this is Jansoulet’s wife, who was of French origin but grew up in Tunisia. Daudet described her quite negatively: “Enormous, bloated to such a degree that it was impossible to assign her an age… badly dressed in foreign clothes, laden with diamonds and jewels like a Hindu idol, she was an excellent specimen of those transplanted European women called Levantines. They are a unique race of obese creoles who are only attached to our world through speech and costume, and whom the East envelops with its stupefying atmosphere, with the subtle poisons of its opium-filled air in which everything… is enervated….” See ibid., 131.
The novel at times explicitly conflated the Empire and North Africa with one another: at one point, Daudet even described an important imperial official as an “African king.” He thus painted imperial corruption in some ways as essentially African or eastern in nature.

Conflating the Second Empire with Tunisia specifically and North Africa more broadly served to thoroughly discredit Bonapartist politics at a moment when Bonapartism’s appeal seemed to be rising once again. But at the same time, Daudet’s portrayal also blurred the edges between Napoleonic European Empire and France’s relationship with its overseas territories in North Africa. Although Tunisia was not a French colony in the 1860s or 1870s, Daudet’s novel implied that it acted as a kind of client state to the Second Empire and indicated that both were bound together by shared cynicism, laziness, selfishness, and corruption. Daudet also indicated that on some level, imperial France’s interest in and expansion into “the Orient” was partly responsible for the rot and decay that characterized imperial society. Although Daudet’s work did not explicitly condemn French expansion overseas, it nevertheless implied that the Second Empire’s interest in North Africa and its political corruption were both part of the same broader imperial project, and that both had had devastating consequences for the French nation.

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6 Ibid., 313.
7 In the mid-1870s, the Bonapartists reached the height of their post-war popularity. See Price, The French Second Empire, 465.
8 This conflation becomes particularly clear in the aftermath of the Corsican election. Jansoulet was competing for the seat with one of his rivals. Under the guidance of the Duc de Mora, who explained to him how the French political system worked, he spent enough money and bribed enough people, so he won the seat. Shortly after his election, however, the Duc de Mora – Jansoulet’s mentor and protector – died. As a result, his rivals decided to contest his election and claim that he won the seat illegally. One official maintained that Jansoulet’s behavior stemmed from the fact that he had lived “so long in the East [that] he forgot the laws, customs, and usages of his country. He believes in expedient justice, in beatings in the open street, he relies on the abuses of power, and worse still, on the veniality and baseness that crouches in all men…” The irony, of course, is that the laws, customs, and usages in Second Empire France are the same as those in Tunisia; in both places, political positions are bought and sold, and corruption only becomes a problem after someone has fallen from grace. See Daudet, Le Nabab, 433.
The debates that transpired over the Second Empire and its relationship to the events of 1870-71 had a profound effect on republican – and liberal - discourse about France’s overseas colonies in the early years of the Third Republic. Partly because Bonapartism remained remarkably popular among many French voters throughout the 1870s, republican writers (as noted in the previous chapters) staked out and consolidated a thoroughly hostile position towards Empire by the middle of the decade. While differences among republicans’ ideas about the empire persisted, most described it as both responsible for France’s decline and at odds with the nation’s values and best interests. They positioned the empire in diametrical opposition to the new republic, which they promised would repair the damage Napoleon III had done to the French nation. This posturing muddled their relationship with certain aspects of the Second Empire’s legacy in overseas territories– and especially with the territories that Napoleon III had described as part of a French Mediterranean Empire in the last years of his reign. This chapter therefore focuses on the post-1870 republican attempts to reject the Napoleonic imperial legacy in Algeria. It stresses the challenges that republicans encountered as they attempted to separate “republican colonialism” from “Napoleonic imperialism.”

France’s overseas territories became entangled in this conversation about the Empire’s failings largely because of Napoleon III’s policies towards Algeria. His insistence that the territory was not a “colony” but a “royaume arabe” with its own national identity had complicated the French discourse of empire and colonization. Early in his reign, Napoleon III had treated the “French nation” and the “French Empire” as equivalents: he had used the term “empire” to designate a specific political program in France, mobilizing it against “republic” or “kingdom.” But in the 1860s, he changed courses, declaring that Algeria was an Arab nation and that the territory was not part of France, but subject to a wider “Mediterranean Empire.”
Napoleon III thus redefined the French Second Empire as a multinational entity, composed of a set of distinct nations ruled by one central administration. Beneath this new regime, “empire” referred both to a form of metropolitan political organization and to a way of ordering different peoples beneath one governing body. The model thus collapsed “metropolitan” policies and France’s relationship to “overseas” territories together into one overarching imperial entity.

As we have seen, Napoleon III’s attempt to recast the Second Empire as a multinational “Mediterranean Empire” and redefine Algeria as a “royaume arabe” met with great resistance from Algerian colonists. Throughout the 1860s, they vociferously objected to his insistence that Algeria was a royaume arabe with a cohesive sense of national identity that the French needed to respect. They contended instead that Algeria was foremost a French colony and argued that French colonists alone could ensure the territory’s economic and political success. They worked to undermine Napoleon III’s imperial system, criticizing both the structure of the Algerian administration and the military’s position within it by claiming that it “indulged” indigenous people and hindered the interests of French colonists. Instead of treating Algeria and its indigenous population as a distinct nation, they argued, the government should “assimilate” both the territory and its peoples. They insisted that the government should grant Algeria’s European population the same civil rights as their metropolitan counterparts and rule them through the same institutions. At the same time, they asserted that the government should force indigenous peoples to assimilate into French culture. Colonists thus articulated an alternative vision of

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9 “Lettre,” in La Politique Impériale, 394. This Napoleonic framework is described in detail in the first chapter of this dissertation.


11 When the colonists demanded “assimilation” throughout the 1860s, they were arguing that France should force the indigenous population to assimilate into French culture by undermining tribal leaders, enforcing individual land
Algeria’s purpose and its ideal structure. Moreover, they made alliances with Napoleon III’s republican opponents in the metropole, who saw the conflicted situation in Algeria as an opportunity to further undermine the Emperor’s authority. Because of this joint opposition, Napoleon III never restructured Algeria or carried out most of his proposed reforms.

In fact, even before the Empire’s collapse, Napoleon III’s *royaume arabe* had effectively dissolved. In 1869, he had organized a commission to draft a constitution for the territory, which overturned many of the principles he had proposed in 1863 and 1865.12 Because it primarily addressed the colonists rather than the Arabs, it implicitly conceded that the colonists were the territory’s key population. It thus treated Algeria as a French colony and not an Arab nation – a direct concession to colonists’ ongoing opposition.13 It also embraced an assimilationist program: it established Algerian assemblies, granted the territory’s inhabitants parliamentary representation, and greatly extended the reach of civil territory.14 But even though the colonists had long advocated for a constitution, they rejected these measures, claiming that they simply

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12 The decision to issue Algeria a constitution stemmed from a complicated series of events. In response to the 1868 famine, the government launched an inquiry into the territory’s agricultural production, which was directed by the Comte Le Hon. Le Hon was Bonapartist in political orientation, but when he arrived in Algeria, he was courted by the colonist settlers. These settlers convinced him that indigenous society was “decomposing,” and that the territory’s prosperity depended on the colonists. In order to secure Algeria’s future, they insisted, France needed to enfranchise its settlers, make it easier for them to buy indigenous property, and eliminate the military’s rule. Le Hon presented these findings to the Senate in April 1869, argued for the extension of civil territory, and asked for an Algerian constitution. As a result of these events, the Emperor decided to organize a commission, composed of three military and five civil servants to determine Algeria’s future. See Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Le Royaume Arabe: la politique algérienne de Napoléon III, 1861-1870* (Alger: Société Nationale d’Édition et de Diffusion, 1977), 659.


14 The members of the commission discussed the possibility of eliminating military territory altogether, but ultimately decided to maintain the distinction. See “Procès-verbaux de la Commission chargée d’élaborer le Projet de Constitution de l’Algérie,” 4-10 in Commission de la Constitution de l’Algérie, 1867-1870, F80*/2041. Fonds Ministérielles, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.
extended the policies of the “royaume arabe.” They particularly objected to the Commission’s decision to maintain military territory – largely because they saw the military as partisan to the indigenous population. They also protested against the decision to extend voting rights not just to French citizens, but to foreigners and indigenous people as well.

The colonists’ anger towards the constitutional project and their insistence that the imperial government’s concessions were insufficient to their purposes did not remain limited to the Algerian stage. One of the longstanding republican allies of the colonist coalition, Jules Favre, brought the matter to the Corps législatif in early 1870. From March 7-9, 1870, the Corps législatif argued about Algeria’s administration and its relationship to France before voting to dissolve the territory’s military organization and institute civilian rule. Colonists greeted this news with great satisfaction: L’Echo d’Oran described the Corps législatif’s decision as the “Waterloo of the royaume arabe.” But if the colonists succeeded in forcing through a number of theoretical concessions under Napoleon III’s rule, the government made few policy changes before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in the summer of 1870. Colonists and

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16 Rey-Goldzeiguer, Le Royaume Arabe, 663.

17 Jules Favre had served as the prosecutor in the controversial Doineau trial of the 1850s, and was a vocal opponent of the military government and the Bureaux arabes in the metropole. See Abi-Mershed, Apostles of Modernity, 160.


19 As quoted in Rey-Goldzeiguer, Le Royaume Arabe, 667.

20 Napoleon III passed two decrees on May 31 and June 11 that endowed civil prefects with most of the administrative authority that had once been vested in the bureau arabes. He also passed a decree that established individual property in Arab territory that had been classified as “arch,” and organized elections in civil territories. See Levallois, Ismayl Urbain, 804. Colonists were, on the whole, unimpressed by these policy changes. Al. Waille declared, “In order to give a semblance of satisfaction to public opinion, the Emperor will soon sign two declarations relative to Algeria as advised by the Minister of War. These measures, like all that have been taken thus far in Algeria, are qualified as transitory by the minister himself… This is nothing but the pure and simple return to the regime of 1863, and Algeria demands something else… In effect, the new decrees maintain the disastrous division of territory… between the royaume arabe and the colony, between indigenous people and Europeans, that
republicans alike attributed this reticence to the Emperor’s ongoing commitment to his earlier vision of Algeria, and continued to associate the imperial government with the *royaume arabe*.\(^{21}\)

If Napoleon III’s attempt to restructure Algeria and reorder its relationship to France had fallen apart by 1870, his vision of a multinational Mediterranean Empire remained a subject of ongoing debate in the last years of his reign. Moreover, colonists’ and republicans’ very critiques of Napoleon III’s imperial system reinforced his attempts to collapse metropolitan and overseas empire together into one unified theory of “empire.” They also treated metropolitan politics and overseas policies as deeply intertwined, arguing that Napoleon III’s misguided approach towards Algeria stemmed primarily from the flaws of the Bonapartist imperial system.\(^{22}\) By invoking Napoleon III’s policies towards Algeria as a symptom of the Second Empire’s wider problems, they thus reinforced the idea that France’s metropolitan and overseas empires were interdependent. As Daudet’s *Le Nabab* shows, some republicans continued to associate Napoleon III’s Mediterranean Empire with internal imperial politics throughout the 1870s.

The legacy of Napoleon III’s conflation of “metropolitan” and “overseas” empire created both strategic and conceptual problems for republicans in 1870s. After the Empire’s collapse, republicans had condemned metropolitan empire as a “decadent,” “militaristic,” “corrupt,” and “oppressive” form of political organization. But if metropolitan empire directly contradicted the values of the new republic, what about overseas empire? What was its relationship to Bonapartist practices and ideals? These questions troubled republicans who wanted to justify France’s

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\(^{21}\) The colonists’ ongoing opposition to Napoleon III is evident from the way that they voted in the plebiscite of 1870. Napoleon III only failed to win the majority of the vote in the Seine, the Bouches-du-Rhône, and Algeria, where the opposition was most marked. See Price, *The French Second Empire*, 397.

\(^{22}\) See, for example Jules Duval and Auguste-Herbert Warnier, *Un programme de politique algérienne* (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1868); *Bureaux arabes et colons* (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1869)
imperial relationship with its colonies, especially as they looked overseas to restore French military prestige. They sought to untangle these two kinds of empire so that they could promote a new kind of republican colonial expansion untainted by Napoleon III. This conversation about empire and its significance unfolded over the course of many years and evolved in response to events overseas and political changes within France itself. But in the republic’s first decade, it centered primarily on the question of Algeria and its relationship to the French nation.

The problems surrounding French understandings of the nature of “empire” and its implications for France’s overseas territories became immediately relevant after the September 4 revolution. Algerian colonists saw the collapse of the imperial regime as an opportunity to overturn the vestiges of the imperial administration and restructure the territory according to their own wishes. And scholars have shown, the weak, unpopular, newly established republican government in France had a stake in meeting their demands in order to sustain their support. As a result, the government made a number of significant changes to Algeria’s administration even before the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War. It invested the colonists with the same electoral and civil rights as their French metropolitan counterparts, marginalized the indigenous population, and made it easier for the colonists to claim indigenous land. In fact, the new republic’s restructuring of Algeria aligned so closely with colonists’ demands that many scholars

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23 Intellectuals and novelists like Prévost-Paradol, Fromentin, and Feydeau who had begun to popularize a specifically “colonialist” vision of empire in the 1860s helped make this process of disentangling possible.

24 Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer, Guy Perville, John Ruedy, and Osama Abi-Mershed all argue that in the immediate wake of the Empire’s collapse, the Republican government essentially straightforwardly implemented the program that Algerian colonists had long advocated for. This is hardly surprising, considering that many of the same republican politicians had fought for the settlers’ demands in the legislature during the last years of the Second Empire. But during the Third Republic, they were able to implement the settlers’ demands more effectively. See Rey-Goldzeiguer, Le Royaume Arabe, 688; Perville, La France en Algérie, 63; Ruedy, Modern Algeria, 76; Abi-Mershed, Apostles of Modernity, 201.

have argued that it was primarily settler self-interest that determined the territory’s political
organization and structured its relationship to France in the early years of the Third Republic.\footnote{Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer, for example, argues that the settlers largely succeeded in constructing an alternative model of Algeria and its future in opposition to Napoleon III, and then mostly managed to push through that model in the wake of the Empire’s failure. See Rey-Goldzeiguer, \textit{Le Royaume Arabe}, 689.}

It is undeniable that settlers and their metropolitan allies largely drove the project of
reorganizing Algeria in the early years of the Third Republic. But if colonists played a large role
in determining the structure of the Algerian administration, a wider set of intellectuals and
politicians sought to define what the form of that administration might signify for the
relationship between Algeria and France. This process became caught up in larger conflicts
within France itself over France’s political organization and the relative merits of “republican”
and “imperial” forms of government. The pressures of these political currents are evident in the
fact that throughout the 1870s, republican politicians did not use the word “empire” to describe
any of France’s overseas territories. Instead, they made use of a series of different words – from
“colony” to “département” – when referring to these places. This marked a profound shift from
Second Empire usages: the imperial government often deployed the terms “empire,” “overseas
empire,” “Mediterranean empire” and “colonial empire” to refer to overseas territories. In the
wake of Napoleon III’s defeat, republican politicians thus struggled to articulate alternative
theoretical models of overseas dominion that were unrelated to the discredited Napoleonic
imperial system and that they could use republican principles to justify. This process of
developing a new model for Algeria and its relationship to France was hardly uncontested: it was
ongoing, fraught, and negotiated between settler populations and metropolitan authorities whose
interests did not always line up. Ongoing political conflicts between the republicans and
conservative groups who continued to dominate the National Assembly throughout much of the
1870s shaped the process of redefinition. But ultimately, this conversation about Algeria and its connections to empire helped provoke a wider set of arguments about the purpose of France’s overseas territories and their connections to the French nation and its politics.

This chapter examines the debates about Algeria and its relationship to the French nation in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war, and considers what they reveal about understandings of “empire” in early Third Republic France. It argues that these debates marked the first moment of an ongoing conversation within the Republic about the meaning and implications of empire that continued to develop through the end of the nineteenth century. Throughout this conversation, republicans tried to differentiate between metropolitan and overseas empire and explain why overseas empire did not contradict republican values even if its metropolitan counterpart was problematic. At the same time, they tried to show why their model of overseas “republican” colonization was superior to its Bonapartist predecessors. Especially at first, republicans’ ideas about Algeria and its relationship to empire, republic, and the French nation were conflicted. But as they continued to argue with Bonapartist and monarchist opponents about the territory over the course of the 1870s, a more coherent republican vision of empire began to emerge.

This chapter’s analysis of these debates about French overseas empire and Algeria focuses on several interrelated questions. First, how did the settler population and the republican government seek to reorganize Algeria and redefine its relationship to France in the wake of the Second Empire’s collapse and a widespread indigenous revolt in 1871? Second, how did this conversation about Algeria intersect with wider debates between writers, intellectuals, and politicians of different political stripes about the meaning and implications of “empire” and its relationship to the French “republic” and “nation” in the 1870s? And finally, how did these ongoing debates about Algeria’s organization and republican France’s relationship to its overseas
territories connect to theoretical literature about colonization that emerged in this period? This chapter considers these questions by examining how this conversation about “empire” and Algeria played out across newspapers, political pamphlets, and academic writing published in the early years of the Third Republic. It begins by focusing on the debates about Algeria’s future that transpired in 1870-71 before expanding its analysis to consider how these debates fit into a wider discussion about republicanism and overseas empire during the later 1870s.

II. War and Revolution: Algeria in 1870-71

The French defeat at Sedan and the September 4 Revolution triggered a widespread discussion about Algeria’s administrative structure and its relationship to France. This discussion was, at least at first, largely driven by settlers themselves, who took to the streets in Algerian cities in order to signify their loyalty to the new republican government, protest against the remains of the Bonapartist regime, and advocate for widespread change in Algeria. Their actions precipitated a whirlwind of reforms, but also drew settlers into conflict with the newly established republican government, especially after the elections in February 1871 brought a conservative majority to power in the National Assembly.27 A widespread indigenous revolt in the spring of 1871 further complicated the situation. Taken together, these events transformed the discourse about Algeria and France’s relationship to its overseas territories in the early part of the decade. Even though different republicans and settlers often did not agree about Algeria, together they permanently shifted the parameters of the conversation about it. Driven by a complicated combination of settler self-interest, republican political opportunism, and

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27 Taithe, Citizenship and Wars, 172.
ideological conviction, this new understanding of Algeria would have implications for the French conversation about the meaning and implications of “empire” in the years to come.

The events that led to this transformation in understandings of Algeria and its relationship to “empire” were convoluted. In the weeks following the collapse of Napoleon III’s government, the new republican government moved a number of republicans sympathetic to settlers’ demands – including Auguste-Hubert Warnier – into the territory’s administration.\(^{28}\) At the same time, colonists across Algeria organized themselves into “republican committees of national defense” – much like their urban counterparts in metropolitan France.\(^{29}\) But although their purported intention was to defend the country against Germany, they spent most of their time staging public protests against the Governor-General Durieu, whom they claimed was plotting a Bonapartist coup.\(^{30}\) The Republican Association of Algiers was particularly active. In a series of circulars published in Algerian newspapers, its members argued that the current Algerian military administration was incompatible with republican values and demanded immediate

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\(^{28}\) Warnier became the prefect of Algiers and Marcel Lucet the prefect of Constantine. See Pierre Darmon, *Un siècle de passions algériennes: une histoire de l’Algérie coloniale (1830-1940)* (Paris: Fayard, 2009), 259.

\(^{29}\) The creation of these committees was controversial. While the republican government encouraged communities in metropolitan France to form committees on September 10th, the governor general had declared that the circular authorizing them was not applicable to Algeria. In response, a group of settlers in Algeria registered their discontent in an official complaint that they published in a number of Algerian newspapers. The complaint contended, “The population protests against the head of the colony’s tendency to perpetuate the imperial policy that placed Algeria outside of the law and in France pretended that it could defend the country through the army alone until the disaster of Sédan. Ready to make all of the sacrifices now imposed on Strasbourg, Toulon, and Verdun, Algeria wants to be… administrated by representatives from the Republic.” See “Comité Républicain de Défense,” *Démocrate* (12 September 1871). After these committees were authorized in late September, the authorities appointed by the new republican government had trouble controlling them. The Prefect of Constantine Marcel Lucet noted, “The government of 4 September, acclaimed by the nation, has successively eliminated decrees of despotism… The hour approaches where the representatives of the people will place our laws in harmony with republican institutions… Already, in several places, committees have formed with the title of national defense… Algeria is effectively the daughter of France; she cannot rest a stranger to the nation’s great pain and patriotic resolution. As a result, she can be called to guard her own security to a certain measure.” He went on to warn the Committee, however, against “extremism” and conjoined them to obey established authorities. See Marcel Lucet, “Circulaire de le Préfet de Constantine aux fonctionnaires placés sous ses ordres,” Comités politiques, F80/1681. Fonds Ministériaux, ANOM.

\(^{30}\) Alexandre Lambert argued that Durrieu was “turning canons against the cities” and “distributing ammunition to assassinate republicans.” See A. Lambert, “Aux Algériens,” *Le Colon*, cited in *l’Indépendant de Constantine* (6 October 1870); Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 76.
reform.\textsuperscript{31} They succeeded in securing Durieu’s resignation by early October 1870. The Government of National Defense replaced the Bonapartist Durieu with General Walsin-Esterhazy, the commander of troops in Oran, whose political allegiances were more in line with republican values. But the colonists saw Walsin-Esterhazy as a continuation of the military regime, and rioted against him. On October 28, he resigned as well. He ceded his authority to General Lichtlin, who went to Algiers to serve as “interim governor.” The colonists – who did not want even a temporary military governor - refused to allow Lichtlin to enter the city, and he was forced to camp outside of it before resigning in turn on November 9.\textsuperscript{32}

In the face of the settlers’ growing unrest, the Government of National Defense in Tours took a series of steps to placate them. Léon Gambetta, the minister of the interior, charged Adolphe Crémieux, the minister of justice, with Algeria’s affairs, largely because Crémieux had visited the territory on multiple occasions. Crémieux and the other members of the Government of National Defense were sympathetic to colonists’ distaste for the military regime – partly because they needed colonist support, and partly because they themselves saw the military as a conservative institution that was hostile to the republic’s future.\textsuperscript{33} Crémieux passed a series of decrees to reorganize Algeria and restructure its relationship to France on October 24, 1870. These decrees largely dismantled the military regime and took steps towards legally assimilating the colony into the French metropole.\textsuperscript{34} They replaced the military governor-general with a civil governor-general, divided Algeria into three departments that would each elect two deputies to

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\textsuperscript{31} More specifically, they argued that the Committees of National Defense would not be able to fulfill their grand mission as long as the “military authority” retained its position because it was incompatible with democratic forms of political organization. See, “République Française: Liberté – Égalité – Fraternité,” \textit{Le Tell} (1 October 1870).
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\textsuperscript{32} Ruedy, \textit{Modern Algeria}, 76.
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\textsuperscript{33} Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeigueur, Thobie, \textit{Histoire de la France Coloniale}, 538, 539.
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\textsuperscript{34} Ruedy, \textit{Modern Algeria}, 76.
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the National Assembly, and created elective councils to advise the governor-general. Crémieux selected Henri Didier, a politician and advocate for settler interests who had served as Algeria’s deputy during the Second Republic, to be the new civil governor-general, and promised prompt elections to fill the other positions. Although these decrees maintained the division between civil and military territory, they placed the officers in military territory under civil prefects. Crémieux also passed a series of laws aimed at the indigenous populations, subjecting most indigenous Algerians to French law and granting French citizenship to Algerian Jews.

Though the Crémieux decrees granted the colonists many of their demands – they instituted a civil regime, granted settlers electoral rights, and took steps towards forcibly dismantling indigenous society - they did not quell the rising discontent. Many colonists felt that they did not go far enough. They objected to the fact that the decrees maintained military territories and did not abolish the bureaux arabes. If many welcomed the prospect of a civil governor-general, they were frustrated by the fact that the government was to remain in the hands of the military until Henri Didier could arrive from France – which, considering that he was trapped in besieged Paris, would take at least several months. They were also incensed by the government’s decision to grant citizenship to Algerian Jews, whom they saw as uncivilized.

35 “Nouvelles de la Province et de l’Étranger,” Le Gaulois (3 November 1870), 3.
37 He instituted trial by jury for many indigenous crimes. But because only French citizens could serve on juries, indigenous peoples accused of crimes would be judged by juries composed of French settlers. Perville, La France en Algérie, 63. Crémieux’s decision to make indigenous people subject to French law had long been a goal of the settler community. Throughout the 1860s, settlers argued that the indigenous Algerians would never become “civilized” unless they stopped living according to religious law. This decree weakened the role of religious law. Crémieux’s interest in Algeria largely stemmed from his interest in Algerian Jews, whom he was committed to protecting and assimilating into French culture. Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeigueur, Thobie, Histoire de la France coloniale, 541.
38 Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeigueur, Thobie, Histoire de la France Coloniale, 545.
39 The decision to grant citizenship to Algerian Jews in fact proved to be among the most controversial of all these decrees. Shortly after it was passed, a number of settlers started a campaign to have it revoked, arguing – primarily in Algerian newspapers – that the Algerian Jews were distinct from their European counterparts. As early as March
In Algiers especially, colonists marched in the streets to protest the new measures and demand the resignation of all administrators associated with the military regime. Even Warnier proved too conciliatory for the colonists’ taste and had to resign from his post on October 29.40

On October 30, news of General Bazaine’s surrender at Metz reached Algeria, creating a fervor that the local administration could not contain. Over the following days, the interim Governor-General sent the Government of National Defense a series of increasingly urgent notes, warning that there was “great agitation” and that the National Guard was “unable to maintain order.”41 At the same time, Romauld Vuillermoz, the more radical republican mayor of Algiers, sent the government a series of notes justifying the ongoing colonist protest.42 He argued that most of the appointed colonial administrators had been conspiring against the Republican government in Tours and threatening to maintain the military administration. There was no “disorder” in Algerian cities, he claimed, only an “unwavering commitment” to the republic and to a civil regime. However, he warned, if Henri Didier was detained in Paris, the republican

1871, settlers began campaigning to have their citizenship revoked, and in August of 1871, they proposed a project of law that would undo the law. A number of important figures from the Algerian Jewish community appeared before the National Assembly to defend their newfound citizenship, and the project of law ultimately failed. A powerful anti-Semitic movement persisted in Algeria, however. See Juillet St-Lacer, “Les Israélites algériennes et le décret du 24 octobre,” La Solidarité d’Alger (11 March 1871); “Nouvelles, Le Petit Journal (22 August 1871), 2.


42 Vuillermoz was an Algerian lawyer who had been deported from France in 1851 by Napoleon III. See Claude Martin, La Commune d’Alger (Paris: Éditions Heraklès, 1936), 26; Perville, La France en Algérie, 62. In these telegrams, Vuillermoz sought to address Gambetta directly, but at least at first, Crémieux alone responded to them. Vuillermoz resented this fact, and on November 5, he noted, “We sent you a pressing telegram, and it was M. Crémieux who responded with observations in a situation that requires acts.” “Maire d’Alger au citoyen Gambetta, Tours,” (5 November 1870) in Actes du Gouvernement, 97.
government needed to send another official to take over the colony in order to make the necessary changes to its administration. He asked the government to appoint a “temporary extraordinary commissioner” to run Algeria’s civil and military affairs. The government in Tours did not immediately respond to the request, leading Vuillermoz to issue an ultimatum on November 7: the government could either send an extraordinary commissioner, or the Algiers Committee of National Defense would appoint Vuillermoz to the position.

When the government in Tours did not respond to the November 7 telegram, the Republican Committee of National Defense in Algiers took matters into its own hands and appointed Vuillermoz to the position of interim extraordinary civil commissioner. Vuillermoz made use of his new position to transform Algeria along pro-settler, republican lines. On November 11, Vuillermoz established a commission to organize Algeria’s settler population into democratic “communes” and extend the scope of colonization. These measures bolstered the

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43 He argued that the only events that had happened in Algiers were those meant to protect the Republic. He noted, “General Walsin-Esterhazy, who had a provocative attitude and used language that was openly hostile to the republic, was constrained to leave. A prefect who was esteemed, but who had, out of weakness, acted complacently towards military authority, was forced to resign. General Lichtlin, who had surrendered and whom the population found odious, was reduced to hand over his power…. See ibid.

44 The municipal council of Algiers – dominated largely by members of the Algiers Republican Committee of National Defense – sent a letter to the National Government supporting Vuillermoz’s request and demanding that the government appoint Vuillermoz himself to the position of “temporary extraordinary commissioner” of Algeria. See “Conseil municipal à ministre de l’intérieur, Tours” (31 October 1870) in in Actes du Gouvernement, 93. These demands did not just come from Algiers. On November 7, Emile Thullier demanded, “It is necessary to make a clean slate of imperial institutions… We must organize… We must name an administrator for the department, and name an extraordinary commissioner for all Algeria.” See Emile Thullier, Algérie française (9 November 1870).

45 Vuillermoz demanded, “There has been no response to our telegram. We informed you that committees of public health have been forming to elect an extraordinary commissioner that you will not send us. They find the nomination of Henri Didier, who is stuck in Paris, mystifying. If you refuse or procrastinate further, the country’s motto will be: Algeria tara de se. Be advised: our voices are no longer heard. Send the commissioner or confirm our authority.” See “Maire d’Alger à Gambetta, Tours,” (7 November 1870), in Actes du Gouvernement, 97.

46 They asked the other Committees of Defense in Algeria to send in telegrams acknowledging and approving the decision. See “Arrête,” (8 November 1870) in Actes du Gouvernement, 97. Algerian newspapers quickly jumped into defend this decision. L’Avenir algérien maintained, “It is up to us Algerians to proclaim our superior administrator or extraordinary commissioner to govern Algeria, that unites and concentrates in his hands all civil and military power.” See “L’Algérie aux Algériens,” Avenir algérien (11 November 1870).

47 “Arrete,” (11 November 1870) in Actes du Gouvernement, 101; Darmon, Un siècle de passions algériennes, 260.
authority of democratically elected city and town governments, weakened the authority of the central colonial administration, and undermined the position of the republican government in Tours vis-à-vis Algeria. Moreover, by centering Algeria’s administration in “communes” composed of Europeans, Vuillermoz effectively displaced the indigenous population from Algeria’s government and rendered them tangential to the territory’s administration.

Vuillermoz’s appointment encouraged colonists to widen the scope of their ambitions. Over the next few days, a number of groups began openly expressing hostility toward the republican government in Tours and demanding reform. Alexandre Lambert, for example, insisted, “Algeria will not adopt that new error of old Crémieux. We say to the delegation of Tours: either Algeria will be entirely French, and ruled entirely by French law, or, if it is necessary that she is ruled beneath an exceptional regime, she will make her own colonial constitution.” In other words, the recently passed Crémieux decrees were illegitimate. The Government should not create a new constitution for Algeria; it should either assimilate the territory into France or allow the settlers to determine the regime under which they would live.

On November 13, a group of republicans in Algiers went a step farther. They sent new demands to the metropolitan government, insisting that settlers in Algeria should have the right to name their own civil governor and appoint deputies to draft Algeria’s new constitution – with no interference from France. Just a few weeks before, the settlers had been advocating for a civil regime and a new constitution. Now they wanted the right to choose their own officials and select a new administrative structure for the colony as a whole.

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48 Alexandre Lambert, Colon, cited in the Moniteur de l’Algérie (3 November 1870)
49 “Vaux émis dans une reunion de 600 à 700 personnes à Alger,” L’Akhbar (13 November 1870).
50 Not all of the colonists agreed with the Algiers Committee of National Defense’s actions. The prefect of Constantine, Marcel Lucet, publically condemned both Vuillermoz’s appointment as extraordinary commissioner
The government in Tours condemned the Committee of Defense’s actions and sent Vuillermoz a series of notes announcing that it rejected “this act of usurpation,” marking the first real break between metropolitan and settler republicans.\(^{51}\) Vuillermoz protested that he had only acted in order to calm the growing radicalism in Algeria and maintained that he could not resign without provoking a general uprising.\(^{52}\) But on November 17, the metropolitan government appointed Charles du Bouzet as the new extraordinary commissioner, and many Algerian cities withdrew their support for Vuillermoz.\(^{53}\) When Bouzet arrived in Algiers on November 20, Vuillermoz had to step down and the “Commune” of Algiers ended.

Bouzet’s appointment did not end the ongoing political conflict in Algeria, however. Like the string of military governors that preceded him, Bouzet conflicted with Vuillermoz, who remained the mayor of Algiers.\(^{54}\) Crémieux and the National Government’s decision to modify and his efforts to reorganize the territory. In a series of telegrams and newspaper degrees, he encouraged the mayors of all the cities in Constantine to do the same. He sent them a telegram noting that Constantine’s Committee of National Defense “rejects with all its energy this antipatriotic movement.” See “Préfet à maires du département,” (10 November 1870) in Actes du Gouvernement, 103. This statement was later printed in Constantine’s newspapers. Several towns sent telegrams to the Government of National Defense, assuring the government of their loyalty. See “Conseil municipal de Bône à Gouvernement, Tours,” (9 November 1870) in Actes du Gouvernement, 105. Even some settlers who disapproved of the Crémieux decrees condemned the Algiers government. The Indépendant of Constantine, which had long criticized the royaume arabe, declared, “The nomination of Vuillermoz… is a veritable usurpation” and “against the interests of the country.” The writer argued that the act “subordinated all authority over the provinces to Algiers; this creates an unfortunate precedent… [it] gives a dangerous weapon to partisans of centralization… The provinces that have long fought against this tendency cannot commit such a capital error.” See “Le conflit algérien,” L’Indépendant (15 November 1870). Le Français, on the other hand, accused Vuillermoz of treason and compared him to Napoleon III, claiming that his project was “to separate Algeria from France and make it an independent state with Vuillermoz in the role of dictator, or as they say municipal emperor.” The writer thus implied that Vuillermoz’s actions were not republican and threatened to return Algeria to the regime that its settlers had long decried. See Le Français (12 March 1871), cited Actes du Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale: Rapport sur l’Algérie Vol. 3 (Paris: Librairie des Publications Législatives, 1876), 94.

\(^{51}\) The telegram also asked him to put up posters announcing that the Government rejected the measures undertaken by the municipal council and promised that they would send a civil governor within ten days. See “Gouvernement de Tours à maire d’Alger,” (10 November 1870) in Actes du Gouvernement, 106.

\(^{52}\) “Maire d’Alger à Gouvernement, Tours,” (11 November 1870), in Actes du Gouvernement, 106.

\(^{53}\) Bouzet was a republican academic who had originally been appointed the prefect of Oran after the September 4th revolution. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeigueur, Thobie, Histoire de la France Coloniale, 546.

\(^{54}\) Although it did not ask Vuillermoz to step down from his position as mayor, the government tried to weaken the authority of Algerian mayors by placing militia beneath the Extraordinary Commissioner. This alienated many
the decrees of October 24 in late December and early January to appease the vocal settler population also complicated Bouzet’s position. These new decrees announced the end of “the regime of exception” and promised a new future for Algeria based on “le droit commune.” They extended Algeria’s civil territory, effectively dismantled the bureaux arabes, and placed the military territories beneath the control of civilian prefects. They also legally assimilated the civil territory in Algeria into the French metropole. Despite the fact that these decrees fulfilled many of the settlers’ demands, the settlers saw them as insufficient, which led to further unrest.

On January 15, the National Government decided to intervene in the ongoing conflicts between Vuillermoz, the Algerian municipal council, and Bouzet by dissolving the municipal council of Algiers and dismissing the mayor. They called for new elections and granted Bouzet the authority to appoint a replacement for Vuillermoz. Instead of calming the situation, however, this measure led to a renewed series of protests against both Bouzet and the metropolitan republican government. News of Paris’ surrender to the Prussian army on January 24 and forthcoming elections only made the situation tenser. Many settlers were concerned that the French would elect a conservative government that would be even less sympathetic to their

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55 Crémieux, “Bordeaux, 1 janvier 1871”, F80/1862. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM.
56 Ruedy, Modern Algeria, 76; Actes du Gouvernement, 348.
57 Many argued that the government should eliminate the distinction between military and civil territories entirely. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeigueur, Thobie, Histoire de la France Coloniale, 547.
58 This decision was sparked by a conflict between Bouzet and Vuillermoz over control of the militia. Both issued a series of counter-decrees to the Algerian militia, which Bouzet invoked as a reason to dissolve the municipal council of Algiers and call for new elections. See Claude Martin, La Commune d’Alger (Paris: Éditions Herakles, 1936), 78.
60 On January 27, a large crowd of settlers went to the Governor’s palace to protest the municipal council’s dissolution. At the same time, a crowd of Algiers’ indigenous inhabitants, who saw Bouzet as an ally against settler rapaciousness, surrounded the palace to defend him. While the encounter did not end violently, it further heightened tensions between the settler population and indigenous Algerians. See L’Akhbar (27 January 1871) as quoted in Actes du Gouvernement, 119.
interests and openly expressed concern about the possibility of a Bonapartist restoration. The *Independent* of Constantine went so far as to declare that if Algeria were “betrayed” again by Bonapartists as it had been in 1851, Algerians would “prefer to give the colony to England.”

In light of these ongoing protests, the Government of National Defense decided that Bouzet was unable to enforce order in the colony. But unsettled relations between the colonists and the government in the metropole continued when Bouzet was replaced with yet another extraordinary commissioner on February 9: Alexis Lambert, the prefect of Oran. Lambert succeeded in establishing an uneasy peace in Algiers, despite the fact that the elections brought a wave of conservatives into the national government – much as the settlers had feared. Even the outbreak of the Paris Commune met with a relatively muted response because the beginnings of a widespread indigenous revolt increasingly overshadowed the events in the metropole.

The indigenous revolt began in early March in Kabylie when Muhammad al-Hajj al-Muqrani, an important tribal leader who had long worked closely with the French government, called a council of war. Over the course of the next few weeks, he convinced a number of

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61 This concern with a possible Bonapartist restoration was not new; a number of colonists had advocated for the complete removal of all officials associated with the Bonapartist administration in order to prevent such an event. In December, the *Colon* had argued, “We must not conserve any of the employees or functionaries of the Bonapartists beneath the Republic, not one; all must be replaced by men whose devotion to the Republic is incontestable and well-justified.” See *Le Colon* (8 December 1871), cited in *Le Moniteur de l’Algérie* (9 December 1871), 2.

62 *Indépendant* (9 February 1871). Because of the concern about he Algiers Committee of Defense also decide to send a number of observers to Versailles to represent Algeria’s interests, including Alexandre Lambert, Calvinhac and Lormand. See Martin, *La Commune d’Alger*, 89.

63 This was in part because Bouzet was unable to maintain order. Bouzet had not even been able to enforce the government’s dissolution of the municipal council of Algiers. The continuing settler protests forced Bouzet to restore the municipal council and the mayor until their replacements could be elected. See Martin, *La Commune d’Alger*, 86; Perville, *La France en Algérie*, 62.

64 Throughout the month of February, however, it is clear that at least a number of settler republican associations followed the movements in the Paris Commune closely, not least because Alexandre Lambert, the deputy they had selected to represent Algerian interests in front of the National Assembly, played an important role in the proceedings. Lambert published a number of articles about Algeria in the *Journal officiel de la République française* that was published by the Commune, in which he attacked the colonial administration for seeking to undermine the authority of the “communes” of Algeria. See Alexandre Lambert, “M. Lucet,” *Journal officiel de la République française: Commune de Paris* (3 April 1871), 136.
neighboring tribes to join him. In early April, this revolt turned into a widespread popular uprising when Muhammad al Haddad – an influential member of the Rahmaniyya, a Sufi Muslim brotherhood – publically declared his support and described the conflict as a jihad. By late April, approximately 200,000 Kabyles had joined, and it continued to spread in the provinces of Constantine and Alger. Through the spring and summer of 1871, the insurgents attacked settler farms, villages, and towns in an attempt to drive European settlers out of Algeria. It was only in late October 1871 that the French military fully suppressed the insurrection.

The causes behind this insurrection were both complex and diverse. Most historians agree, however, that the complex political and administrative changes instituted in 1870-71 made the indigenous Algerians fear for their future in a reorganized Algeria. Many tribal leaders had had personal relationships with Napoleon III; Muqrani in particular had visited him during the festivities at Compiègne in the 1860s. These leaders saw him and his administration – especially the bureaux arabes – as a bulwark against rapacious settlers who sought to steal their land. They feared that a civilian administration would privilege the settlers’ interests over their own. The first months of the Third Republic had only consolidated their suspicions of civilian

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65 There were earlier outbreaks in late January and early February, but it was Muhammad al-Hajj al-Muqrani who transformed it into a widespread insurrection. It is worth noting that Muqrani had long collaborated with the French administration, and specifically with the Bureaux arabes. Napoleon III had made him an officer of the Legion of Honor in 1862 in exchange for his services to France. See Darmon, Un siècle de passions algériennes, 268.


67 The revolt involved about 800,000 people, but only about 200,000 were actively involved in military operations. See Lorcin, Imperial Identities, 174.

68 The conflict that ensued over the following months led to the deaths of 2,686 Europeans and many more indigenous Algerians. See Ruedy, Modern Algeria, 78.

69 See, for example Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzieheguer, Thobie, Histoire de la France Coloniale, 548; Ruedy, Modern Algeria, 77; Darmon, Un siècle de passions algériennes, 272; Patricia Lorcin, Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, prejudice, and race in colonial Algeria (New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1995), 177.

70 Darmon, Un siècle de passions algériennes, 268.

rule – the republican journals had used the new freedom of the press to openly advocate for the radical cantonnement of indigenous tribes and argue that the new government should take a series of drastic measures to secure indigenous land. The Crémieux decrees, which undermined indigenous law and threatened to expand the scope of French colonization, consolidated the impression that the indigenous tribes were under attack. The fact that the settlers worked systematically to undermine military authority and ship the officers of the bureaux arabes outside of the territory – the only administrators that most members of the indigenous population ever interacted with – further compounded the situation. Muqran and his followers decided to act before the government could consolidate a regime that seemed antithetical to their interests.

The revolt – combined with the outbreak of the Commune - changed the tenor of the debates in Algeria about the territory’s administration and its relationship to France. The newly elected metropolitan government decided to replace Lambert with an administrator who could wield greater authority over both the settler and indigenous populations. It eliminated the position of “extraordinary commissioner” and appointed Vice-Admiral Gueydon to the position of “Civil Governor of Algeria.” At first, colonists objected to this announcement – Gueydon was a member of the military, after all, even if he was serving as Algeria’s “civil governor.”

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73 Ruedy, Modern Algeria, 76.
74 Gueydon also emphasized in all of his public pronouncements that he was a “civil governor.” In his initial decree, he claimed, “The President of the council of ministers... nominated me as the CIVIL Governor of Algeria... I accepted with much less hesitation because Algeria is now represented in the National Assembly, so I would not have to concern myself with politics. It is your representatives who are responsible for making your aspirations real on that account. My policies will focus on Colonization and Public Works... I will be able to devote all of my care to the development of a civil regime and civil institutions.” See Vice-admiral de Gueydon, “9 April 1871,” F80/1862. Fonds Ministérielles, ANOM.
75 Perville, La France en Algérie, 64.
76 The prefect of Constantine noted in a letter that “the nomination of Monsieur the Admiral de Gueydon to the General Government of Algeria has been met with marked defiance on the part of the European population. They do not believe for a moment that he could actually serve as the head of a civil government and imagine that the
was also Legitimist in political orientation and close to Adolphe Thiers. The settlers argued that his appointment was little more than the resurrection of the old military regime and imperial politics. A number of municipal councils across Algeria registered complaints against the choice. But in the face of a growing indigenous insurrection and the specter of the Versailles government’s sharp repression of the Parisian Communards, they unhappily acknowledged his authority. By mid-1871, the settlers’ campaign to radically restructure Algeria had thus ended in a compromise solution that seemed to bridge, at least temporarily, military and civilian rule.

For approximately six months following the collapse of the Second Empire, a vocal group of settlers organized into Committees of Defense engaged in an ongoing political battle with the interim republican government in Tours over Algeria’s future. They demanded political representation, the end of the military regime, easy access to indigenous land, and “assimilation” into France. The settlers’ campaign against the last vestiges of the military administration and the *royaume arabe* was, on the whole, extremely successful. Although they did not succeed in their attempts to draft their own constitution for the territory or appoint all of their own administrators, they secured French political and legal rights and effectively managed to marginalize the indigenous population. They owed their success in part to the fact that the interim government both needed the colonists’ support and was highly distracted by the events unfolding in the metropole. But their ability to demand reforms also stemmed from the way that they mobilized republican anti-imperial discourse in support of their demands. They tried to show that Algeria

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78 Even Constantine’s municipal council, which had rejected Vuillermoz’s election, formally protested the decision: “The municipal council of Constantine energetically protests against the appointment… that will restore the military regime, and it asks that this decision be immediately repealed.” See *L’Indépendant* (3 April 1871), 1.

would only be truly “republican” when it adopted a civil administration by highlighting the connections between the military and the Second Empire. This strategy had its limitations, however, which became evident as divisions between “moderate” and “radical” republicans in the metropole intensified in early 1871 - especially when some of the colonists expressed sympathy for the Communards. The conservative metropolitan government that came to power in 1871 became suspicious of settlers’ calls for radical reform, and settled on a hybrid system that met most of their demands but kept elements of the imperial system in place.

These debates over Algeria’s future also had an important effect on the position of the indigenous population in the territory on both legal and discursive levels. Although no French administration ever treated them equally, the new “civil” organization discriminated against them more openly. Under Napoleon III, neither the European colonists nor the indigenous Algerians were able to select their administrators. Under the new regime, however, European settlers and Algerian Jews would select the representatives for the entire territory, while the Muslim population had no representatives at all. They were thus structurally excluded from republican civil Algeria. This exclusion was also evident in settler demands for the territory’s organization and the government’s responses, most of which were formulated as though the non-European population did not exist. As Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer has pointed out, in the wake of the events of 1870-71, the settlers succeeded in coopting the very word “Algerian” itself, which in the future would be used to refer to Algeria’s European population, and not its indigenous one.

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80 In early 1871, before the revolt erupted, Warnier wrote a pamphlet arguing for the confiscation of indigenous land and the removal of the army from indigenous affairs. He argued that the indigenous were not central to Algeria’s future and that they had accepted French rule – citing the fact that they had not yet revolted, despite France’s recent defeat. See A. Warnier, L’Algérie et les victimes de la guerre (Alger: Imprimerie Duclaux, 1871), 11, 57.

81 Rey-Goldzeiguer, Le Royaume Arabe, 688.
This marginalization of the indigenous population heightened in the wake of the indigenous revolt. Despite the fact that there was no overarching agreement about the causes of the insurrection, there was nevertheless a widespread consensus in both Algeria and France about what it revealed about Algeria’s indigenous population. *Le Petit Journal*, in a series of articles purportedly based on interviews that one of its journalists conducted with his “Arab friend,” claimed there were two factors behind the Arabs’ decision to revolt. First, the Arabs’ religion “commanded them to kill Christians.” The fear of French force had long kept the indigenous population from acting on this commandment – but when they saw Germany easily defeat France, they lost their fear of French military prowess. As a result of this second factor (French military weakness), the Arabs decided to rise up against French rule and kill as many Christians as they could.\(^{82}\) *Le XIXième Siècle* offered a slightly more sophisticated of the same argument. Though it did not claim that most Arabs spent their waking hours dreaming of killing Christians, it averred that marabouts had deliberately spread religious “fanaticism” throughout the population and then pushed them to revolt.\(^{83}\) This insistence on the indigenous population’s religious fanaticism ran through a number of newspapers and pamphlets, both reflecting and reinforcing an enduring suspicion of the political influence of Islam.\(^{84}\)

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\(^{82}\) The journalist went on to argue that if the military had immediately responded to the revolt by violently trying to suppress it, the indigenous population would have quickly surrendered. But when the French administration tried to decide how best to respond, the Algerians read their hesitation as a confirmation of their weakness. As a result, the insurrection spiraled out of control. Saladin, “Lettres algériennes,” *Le Petit Journal* (17 April 1871), 4; Saladin, “Algérie: Le drame de Palestro,” *Le Petit Journal* (7 May 1871), 4.

\(^{83}\) “Insurrection de Palestro,” *XIX Siècle* (3 January 1873), 3-4.

\(^{84}\) Writers on opposite sides of the political spectrum embraced it as one of the key reasons behind the revolt, from the writer of *L’Algérie devant l’Assemblée nationale*, who sought to defend the military administration in Algeria, to Paul Fawtier, a supporter of the Commune who defended the civil regime. See *L’Algérie devant l’Assemblée nationale: causes des insurrections algériennes* (Versailles: Muzard, 1871), 6; Paul Fawtier, *L’autonomie algérienne et la république fédérale* (Constantine and Paris: Challamel, 1871), v. One author even went so far as to argue that France’s position in Algeria was untenable because of the religious fanaticism of its indigenous population. See A. Ducrot, *La Vérité sur l’Algérie* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1871), 14.
This growing French consensus on the destructive tendencies of the Arabs’ religious beliefs also helped create an agreement in both Algeria and the metropole about how to deal with the defeated indigenous tribes. Though they argued about specific measures that the government should take, most writers concurred that the government needed to harshly punish those who had risen up against the French. The Journal des débats, for example, published a letter from a colonist from Djidjeli that sought to garner metropolitan support for a “terrible repression.” The journal itself noted that it published this article because it agreed with the colonist that the government needed to act with “a bit more vigor.”85 The same letter appeared two days later in Le Temps. After the letter, the Temps writer noted, “The type of government to use in the colony can be discussed, but there must be only one voice on the imperious necessity to cut short… these rebellions.”86 Le Pays argued that France would only be safe if France “made the Arabs feel that it was a superior force” and “inspired real terror” among them.87 Le Salut publique went a step farther, arguing that the revolts showed that the indigenous population would never assimilate into French society. It claimed, “The events that continue to unfold in Algeria have a considerable importance for the future of the indigenous race and for European colonization. Until now, many serious thinkers had believed in the progressive assimilation of Arabs and Kabyles… Alas! The awakening has been cruel and terrible.” The writer went on to insist that Algeria’s future would only be secure when Europeans had “complete possession of the soil.”88

In the months following the indigenous revolt, a consensus thus emerged around the idea that the indigenous population was treacherous. Napoleon III had sought to center France’s

85 Le Journal des Débats (2 August 1871), F80/1862. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM
86 Le Temps (4 August 1871), F80/1862. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM.
87 Le Pays (5 August 1871), F80/1862. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM.
88 “Algérie,” Le Salut publique (13 May 1871), excerpt in F80/1862. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM.
relationship with Algeria on an imperial relationship with a coherent “Arab” nation. The indigenous revolt convinced many commentators on both sides of the spectrum that Algeria’s future could never lie in the hands of the indigenous population. Even though a few commentators invoked the untrustworthiness of the native Algerians as proof that Algeria could never be colonized, most came to support the settlers’ contention that Algeria’s future lay in a widespread expansion of European colonization.\(^8\) The National Assembly’s 1871 decision to punish the tribes by expropriating the land of those who had risen up against French rule reflected this new agreement.\(^9\) The “Arabophile” project to defend the economic and political interests of indigenous peoples – as personified by Ismaël Urbain – had been losing ground since the mid-1860s. The 1871 revolt consolidated the colonist position that Europeans, and not Arabs or even Kabyles, would be central to Algeria’s future prosperity, and that the government should set aside more territory to encourage increased colonization. This conviction – even more than the political wrangling between the settlers and the metropolitan government - finally put an end to Napoleon III’s long-contested vision of Algeria as a royaume arabe. With widespread agreement that the indigenous population would never be central to Algeria’s future, it became impossible to defend the idea that Algeria was an Arab nation.

The widespread belief that Napoleon III’s imperial “politics of nationalities” was partly responsible for all of France’s contemporary problems further consolidated the condemnation of the idea of an “Arab nation.” In the wake of French defeat, both republican and monarchist

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\(^8\) Military officer A. Ducrot tried to demonstrate that no foreign government had ever subdued the indigenous populations of Algeria. Instead, everyone from the Romans to the Turks had struggled to maintain control of the territory. While he acknowledged that it might be in France’s best interest to continue to occupy Algeria, trying to colonize it was impossible. E. Ducros attacked this argument with yet another pamphlet. He claimed that a civil government would be able to win over the indigenous population and argued that the French government could easily keep the peace in Algeria. See A. Ducrot, La vérité sur l’Algérie (Paris: E. Dentu, 1871); Ducos, L’Algérie: quelques mots de réponse à la brochure ‘La vérité sur l’Algérie’ par le general Ducrot (Paris: Dunod, 1871).

\(^9\) Perville, La France en Algérie, 70.
writers had claimed that Napoleon III’s attempt to divide Europe into independent nation-states had led to the unification of Germany and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. A number of commentators maintained that this policy was also responsible for provoking the indigenous revolt. E. Beauvais, for example, argued that Napoleon III’s “misapplication of the principle of nationality” was at the root of French problems in Europe and Algeria alike. Charles Strauss similarly asserted that the “catastrophic politics of nationality” had caused France to almost lose Algeria, just as it had lost Alsace-Lorraine. By directly linking the Algerian revolt to France’s loss in the Franco-Prussian War, these writers insisted that creating policy based on the idea of an Arab nation would only continue to lead France towards disaster.

The indigenous revolt put an end to the open political wrangling over Algeria’s organization, reflected a new political consensus about the importance of colonization, and marked an end to the *royaume arabe*, but it also provoked a more theoretical conversation about Algeria’s future, its relationship to France, and its implications for the new republic. Although settlers and metropolitan politicians, journalists, and intellectuals all concurred that Napoleon III’s vision for Algeria’s purpose and relationship to France was flawed, they disagreed about what should replace his kind of imperial system. What would a new “republican” Algeria look

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92 Even in the mid-1870s, commentators continued to draw this connection. In an article on the Algerian justice system, Charles Roussel argued, “The Empire inaugurated a policy of utopias and contradictions in Algeria, for which the Napoleonic ideology was primarily responsible. The principle of nationalities rose up in the imagination of the head of state, and the *royaume arabe* became the formula for Algeria.” See Charles Roussel, “La Justice en Algérie: Les tribunaux indigènes,” *La Rêve des deux mondes* (1 August 1876), 689.


like? The process of determining the new model was contentious, and informed by debates over the relative benefits of a civil or military administration. These specific debates about administrative policies were couched in broader, powerful discourses about the memory of the Second Empire, the Paris Commune, Algerian radical republicanism, and the indigenous revolt. Although the conversation began in Algeria, by late 1871 it extended into the metropole as well. Moreover, it would also grow to include not only republicans but also the diverse conservative factions who dominated French politics in the elections of 1871. Indeed, it was only through dialogue and conflict with other political groups that a more coherent vision of French Algeria and its relationship to the new republic would emerge. This vision would ultimately play an important role in shaping French understandings not only of Algeria, but also of empire, republicanism, and nation in the early years of the Third Republic.

III. Theorizing Algeria’s Relationship to the Republic

In the wake of the tumultuous events of 1870-71, a more widespread discussion about Algeria and its future began to unfold. To some degree, this discussion echoed the debates that had transpired in Algeria immediately after the collapse of the Second Empire. But even as commentators continued to argue about the relative merits of different forms of administration, the role of the army, and the usefulness of military territory, they also engaged in a more abstract conversation about Algeria’s future and its relationship to France. This conversation was informed by debates within France about the country’s political organization, which, as we have seen, focused on the relative merits of republicanism and Bonapartist imperialism. After all, although the moderate republican Government of National Defense had presided over Algeria’s reorganization in 1870, conservative politicians – many of whom actively opposed the republic - dominated the elected government that came to power in 1871. These conservative politicians
did not always agree with the Government of National Defense’s policies towards Algeria and at times sought to redefine the territory on their own terms. The ongoing arguments between different political actors transformed the popular and political discourse around the territory, giving rise to a republican vision of Algeria that largely eschewed the notion of “empire.”

This conversation began in 1871 as a debate about the merits of Algeria’s new administration, the nature of its new status, and the structure of its relationship to France. This debate was informed by the memory of the recent political conflicts in Algeria and the widespread indigenous revolt. If most commentators agreed that the revolt demonstrated that the indigenous population was untrustworthy, they disagreed about which French policies had instigated its outbreak. Some maintained that the Empire and Algeria’s military administration were primarily responsible, whereas others claimed that it was the new republic and its civil administration that had created the instability that made insurrection possible. These contrasting positions emerged at least in part from conflicting beliefs about the legacy of the Second Empire and the political conflicts that had transpired in Algeria following its collapse, and they served as a referendum on both the Empire’s and Republic’s respective relationships with Algeria. They also presented an opportunity for republicans to differentiate the new regime in Algeria from its previous administration, demonstrate that the continued republican presence there represented a new era, and lay out a vision for a new “republican” Algeria.

The conversation in Algeria itself about the territory’s problems did not focus directly on the relative merits of the Empire or Republic. Instead, most commentators argued that the

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military administration was responsible for the recent conflict in the territory and blamed military officers for the recent revolt’s outbreak and spread. *L’Akhbar*, for example, claimed that because military operated as a corrupt system, it had had a “damaging” effect on both the indigenous and colonist population. By first mismanaging native Algerians and then limiting European colonization, it implied, the military regime had set the stage for a revolt and then weakened the state’s ability to suppress it. Other authors went a step farther, and implied that the military had deliberately provoked the conflict. As *L’Alger française* argued, if the military had acted immediately, the insurrection would have been “easy to put down the revolts with a single blow” but “the military authority neglected to put its foot down on the first sparks, and now everything is on fire.” The author went on to imply that this negligence was deliberate because the military was trying to use the revolt in order to prove that it was critical to France’s authority in the territory. Settlers in Algeria thus sought to use the conflicts in Algeria to show that the bureaux arabes and military governance were corrupt, self-serving, and ineffective institutions that would be detrimental to Algeria’s future, even if the government in France was becoming “republican.” At the same time, they promised that a civilian government that promoted colonization would bring stability to the territory under a new republic.

These arguments about the military’s role in recent Algerian conflicts extended into the metropolitan press, and especially to republican newspapers – at least in part because Algerian colonists wrote in to them to express their opinions about the unfolding events. Charles Jourdan,

96 “Alger,” *L’Akhbar* (30 September 1871), excerpt in F80/1862. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM.
97 *L’Alger française* (11 May 1871), excerpt in F80/1862. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM.
98 He argued, “Now, certainly, something other than militias are necessary for protecting colonized territory, but they would have sufficed before Mokrani, the intimate friend of General Augerau… raised the standard of revolt. At the beginning of the uprising, it would not have been impossible to stop it short with the forces that remained in Algeria. But you know as well as us… why troops are kept in Algiers and other villages instead of sending them out immediately against the roots of the agitation…” See *ibid.*
an influential settler journalist, wrote a series of letters to *Le Siècle* attacking the military and its attempt to handle the revolts. In these letters, he suggested – even more openly than the *Alger française* had – that the military had purposely “allowed the insurrection to grow” in order to prove that its officers were still necessary to protect French rule in Algeria. By highlighting Muqrani’s longstanding ties to several of the bureau’s important officers, moreover, he even implied that the *bureaux arabes* might have started the revolt in the first place. He went so far as to demand an official inquiry into the military’s behavior during the revolt, and warned that the government would prosecute any officers who had committed “crimes” against the state. He concluded his condemnation of the military’s ineffectiveness by expressing the hope that the metropolitan government would limit the military’s influence in the territory. This claim that officers of the *bureaux arabes* had at least sanctioned and even possibly sparked the revolts occurred in a number of metropolitan publications produced by settlers.

If the metropolitan press’ coverage of the insurrection at times reflected the reporting in Algeria, it was often much more politicized: metropolitan writers went out of their way to tie the recent conflicts to the metropolitan government. Many republican writers linked the revolts directly to Napoleon III’s policies in Algeria and specifically to his attempt to reorganize the territory into a *royaume arabe*. *La Gazette de France* thus maintained that the revolt was the result of the “faults of the Empire” and the “arabophile” policies that Napoleon III had

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100 Charles Jourdan, *Le Siècle* (6 August 1871), excerpt in F80/1862. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM.

101 Ibid.

102 See, for example, Fawtier, *L’autonomie algérienne et la république fédérale*, vi. It also appeared in metropolitan publications, including some novels. In 1878, Hector France published a novel that depicted the military as inefficient, corrupt, and brutal. Its officers fail to command the Arabs’ respect, but also kill, rape, and maim them. As a result, they push them to revolt. See Hector France, *L’Homme qui tue!* (Brussels, 1878), 63, 203, 232.
Auguste Pomel insisted that Napoleon III’s desire to create a *royaume arabe* led him and his officers to “reinforce the feudal organization of the tribe,” which degraded the Arabs’ character and pushed them to revolt. A. Lenthéric, on the other hand, tied the problems in Algeria to other disasters that he laid at the feet of the Empire: namely, the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune. He opined, “It is clear today that the politics followed by the Empire will spare us no failures. In Algeria the *royaume arabe*, Napoleon III’s foolish utopia, has brought its fruits: the insurrection of all the tribes in the province of Alger and Constantine.” Both writers, in other words, sought to show that the revolts in Algeria were part of a broader pattern of the Second Empire’s failings: its policies had led both to French defeat in Europe and indigenous revolt in North Africa. In order to redeem itself – in metropole and overseas territory alike – the French would need to adapt a radically new political system.

Even explanations of the revolt that adopted a more moderate tone often had a political agenda. Félix Robiou de la Trehonnais, an agronomist who had spent several years in Algeria, maintained that many colonist attacks on the bureaux arabes, the military administration, and Napoleon III were “calumnies.” At the same time, however, he argued that both Napoleon III and his military officers had been “seduced” by the “undeniable courage of the Arabs… their savage bohemian customs… and all the poetry in their patriarchal and free life.” He even claimed that Napoleon III and his military officials shared many commonalities with the Arabs.

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103 *La Gazette de France* (5 August 1871), excerpt in F80/1862. Fonds Ministériaux, ANOM.

104 He maintained that the royaume arabe was a “despoiling of all the territorial riches of the State in favor of the indigenous populations who had fewer rights than pretentions to it.” See Auguste Pomel, *Les races indigènes de l’Algérie: Arabes, Kabyles, Maures et Juifs.* (Oran: Ve Daquier, 1871), 34.

105 A. Lenthéric, “La Guerre en Algérie,” *Gazette de France* (1 August 1871), excerpt in F80/1862. Fonds Ministériaux, ANOM.

106 He was particularly incensed by the accusation that the bureaux arabes had driven or supported the revolt. See Félix Robiou de la Trehonnais, *L’Algérie en 1871* (Paris: Masson et fils, 1871), 19.

107 Ibid., 21.
since both belonged to a political system based on the principles of “absolute sovereignty.” As a result of the Empire’s desire to preserve this “splendid mirage of the desert,” he insisted, the Emperor and his officers had treated the Arabs too leniently, and had wrongly opposed the expansion of European settlements. These two policies led to an uncontrolled indigenous population that revolted when its Bonapartist-protected privileges were challenged. Trehonnais thus argued against the often-repeated contention that Napoleon III and the bureaux arabes had been conspiring against Algeria to serve their own interests, but his characterization of the Napoleonic bureaus’ motivations was, if anything, just as damning. After all, he implied that the French imperial government and Arab tribes in the Algerian desert lived by the same patriarchal codes and had much in common. In the context of a well-developed colonial discourse that often invoked those desert tribes as the epitome of barbarian practices and feudal values, such a comparison was highly unflattering to the Second Empire and its administration. Moreover, like other authors, Trehonnais concluded by noting that the problems with the Second Empire’s administration demonstrated that Algeria’s future lay in a republican civilian administration and expanded colonization.

Republican Visions of Algeria: Assimilation

If republicans tended to paint the Second Empire as responsible for Algeria’s problems while implying that the new republic would restore the territory, they did not necessarily agree
on how the republic would solve these problems or on the relationship it would have with Algeria. Many concurred that the republic would redeem the faults of the past by granting the colonists the “political liberty” that was intrinsic to republican government.111 But they had sharp disagreements about what this “political liberty” would look like and the specific relationship with France it would entail. Although many republicans argued that Algeria should be entirely assimilated into the French nation, others proposed that France should restructure its relationship with Algeria and its other overseas territories on the principle of political autonomy.

The argument that Algeria should assimilate into the French nation had a long history, dating back at least to the Second Republic.112 During the last years of the Second Empire, settlers had used the idea to criticize the military administration and demand that the state grant Algeria’s European population the same civil rights and governmental institutions as those guaranteed to French citizens within France itself. The settlers were usually less clear about the position that the indigenous population would occupy in this new “assimilated” state, especially in 1870-71, when they mostly formulated their demands as though native Algerians did not exist. The conversation about “assimilation” expanded in the early 1870s as both metropolitan and colonist writers disagreed about what such a program would mean for Algeria and France.

Some of these disagreements centered on the timeline for Algeria’s integration. René de Semallé, for example, contended that Algeria should immediately merge with France. He argued that there should “no longer be a country officially called Algeria, only overseas departments,

112 The French theory of “assimilation” itself had an even longer history, dating back at least to the French revolution. Scholars have shown that the theory of “assimilation” emerged out of the universalist ideals of French revolutionary republicanism, which held that “human nature… was a universal impervious to cultural and historical difference,” and as a result, all men should have a set of equally universal rights. See Osama Abi-Mershed, Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 9.
each independent of the others… Algeria should only be a topographical name…” He insisted that the European settlers should become French citizens with full voting rights and that metropolitan ministries and laws should govern them. As a result, he claimed that Algeria’s administrative and legal system needed to be transformed to match the metropole’s. Louis Rinn, on the other hand, asserted that immediate “pure and simple assimilation” would not be possible in Algeria. He argued that the republican government should instead slowly work to “suppress the laws of exceptions… and, insofar as it is possible, the positions that do not exist in the metropole… and arrive at rules marked by unity, simplicity, and fixity.” He nevertheless believed that eventually, Algeria would integrate into the metropole and warned that it “must not be isolated and separated from France by governmental institutions… that continue to make Algeria a colony… because she has the right to be considered an integral part of French territory.” He promised that by suppressing the distinction between civil and military territory and applying French law whenever possible, Algeria would slowly become “overseas France.” Although these writers concurred that Algeria was not a colony and should instead become “part of France,” their interpretations of the time that incorporation would require diverged.

113 René de Semallé, Projet d’organisation de l’Algérie (April 1871), 5.
114 Charles Strauss similarly contended that Algeria was not “a colony” but “the extension of France.” See Charles Strauss, L’Assimilation et la reconstitution du Ministère de l’Algérie (Paris: Chez tous les librairies, 1874), 11.
115 Strauss’ position was somewhat less radical than Semallé’s. He did not argue that Algeria needed to be divided into departments that were indistinguishable from other French departments. Instead, he argued, Algeria needed to have its own minister, located in Paris, who would both ensure that the metropolitan government devoted more of its attention to the territory and formulate policies to encourage colonization. See ibid., 26.
117 Ibid., vii.
118 Ibid., 20.
119 Ibid., 10.
Advocates of assimilation also disagreed about its implications for the indigenous population. They had very different ideas about the degree to which Algeria’s indigenous population would “assimilate” and about the form that their assimilation would take. Some authors indicated that some indigenous populations would continue to exist in a separate sphere. René de Semallé, for example, proposed that a “Commission of Arab and Kabyle Affairs” – which could function similarly to the US Commission of Indian Affairs - should oversee the indigenous population in the south. He insisted that in the rest of Algeria, however, the French government should force assimilation by dividing tribal property between individuals and banning polygamy. At the same time, however, he implied that these peoples’ “assimilation” would be partial because they would have none of the rights of French citizens. Auguste Pomel, on the other hand, divided the indigenous population by ethnic group instead of by location. He argued that the Arabs could not assimilate into French society and that the government should therefore relocate them to the Sahara. The Kabyles, on the other hand, shared French political values, so it would be easy to incorporate them. Although Pomel did not claim that the Kabyles would become French citizens, he argued that the government would eventually be able to “reconcile” their laws and customs with those of France.

Pomel and Semallé both argued that some indigenous groups would integrate into French society more rapidly than others, but other authors insisted on a more radical assimilation that

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121 He also argued that all of their currently recognized communal political rights should be abolished. See *ibid.*, 12.
122 He argued that the Arabs had no rights to their land anyway, and that Algeria would never be peaceful if they remained scattered throughout the territory. See Auguste Pomel, *Les races indigènes de l’Algérie: Arabes, Kabyles, Maures et Juifs. Du rôle que leur réservent leurs aptitudes* (Oran: Ve Daquier, 1871), 40.
would incorporate everyone. Henri de Senhaux, for example, agreed with Semallé’s contention that the government should force assimilation by eliminating tribal property, but he contended that the policy should apply to all of Algeria. He also argued that the state should eliminate all indigenous officials and rule the indigenous population directly through European justices of peace. These justices would enforce French law in all parts of Algeria. The indigenous population would thus legally assimilate into the state – although, like Sémallé, Senhaux insisted that they would not have the rights of French citizens. An “officer of the militia” proposed a more systematic plan. Like the other writers, he insisted that assimilation would have to begin with the institution of individual property. But he also argued that the state should transform Arab tribes into cantons and communes and use European administrators to oversee them. These communes would have the same type of administration and justice system as their European counterparts. The Arabs would be able to continue to practice most of their customs, although the officer insisted, that the state should force them to give up polygamy. All of these authors thus proposed measures that would force indigenous peoples to adopt French legal, economic, and cultural norms – even as they denied them political rights.

Some authors were more concerned about the legal rights of the newly assimilated Arab population. Louis Rinn, for example, agreed that the indigenous population needed to adopt French customs. However, he claimed that the best way to convince them to do this was to

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125 It is also worth noting that he also thought that the government should take away much of this property and give it to settlers. See Henri de Senhaux, *La France et l’Algérie* (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1871), 53.
126 He indicated that they would make some exceptions for Muslim beliefs. See *ibid.*, 88.
127 Like Senhaux, he also thought that most tribal land should be given away to European settlers. See *À Monsieur le Vice-Amiral de Gueydon: La pacification de l’Algérie* (Constantine: Louis Marle, 1871), 15.
128 *À Monsieur le Vice-Amiral de Gueydon: La pacification de l’Algérie* (Constantine: Louis Marle, 1871), 10.
“multiply the means of contact between colonists and natives” by granting land to colonists in indigenous territory. He argued that these colonists would slowly influence the surrounding tribes and bring them closer to French traditions. At the same time, however, he asserted that true assimilation would require that the indigenous population participate in Algeria’s politics and administration. Like other authors, he did not believe that they should gain French citizenship or electoral rights equivalent to those of Europeans; he contended that it would be “impossible” for the indigenous population to be represented at the National Assembly. Instead, he argued, the population should be “consulted” on matters that concerned them directly. He claimed, “if we really want to penetrate Algeria with our democratic institutions, we must… call on the natives to give us their views, in all that concerns purely Algerian questions….“ He suggested that some Arabs should be admitted to Algeria’s consultative council and encouraged to participate in some basic decision-making processes, though they would still lack the right to vote in French elections or participate in other political institutions.

It is clear that advocates of assimilation had very conflicting ideas about the degree to which the indigenous population would be included in the process. Louis Rinn was unusual in advocating for an “assimilation” that would include indigenous peoples and that would, in limited ways, accommodate their voices. Most agreed that assimilation should not entail citizenship or any political rights for native Algerians. Because indigenous groups made up the bulk of Algeria’s population, this political exclusion represented a tension in the thought of pro-assimilation advocates who sought to make Algeria into an “extension” of the French nation.

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130 Rinn, Algérie assimilée, 12, 49.  
131 Ibid., 18.  
132 Ibid., 32.
Despite these tensions, treating Algeria as an extension of France had a number of ideological benefits: most notably, it served as a way to distinguish between the republic’s relationship with its overseas territories and the empire’s. If in the immediate aftermath of the war, republicans of all stripes had effectively discredited the term “empire,” describing Algeria as a part of France became a way to avoid the implications of maintaining an overseas empire while repudiating metropolitan empire at home. If Algeria was a part of republican France and not a component of a multinational Mediterranean Empire, republicans could more effectively distance themselves from both Napoleon III’s metropolitan and overseas empires without having to explain the apparent contradiction of a republic that was also still an empire.

**Republican Visions of Algeria: Autonomy**

In contrast to the many writers who argued that the new Third Republic should assimilate Algeria into the French nation, some authors insisted that France should reconstitute Algeria as a semi-autonomous French colony. Those who made the case for Algeria’s autonomy did so for different reasons. One group claimed that Algeria could never assimilate into France because its indigenous population would only slowly – if ever - adapt to French rule. Roubiou de la Trehonnais, for example, insisted that the native Algerians were too uncivilized and unruly to be controlled by French law.133 Giving the indigenous peoples the liberal institutions and immunity against arbitrary power that came with civil institutions would only encourage them to revolt.134

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133 He did not approve of the bureaux arabes, however. He claimed, “One can say that what made up the base of the bureaux arabes’ policies was the cult of the indigenous and the hatred of the colonist and of everything that favors colonization. This cult of the indigenous led the [officers] to build mosques and furnish the indigenous with free transports for visiting Mecca… The spirit of the bureaux arabes’ policy was characterized above all by a flagrant partiality for a conquered race…” See Robiou de la Trehonnais, *L’Algérie en 1871* (Paris: Masson et fils, 1871), 27.

134 He associated such rights with the policies of the bureaux arabes and insisted, “The Arabs are today what they were at the moment of the conquest in their customs, their education, and their way of being, thinking, and acting, but as for their sentiments towards us, there exists among them a greater distance and a more ardent desire to escape
The army, stripped of its political authority, would have to continue to govern them, until the French broke down their customs – especially their joint property ownership and family structure. As a result, he concluded that Algeria’s administration needed to be independent from France’s so that it could govern its settlers as French citizens while subjecting the indigenous population to a different regime. A. Villacrose similarly condemned recent attempts to subject the Arabs to French law. He warned the government that many of the measures it had taken to assimilate Algeria were premature and would lead only to instability. Even the first steps towards Algeria’s assimilation would be many years away - after the native Algerians died or left the territory. Even though most pro-assimilation authors also indicated that the indigenous population would not fully assimilate, they did not argue that this population would prevent the territory’s assimilation in the same way that Trehonnais and Villacrose did.

Other writers defended the idea of an autonomous Algeria in abstract political terms. J. G. Bézy, a former military officer who had long opposed Napoleon III’s policies in Algeria, argued, much like Trehonnais and Villacrose, that the indigenous population posed an obstacle to Algeria’s assimilation. He noted that the republican principles of liberty and universal suffrage

our control… This is what the bureaux arabes’ policy of conciliation has brought us…” See A. Villacrose, Vingt ans en Algérie, ou tribulations d’un colon racontées par lui-même (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1875), 29.

135 He felt that the army in itself was not problematic; he felt that without the influence of Napoleon III, military officers would be able to enforce France’s goals. See Ibid., 32, 43.

136 He argued, “The superior administration… has… taken measures that would be excellent in ten, twenty, or thirty years… but that, at the present hour, have terrible immediate effects.” Although a civil administration could oversee the territory’s cities, the military could better enforce order in the countryside because commanded the Arabs’ respect. If the government was determined to replace military officials with civilian administrators, no one should think that these administrators would have responsibilities that echoed their metropolitan counterparts. He noted, “There is an immense difference between the functions of an administrator and justice of the peace in France and their counterparts in Algeria.” Ibid., 134, 219, 228.

137 He maintained, “There is an absolute incompatibility between the Arab and the Frenchman; at the moment when the native is naturalized, whether he wears our clothing, or accepts our customs, he is still Arab, but he is only Muslim in name: he has become… a free thinker, and consequently an atheist.” There were very few Arabs, he argued, who were willing to undergo such a transformation. He did not argue that the population should be exterminated or moved into the desert, but claimed it was slowly diminishing. Eventually, he maintained, the Arabs that remained would decide to move – of their own volition – to Tunisia and Morocco. See Ibid., 144, 146.
that worked well in France did not function in Algeria because the indigenous population was in
“great majority.” If France granted the native Algerians voting rights, France would be “drowned
in a fanatical and oblivious mass of voters who are hostile to our progress and even our presence
in Algeria.” Excluding them, on the other hand, would create a country “of 30 thousand voters
in a state of three million inhabitants.” Algeria thus required a hybrid administrative system in
order to account for the needs of both its indigenous and European inhabitants. Unlike
Trehonnais and Villacrose, Bézy did not treat Algerian assimilation as even an attractive if
impossible goal. Instead, he maintained, France should transform Algeria into a semi-
autonomous state that had the liberty to determine its own affairs while maintaining a “national
link” to the French Republic. Notably, Bézy did not advocate for this semi-autonomous status to
be applied to Algeria alone. In fact, he argued, France itself should become a “federated
republic” made up of decentralized states loosely linked to one another, thus suggesting a
political model that few French republicans in France or abroad would ever accept.

Paul Fawtier, a republican who expressed sympathy for the Parisian Communards,
similarly claimed that Algeria should not assimilate into France because such a move would lead
to “excessive centralization, the instrument of all despotisms.” He noted that the settlers had
called for assimilation under the Empire in order to stave off the “monstrous idea of the Royaume
arabe” but claimed that the idea was now “inapplicable” to Algeria because its population was
too different from that of France. He did not believe that this intractable difference resulted from
the indigenous population (as Trehonnais, Villacrose, or Bézy had argued); on the contrary, he

138 J. G. Bézy, Notes sur l’Algérie (Oran: Ch. Pothier, 1879), 23.
139 Ibid., 22.
140 Ibid., 21.
141 Paul Fawtier, L’autonomie algérienne et la république fédérale (Constantine and Paris: Challamel, 1871), 1.
maintained that “the only assimilation that is possible is that of [turning] the indigenous race into the conquering one.”\textsuperscript{142} Instead, the issue stemmed from the fact that Algeria’s settler population consisted of immigrants from all over Europe. These immigrants could not become French: instead, they needed to come together to create a distinctive Algerian nation.\textsuperscript{143} This nation would relate to France through a federal system: it would send representatives to Paris and contribute to France’s government and defense. At the same time, however, it would have its own colonial parliament and constitution that the settlers alone would determine instead of the metropolitan government. Like Bézy, Fawtier’s embrace of a federal system extended beyond Algeria itself: he argued that France should also be divided into semi-autonomous provinces and communes that would make many decisions independently from the federal government.\textsuperscript{144}

Other publications echoed Fawtier’s insistence that Algeria could not assimilate because the needs of its settlers differed from those of metropolitan French citizens.\textsuperscript{145} T. E. A. Juillet Saint-Lager, for example, insisted that granting settlers the right to elect representatives to the French National Assembly would not solve Algeria’s problems, because the territory’s representatives would only constitute a small minority of the Assembly’s deputies. French politicians who knew nothing about the territory would therefore have the greatest influence over

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\textsuperscript{142} While he argued that the indigenous population would eventually assimilate, he did not plan to grant them rights of citizenship immediately. Only the Algerian Jews would immediately exercise citizenship rights: the Muslims would only become citizens after they assumed individual property ownership and paid taxes. See \textit{Ibid.}, 3.

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Ibid.}, 6.

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Ibid.}, 15.

\textsuperscript{145} Juillet Saint-Lager also believed that the indigenous people in Algeria could not be entirely assimilated, however. While he believed that the military government should be abolished, he argued that native Algerians’ institutions and religions needed to be at least to some degree respected. He nevertheless clearly believed that the French should attempt to transform Muslim law slowly over time. Ultimately, he hoped to “drown the indigenous population in a denser and more compact European population.” See T.-E.-A Juillet Saint-Lager, \textit{France et Algérie: Solutions de quelques-unes des questions à l’ordre de jour} (Alger: Imprimerie de Juillet Saint-Lager, 1871), 11.
Algeria’s administration and future. Instead of subjecting the territory to the whims of metropolitan politicians, he argued, Algeria should relate to France as a semi-autonomous state in a wider federal system. Its European settlers should follow the same civil laws and exercise the same civil rights as their metropolitan counterparts. But the settlers should also have the right to appoint representatives who would write Algeria’s constitution and determine its future. By granting the territory its own “colonial assembly,” Juillet Saint-Lager maintained, France would ensure that Algeria’s government would be able to create policies and laws designed specifically to solve local problems. Like the other federalists, however, Saint-Lager did not envision a semi-autonomous system in which the indigenous people would have equal rights.

Bézy, Fawtier, and Juillet Saint-Lager did not only proffer suggestions for remodeling Algeria’s administration. They also suggested theoretical frameworks for understanding the nature of Algeria, its relationship to France, and the French nation itself. For Bézy, this framework shared some commonalities with the assimilationists’. Like the assimilationists, Bézy treated Algeria as part of France, but he proposed a vision of a decentralized French nation made up of territories that were only loosely bound together. Algeria could thus become part of the French nation without “integrating” into it. Although Fawtier and Juillet Saint-Lager shared Bézy’s view of a decentralized French nation, they went beyond Bezy by arguing that Algeria should remain outside of France. Fawtier insisted that Algeria would become its own nation, bound to France through a set of republican political allegiances. Juillet Saint-Lager, on the other hand, maintained that Algeria should be understood above all as a French “colony” comparable

146 Ibid., 5.
147 Juillet Saint-Lager argued that federation would solve the problems of over-centralization that had haunted France ever since the revolution. See ibid., 25.
148 Ibid., 36.
to the British colony of Canada. In fact, he specifically advocated for the French government to adopt the British model of semi-autonomous settler rule and apply it in Algeria. He thus invoked a wider international history of colonialism and used it to defend a very particular vision of Algeria. This vision had sweeping theoretical implications for Algeria’s future and for its relationship to the French nation. By narrating a multinational history of Europe’s overseas colonies and inscribing Algeria within it, Saint-Lager detached Algeria from European metropolitan empires like Napoleon III’s and implied that the practice of modern colonization was distinct from traditional European imperialism. Such arguments were not entirely new.

Juillet Saint-Lager had also compared Algeria to British colonies in a number of other pamphlets — even ones that did not necessarily advocate for Algerian autonomy. None of these calls for Algerian autonomy gained much traction in the immediate aftermath of 1870-1871 – perhaps in part because many of the advocates for autonomy suscribed to a theory of federalization that

149 Napoleon III’s insistence that Algeria was not a colony was based on the belief (drawn from Ismaël Urbain) that the term “colony” did not just signify a state’s overseas territory; it referred to a territory that a state intended to populate with its own citizens. Because Napoleon III thought that indigenous peoples would remain the primary population of Algeria, he thought calling it a “colony” would be misleading. See Levallois, Ismaïl Urbain, 322.

150 This model of colonization, he argued, was superior to the French model, which was based on Roman methods of military occupation and forced exploitation. He noted that the decision to exile 1848ers to Algeria was similar to the Romans’ use of slave labor to build their colonies. This model was inefficient, because it meant that Algeria’s colonists did not want to be there. Moreover, the presence of political radicals made Algeria unattractive to other prospective colonists. Semi-autonomous settler rule would enable Algeria’s inhabitants to create useful laws that would promote enterprise and attract a large European population. See Juillet Saint-Lager, France et Algérie, 4, 12.

151 In 1866, Jules Duval differentiated between European metropolitan empire and overseas colonial empire. Duval had maintained that all absolutist governments – whether monarchies or empires – were unable to understand or operate colonies. To thrive, he argued, colonists needed “complete liberty” – a guarantee that absolutist governments were unable to provide. Duval thus blamed “colonial Caesarism” for the failures of Napoleon III’s Algerian policies. For Algeria to succeed as a colony, Duval argued, France needed a different kind of government altogether – not a Bonapartist empire, but a republican regime that would allow for greater freedom of initiative. His critique thus sought to pull apart Napoleon III’s association of “metropolitan empire” with “colonial empire,” implying that they were opposed enterprises that required distinct sets of political institutions. See Jules Duval, Reflexions sur la Politique de l’Empereur en Algérie (Paris: Challamel Ainé, Commissionnaire pour l’Algérie et l’Etranger, 1866).

152 Henri de Senhaux, for example, did not argue that Algeria should be structured as a semi-autonomous colony. But even as he argued that Algeria should be assimilated into France, he compared France’s colonization efforts in Algeria unfavorably to England’s efforts in North America and Australia. See Henri de Senhaux, La France et l’Algérie (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1871), 64. See also A. Aubanel and J. Maistre, Notes sur l’Algérie, 2nd ed. (Nimes: Imprimerie Clavel-Ballivet, 1878), 9.
became discredited after the Paris Commune. But they represented an early effort to define and legitimize France’s relationship to overseas territory by invoking a language that did not depend on older French or European imperial formations.

**Conservative and Bonapartist Critiques**

Not all writers held the military, the bureaux arabes, or Napoleon III responsible for Algeria’s problems and the recent widespread revolt. Nor did they all agree on the ability of the republican state to remake Algeria and secure its future. Some instead argued that Algeria’s current problems resulted from the failings of the new republican administration that had come to power in the wake of September 4. These writers were usually more sympathetic to the military regime, and interested in defending aspects of Napoleon III’s policies towards Algeria. They sought to show that it was the Republicans, rather than the military or the Bonapartists, who were responsible for Algeria’s problems – an argument that had much in common with the Bonapartist argument against the Republic within metropolitan France. A number of these writers pointed specifically to the administration’s decision to pass the Crémieux decree that granted Algerian Jews French citizenship. Louis Serre, for example, argued, “without the naturalization of the Jews… the revolt would have never happened.” He noted that the Arabs “hated” the Jews

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155 François Leblanc de Prébois, for example, insisted that Arab anger over Jewish naturalization had pushed them to revolt against an administration they saw as unjust. He thus used the Crémieux decree as evidence that it was the republican administration’s decisions, and not the legacy of the Second Empire, that was responsible for the Algerian disaster. Leblanc de Prébois was a military officer who had long served in Algeria. See François Leblanc de Prébois, *Bilan du régime civil de l’Algérie à la fin de 1871* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1871), 5.

156 He also argued that the events of the Paris Commune and their radical echoes in Algeria played a role. Like Leblanc de Prébois, Serre was a former military officer. See Louis Serre, *Arabes martyrs. Étude sur l’insurrection de 1871 en Algérie* (Paris: E. Lachaud, 1873), 8.
because they were “soft, cowardly, and effeminate” and as a result, they were “humiliated” when the Jews were elevated to a position above them.  

Serre concluded by arguing that the decree had been a disastrous mistake on the part of the Algerian administration, and cast doubt on the ability of the republican administration’s ability to draft responsible legislation for Algeria.

Some authors implied that the revolt stemmed from issues that went beyond a single republican decree to include a broader set of problems that characterized the new republican regime. Many pointed to the republic’s decision to establish a civil administration. Le Temps, for example, contended that the insurrection was “uniquely the result of discontent and irritation caused by the introduction of the civil regime.” François Leblanc de Prébois agreed, but took the argument a step farther: he maintained that the civil regime caused the insurrection and was also responsible for its size and duration. The civilian government’s inability to control native Algerians, he asserted, proved that it was “weak” and “inane.” He argued that the prospect of eliminating the military administration in a territory almost entirely composed of indigenous peoples was “an illusion;” instead of eliminating the bureaux arabes, the French should expand their authority over “civil” and “military” territories alike because the military was the only force in the territory that could ensure security. He thus turned the settlers’ attempts to blame the military for the revolt on their head, claiming that the revolt stemmed not from the legacy of the military regime but from the colonists’ and republic’s desire to eliminate it.

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157 Ibid., 9.
158 Ducrot also argued that the Arabs had been insulted by the Crémieux decree. See Ducrot, La Vérité, 40.
159 “Affaires des grands chefs arabes,” Le Temps (27 March 1871), 3.
160 Prébois, Bilan du régime de l’Algérie à la fin de 1871, 3.
161 Ibid., 11, 13.
162 This attempt to defend the military regime also extended into contemporary literature. In 1876, Ernest Feydeau, who had written a number of novels sympathetic to Napoleon III’s attempt to restructure Algeria in the 1860s, wrote a novel entitled, Souna: Moeurs arabes that portrayed the military as the organization that best understood the
Several other authors echoed Prébois’ claim that the revolts proved that a “civil government” would never be able to rule Algeria, but they offered different reasons for its failures. In *Le Gaulois*, C. de Salvière argued that the civil government’s real weakness reflected the fact that it was beholden to the settlers’ interests. As a result, it was unable to mediate between the colonists and native Algerians: it would simply subsume the needs of the indigenous people to those of the colonists. He claimed that the settlers were well aware of the radical imbalance of power that a civil government would bring, and maintained that it was, in fact, the reason that they pursued civil government so avidly. He noted that the colonists “had all the impatience of a new people” and wanted to secure their fortunes. They hated the military regime because it “interrupted their taste for domination” and saw the civil regime as “more apt… to enrich them.” Salvière thus implied that the colonist population’s attempt to defend the civil regime by invoking republican ideals stemmed primarily from a desire to secure their own interests. They had succeeded in duping their metropolitan republican allies, he argued, but the indigenous Algerian population was aware of their motives. The Kabyles thus rose up against the civil government because they saw that it would strip them of all of their privileges. He concluded by warning that the indigenous population would continue to revolt against a civil government that so radically opposed their interests. An anonymous former Algerian officer offered a similar argument. He maintained that the indigenous population had revolted against the civil regime because it “signified the enslavement of the indigenous population by the indigenous population and that as a result, was best able to exercise authority over it. Faydeau also criticized the republicans’ decision to grant citizenship to Algerian Jews, whom he described as “rodents.” See Ernest Faydeau, *Souna: Moeurs Arabes* (Paris: Ancien Maison Michel Lévy Frères, 1876), 19, 182.

163 He even implied that the republicanism of this population was basically a sham, noting that their taste for republicanism stemmed from day that the imperial government “declared indigenous property incommunicable.” See C. de Salvière, “L’Insurrection de l’Algérie,” *Le Gaulois* (22 August 1871), 2.

164 They respected the bureaux arabes because “they respected the sword, the sign of force that exerts an uncontestable prestige on oriental peoples.” See *ibid.*, 2.
Europeans.”165 Like Salvière, he thus insisted that a civil government could never rule Algeria because it would lead to endless indigenous insurrections. But he also maintained that such an administration would have negative consequences for France, both because its oppressive nature would violate the country’s Christian morality and because it would prevent Algeria from becoming stable and prosperous.166 Both Salvière and the anonymous military officer thus sought to counter settler arguments that the civil administration was both inherently more “just” than its military counterpart and would necessarily lead to greater prosperity and stability in Algeria. Instead, they maintained, the civil regime was an illegitimate form of administration that would make it impossible for France to effectively hold onto the territory.

Many of the authors who condemned the Third Republic’s policy decisions in Algeria also implied that republicanism itself was responsible for the territory’s current problems. Some went so far as to insist that the settlers’ radical republicanism had played a key role in sparking the insurrection. Louis Serre argued that the Algerian “radical press” and “Communard movements” frightened and alarmed the indigenous population, and pushed them to revolt against French rule.167 Prébois similarly maintained that the radical settlers’ printed attacks against the Second Empire and their protests against the military administration alienated the Arabs in particular, who saw Napoleon III and the military as their protectors.168 C. de Salvière, on the other hand, argued that it was above all the colonists’ behavior that alienated the indigenous population. He noted that after the September 4th Revolution, the colonists –

166 He maintained that this was in part because the settler population was untrustworthy, and claimed that the events of 1870-71 had shown that they only had only minimal loyalty to France. The indigenous population, on the other hand, he argued, had fought for France against the Germans. See Ibid., 22.
167 Serre, Les Arabes martyrs, 12.
168 Prébois argued that Algerian cities were composed of a “cosmopolitan and floating population” that was “infested by the demagogic spirit.” See Prébois, Bilan du régime civil, 5.
“excited” by “passions” - organized into committees of defense “under the pretext of the war with Prussia” and pestered the government to remove all of the soldiers from Algeria and replace them with citizen militias. As a result, most of the officers who had experience working with the indigenous tribes disappeared. The civilian prefects sent in to replace them failed to treat the tribes with respect. These insults, combined with the bad news from the war with Germany and “seditious” articles printed in the colonist press, drove the indigenous tribes to revolt. Serre, Prébois, and Salvière thus all directly linked the settler population’s radical republican activism to the indigenous population’s discontent, and implied that it was radical republicanism, rather than imperialism, that was the cause of the problems in Algeria.

Despite the fact that these critics of the new republican government and the civil regime were more sympathetic towards the indigenous population in Algeria, most of them nevertheless agreed that colonization – under military supervision – would be a key component of ensuring Algeria’s future security. Jules Quinemant, a retired military officer and Algerian settler, claimed that the Arabs “could not be assimilated,” but that the military could “move them closer to us.” Moreover, he insisted, the Arabs would never be able to make Algeria prosperous, because they were incapable of improving or farming their land. In order to ensure Algeria’s future wealth and stability, Quinemant argued, the government needed to inspire a large wave of European colonization so that the French population would “counterbalance… that of the indigenous.” However, he insisted, the government should not count on immigration to populate Algeria, but should instead settle former soldiers in military agricultural colonies. These colonists, he averred, would be better able to defend themselves against the predations of the Arabs. At the same time,

170 Ibid., 7.
they would also slowly gain the respect of their indigenous neighbors who only respected military force. This vision of colonization thus positioned the spread of the settler population as equivalent to the spread of the military’s influence in Algeria. Instead of replacing the military government with a civil government in order to placate the colonists, he proposed to displace the civil colonist population with a military one. Quinemant’s proposal was unique. But a number of other critics of the civil regime agreed that while the French state needed to support colonization, the nature of the colonist population needed to change. Prébois and Salvière both argued that the government should recruit colonists from the rural areas of France who would be free from the demagogy of their urban counterparts – and who would also make better farmers. Like Quinemant, they thus sought to change the nature of the colonist population in order to resolve its ongoing conflicts with the military administration.

These diverse accounts of Algeria’s problems and its potential reflected the political concerns of the people who formulated them. Many settlers had an interest in linking the recent insurrection to military incompetence because they were still seeking to eliminate the last vestiges of the military administration, and they feared that the outbreak of the revolts would convince metropolitan administrators to restore the military government. At the same time, in light of the republicans’ shifting electoral fortunes in 1871, some colonists started to separate their own desires to reorganize the colony from the conflicts of metropolitan politics. They began

171 Ibid., 12.
173 The decision to install a military official as Algeria’s new civil governor-general only consolidated this impression. A note from the prefect of Constantine to the French government noted, “As I had the honor to inform you in my earlier correspondences, the nomination of Monsieur l’Amiral de Gueydon to the Government General of Algeria has been welcomed with marked defiance by the European population. They do not believe for a minute that he could really serve as the head of a Civil Government and imagine that the government… in designating an admiral, is taking a roundabout path towards the restoration of the military regime.” See Lucet, “18 April 1871,” F80/1862. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM.
to claim that their demands did not emerge from a particular political ideology, but instead stemmed from a desire to transform Algeria into a functioning territory. Some employed the new consensus that settler colonization would serve as the basis for Algeria’s future as an argument to bolster their contention that the territory’s administration was an apolitical question. As one settler journalist contended in the fall of 1871, “Reconstituting the administration of Algeria on new bases is not politics, but colonization.”174 This argument linked colonization and civil administration in order to convince readers that people of all parties and political convictions should support the administrative reorganization of Algeria. Especially in light of the strong links between many Algerian colonists and metropolitan radical republicans during the winter of 1870-71, this type of positioning represented a discursive shift and a new political strategy.

In metropolitan France, on the other hand, descriptions of the revolt and its implications for Algeria remained deeply tied to political debates. Indeed, the historic close ties between the settlers and the republicans to some degree ensured that Algeria and its future became entangled in wider political arguments about the viability of republicanism, monarchism, and Bonapartism in the early years of the Third Republic – even at a moment when some settlers tried to depoliticize the question of Algeria’s future. Those who entered into the debate about the relative value of the civil and military administration thus usually couched their arguments in a wider set of claims about France’s political organization. Republican commentators highlighted the connections between the military regime and the Second Empire, arguing that both were primarily responsible for contemporary Algeria’s problems. They sought to demonstrate that the revolt was the result of the Second Empire’s negative legacy and not connected to the new republic. At the same time, they promised that the new republican regime would be able to bring

174 “Alger,” L’Akhbar (30 September 1871), excerpt in F80/1862. Fonds Ministériaux, ANOM.
a long-awaited peace and prosperity to the territory – even if they did not agree about what a
“republican Algeria” would look like. Conservative commentators, on the other hand, insisted
that the republicans’ changes to Algeria’s administration were responsible for the insurrection.
By arguing that the radical press played a key role in pushing the indigenous population to
revolt, moreover, they invoked the situation in Algeria as an evidence of the fact that the damage
caused by radical republicans in 1871 extended beyond Paris. They thus rejected the idea that a
civilian regime could rule Algeria more effectively than a military one and also cast aspersions
on republicanism itself by linking it to the radicalism of the Commune.

These diverse commentators also expressed fundamentally different views about the
connections between Algeria’s administrative structure and France’s political organization.
Republicans in particular tended to paint the collapse of the Second Empire as a break in
Algeria’s history, implying that it had ushered in a new era in the territory’s relationship with
France. They described the new civil administration as the natural outgrowth of republicanism,
and indicated that by changing the administration of the territory, they had transformed Algeria’s
relationship to France from an “imperial” one to a “republican” one. The new Algeria was not a
separate, subjected territory – let alone a separate nation. Instead, it would either merge with the
French nation, or exist next to it, as a semi-autonomous republican state. As a result, these
commentators implied, the new Algeria would be in line with democratic, republican values that
would redeem Algeria from the mistakes of the past.¹⁷⁵

Many of their conservative opponents, on the other hand, used a somewhat different
approach. Although most conservatives bound the civil administration to the new republican

¹⁷⁵ This line of argumentation echoed other republican political commentators’ promise that republicanism in
France would redeem the country from the faults of the Second Empire.
administration and implied that both were responsible for the indigenous revolt and Algeria’s current problems, they did not usually try to defend the Second Empire or Napoleon III’s vision of France’s relationship to Algeria. Even as they relied on some of the key principles that had underwritten his policies towards Algeria – namely, that France’s best interests lay in defending the indigenous population against the predations of the settler population – they never referred to Napoleon III by name, let alone mentioned the royaume arabe. In other words, even as they tied the failures of the civil regime to republican politics, they sought to distance the military regime from any particular kind of political organization in France. This rhetorical strategy was doubtless due, at least in part, to the degree to which Bonapartism in general and Napoleon III in particular had become discredited in the wake of French defeat. But it also meant that they struggled to present a coherent vision of Algeria’s future. They argued for the continued presence of the military regime, but did not connect the military’s presence in Algeria to any particular (or Bonapartist) understanding of Algeria’s relationship to France.

Conservative critics’ inability to articulate a clear model for a new Algeria - combined with the fact that its association with radical Communard thought had discredited the republican campaign for Algerian autonomy - meant that in the wake of 1870-71, politicians of all parties increasingly began to use “assimilation” to describe Algeria and its relationship to France. This move towards “assimilation” was also driven by a discourse that described Algeria as central to France’s future in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. The idea that Algeria was critical to France was not new: Prévost-Paradol had posited it in 1868 when he contended that strengthening the French presence in Algeria would enable the country to counter Prussia’s
Prévost-Paradol warned that France had begun to suffer from what he called “decadence,” which, he argued, was particularly dangerous in light of Britain and Prussia’s growing strength. In order to halt France’s slide into decadence and international irrelevance permanently, Prévost-Paradol insisted, the nation needed to extend its borders and increase its population. Because France had limited opportunities for expansion in Europe, it would have to follow Britain’s example and increase its reach overseas – by expanding its colonization efforts dramatically. He highlighted Algeria as the point from which the French could begin this project of colonial expansion. France, he claimed, needed to settle large numbers of colonists in Algeria to transform it into a France africaine. Once French citizens had established themselves securely across Algeria, they could extend their reach farther into North Africa, towards Tunisia and Morocco and, “finally found that Mediterranean Empire that will not only satisfy our pride, but secure our future position in the world.” Prévost-Paradol saw French colonial expansion in Algeria and North Africa as beneficial because it would provide France with military security and space for the French race, language, and culture to expand and flourish – an opportunity he found especially appealing in light of Prussian expansion in Europe and British domination of North America and Australia. See Lucien-Anatole Prévost-Paradol, *La France nouvelle*, 10th ed. (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1869), 397.


He noted, “Cultivated spirits who follow the movement of political literature remember without doubt that last chapter of *La France Nouvelle* where Prévost-Paradol, with a clairvoyance that events have cruelly justified, looked at our situation with a distressed eye… He asked what chance we had to maintain a respectable quantity of the earth and responded: the great chance is… Algérie. Prévost-Paradol’s book had a profound impression on me… it inspired in me the desire to go visit our Africain colony.” See J. J. Clamageran, *L’Algérie: Impressions de Voyage suivie d’une étude sur les institutions kabyles et la colonisation* (Paris: Librairie Germer Ballière, 1874), 2.

He argued, “Conquered and defended by our valiant army… reclaimed in part by our intrepid colonists, explored by our researchers, vitalized by our capital, *France africaine* is already, despite the mistakes committed, a title of
Even writers who did not engage with Prévost-Paradol often described Algeria as central to France’s continental security. In 1874, Charles Strauss composed a series of pamphlets arguing that Algeria was valuable to France not only because it offered the opportunity to expand France’s boundaries and population in the face of other growing European powers, but also because controlling Algeria would enable France to dominate the Mediterranean.\footnote{181} He argued that the republic should “enclose the two shores of the Mediterranean between two Frances, make Algeria an inhabited France, and we will not have to wait to recoup the fruits of this generous and civilizing creation.”\footnote{182} Controlling the Mediterranean, he implied, would both improve France’s military position and offer new opportunities for commerce and trade even as it “doubled” the size of its territories.\footnote{183} Strauss even intimated that the opportunity Algeria represented was so valuable that Germany would try to take it if not prevented.\footnote{184}

In some ways, Strauss’ desire to see France dominate the Mediterranean was similar to Napoleon III’s: both saw expansion into North Africa as an important way of securing prestige and security. Both also insisted that Algeria should not be understood as a “colony.”\footnote{185} However, Strauss’s understanding of the French overseas project was distinct from Napoleon III’s. Napoleon III had argued for the creation of a multinational Mediterranean empire in which the imperial government would exercise control over a set of distinct nations: he had asserted that

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honor for European France; governed by a liberal spirit, administrated with wisdom, peopled by a new influx of immigrants, it will become for us, beneath the aegis of the republic, an element of strength, a means of expansion, and a vivid and glorious proof of our civilizing genius.” See \textit{ibid.}, 302.
\end{quote}

\footnote{182} \textit{Ibid.}, 19.
\footnote{184} Strauss, \textit{L’Algérie et la Prusse}, 18.
Algeria was not a colony because he did not believe that its primary population would be made up of colonists. In Strauss’ vision, on the other hand, French domination of North Africa would be based on the extension of the French people over new territories. The existing populations in North Africa would have to either assimilate or leave: they certainly would not be able to form their own nation. Settlement – not political control – was at the center of Strauss’ vision for Algeria’s future. He maintained that Algeria was not a colony because it was not fundamentally separate from France: instead, it represented the prolongation of France overseas. Strauss thus described Algeria as deeply connected to the French nation and he assumed that French settlers would displace the indigenous population.

**Emigration from Alsace and Lorraine**

The idea that Algeria and France were bound together was enforced by attempts to link the territory to the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine that Germany had recently annexed. Even in 1871, some writers began to argue that France should use Algeria to “create a second France… to compensate for our diminished presence on the Rhine.” By transforming Algeria

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186 He was also specifically attempting to differentiate Algeria from British colonies, because he did not believe that they were comparable – at least in part because British possessions were much farther away than Algeria. He went out of his way to condemn proponents of Algerian autonomy who invoked Britain to justify their attempts to make Algeria more independent from France. See ibid., 13.

187 If some writers argued that Algeria offered an opportunity for France to regain its lost strength, others maintained that France’s problems in the territory reflected flaws in the French national character. An article in *Le Temps* argued that the unrest in Algeria revealed “…the lack of firmness that we decorate with the name of humanity… the vanity that persuades us that we have a mission to fulfill everywhere… that is what forms the basis of our conduct in Algeria and elsewhere.” See *Le Temps* (4 August 1871), excerpt in F80/1862. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM.

188 One writer went so far as to compare France’s position in Algeria to its former position in Alsace-Lorraine: he argued that France had lost Alsace-Lorraine in part because it had never forced the territory’s inhabitants to stop speaking German. As a result, the newly unified Germany had been able to claim that Alsatians and Lorrainers were ethnically German and thus seized the territory. In order to prevent the same thing from happening in Algeria, he argued, all of the territory’s inhabitants should be forced to learn French. See A. Aubanel and J. Maistre, *Notes sur l’Algérie*, 2nd ed. (Nimes: Imprimerie Clavel-Ballivet, 1878), 9.

189 *Le Temps* (4 August 1871), excerpt in F80/1862. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM.
into three départements, a writer for Le Temps hoped, France would be able to regain what it lost in status, population, and territory when Germany defeated it. The author of the popular children’s book Le Tour de la France par deux enfants wrote a novel devoted to the subject in 1887, Les enfants de Marcel, which described Algeria as the “new Alsace.” In this vision, merging Algeria into the French nation would not only benefit Algerian settlers, who would gain the rights, privileges, and institutions that they had been denied: it would also benefit France itself by healing the dismembered national body and conjoining it with new overseas territory.

The tendency to link Algeria and Alsace-Lorraine both drove and was driven by a visible if unsuccessful campaign to encourage displaced Alsatians and Lorrainers to move to Algeria. As early as December 1870 – long before Germany annexed the two regions - Auguste Warnier began to argue that the government should encourage French citizens living beneath German occupation to immigrate to Algeria. He insisted that in order to avoid becoming a second-rate nation and to gather its strength against a newly unified Germany, France needed to greatly expand its colonizing efforts. He claimed that many peasant families in these occupied

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190 Ibid.

191 This book was taken up by the school system and published as a course book for the “cours moyen.” See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery (New York: Macmillan, 2003), 166.

192 A few writers also invoked Alsace-Lorraine to defend the indigenous insurrection. Louis Serre argued, “If Alsace revolted to reclaim its lost nationality and if, despite our efforts, it fell again beneath the control of the conquerors, you would not have enough hatred and anger against [the Germans] if they confiscated the belongings of the defeated.” See Serre, Les Arabes martyrs, 33.

193 At the same time, Charles Lavigerie, the archbishop of Algeria, petitioned the French government to send refugees from Alsace-Lorraine to the territory. See Schivelbusch, The Culture of Defeat, 166.

194 He specifically maintained that “if France wants to remain the France of our ancestors and conserve the equilibrium, already very compromised, between her forces and that of a unified Germany and that of the Anglo-Saxon race that is the master of England and the United States… it [must] through Algeria, its only healthy anchor… create a grand Mediterranean empire that includes France… and… the majority of the Berber peninsula….” Warnier was one of the only republican writers who continued to use the term “Mediterranean empire” to describe France’s relationship with Algeria in the wake of the Second Empire’s collapse. His vision of a “Mediterranean empire” was nevertheless very distinct from Napoleon III’s. Napoleon III envisioned a
territories did not have the resources to rebuild their destroyed homes. If they remained in France, they would only impoverish the French nation, leading to ever-greater French weakness. But if France raised a relatively small tax, the government could move all of these newly impoverished peasants to Algeria. There, they would ultimately help invigorate both the colony and the metropole by generating economic capital and increasing France’s population.  

The idea that Alsatians and Lorrainers should move to Algeria became even more popular after Germany annexed the territories and gave its inhabitants the choice between leaving and surrendering their French citizenship. A movement developed to encourage the refugees to immigrate to Algeria, where they would be able to “remain French.” This idea that Algeria would represent a site wherein displaced French citizens could move in order to retain their national status became extremely popular. This plan eventually gained government support. In June 1871, the National Assembly voted to set aside 100,000 acres of the “best land” for emigrants from Alsace-Lorraine and promised to pay to transport them to the colony and set up “population centers” for them that would include a school, roads, water, and other basic services. The Algerian administration also raised money to help with the project.

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“Mediterranean Empire” composed of distinct nations, whereas Warnier was advocated for an empire that would serve as an extension of the French nation. See Warnier, L’Algérie et les victims de la guerre, 5.

195 Ibid., 59.

196 Approximately 5% of the population of the annexed territories left by 1876. See Dan P. Silverman, Reluctant Union: Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany (Pittsburgh: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 66.

197 Albert Lavigne, Questions algériennes: le régime du sabre (Paris: A. Lacroix, 1871), 43.

198 It was also championed by the archbishop of Algeria, who wrote to the refugees from Alsace-Lorraine, promising them that ‘France africaine’ was ‘a home no less French than the one you have lost. It awaits you, and its love is as great as your misfortune.” As quoted in Schivelbusch, The Culture of Defeat, 166. See also E. Ducos, L’Algérie, 4.

199 French atlases and geography textbooks published in the 1870s included this information in their sections on Alsace-Lorraine. See, for example, F. de la Brugère, Atlas national (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1877), 452.

200 “Contribution extraordinaire et sequestre 1872/1873” in GGA3E74. Fonds Ministériales, ANOM.
A number of groups emerged from across the ideological spectrum to facilitate emigration from Alsace-Lorraine and to provide resources for recent emigrants. The Society for the Protection of Alsatians and Lorrainers raised money and advocated on the behalf of emigrants to Algeria to increase their land allotments. In 1873, they even sent one of their members to Algeria in order to inspect the situation of the recent emigrés and arrange assistance for them if necessary. In 1874, the Comte d’Haussonville, an Orleanist with familial ties to the duc de Broglie, organized an art exhibition at the Palais de la Présidence du Corps Législatif to fund Alsatians and Lorrainers “who wanted to remain French” as they emigrated to Algeria.

Despite the efforts of the government and these advocacy groups, very few peasants from Alsace and Lorraine moved to Algeria, and many of those who did eventually moved back to France. These efforts nevertheless produced an enduring mythical connection between the two territories: the idea that Algeria would help make up for France’s loss proved very influential. As a result, the campaign helped secure popular conceptions of Algeria as an “extension” of metropolitan France. European settlers in Algeria had long campaigned for the territory’s assimilation into France. This assimilation was never cemented as fully as many of them might have hoped, but on a more abstract level, the idea that Algeria was an integral component of the French nation gained increasing traction in the wake of French defeat.

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201 “Immigration alsacienne et Lorraine” in GGA3E73. Fonds Ministérielles, ANOM.
202 Guynemer, who had once been the sous-préfet of Saverne, wrote a positive report about the status of the recent immigrants. See Guynemer, *Situation des Alsaciens-Lorrains en Algérie* (Paris: A. Chaix, 1873), 3, 79.
204 As John Ruedy argues, of the 125,000 Alsatians and Lorrainers who left, only 5,000 settled in Algeria. See Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 80. Even those that did emigrate mostly went to Algeria’s major cities and not to go farm land in the countryside. See Perville, *La France en Algérie*, 66.
For republicans in particular, the idea that Algeria would ultimately become a component of the French nation served a variety of purposes. On the most basic level, it placated many of their republican settler allies in Algeria, providing them with much-needed support in the National Assembly. But on a more abstract level, it also enabled republicans to differentiate between a republican Algeria and an imperial Algeria – which was in line with their attempts to distinguish between republican and Second Empire France. It gave them a new vocabulary to describe France’s republican relationship with Algeria that avoided the discredited idea of empire itself. The model nevertheless carried a number of contradictions and tensions. It remained unclear exactly how and to what degree Algeria would be able to “assimilate” into France. The position of the indigenous population in this newly assimilated Algeria also remained unclear. And perhaps even more problematically, at least on an ideological level, the language of “assimilation” did not give republicans a language to describe France’s relationship to other overseas territories. In the years to come, as republicans looked to expand French influence in other parts of the world, they would search for more comprehensive models that did not rest on the concept of assimilation.

IV. New Models of Colonization

This new model for French expansion would ultimately emerge in part from a new literature on “colonization” that began to appear in the early 1870s. This literature attempted

206 As Chapter 2 discusses, the republicans occupied a marginal position in French politics. Much of the French population was skeptical of republicanism. Throughout most of the 1870s, conservatives dominated the National Assembly. The Republicans therefore needed any support they could get. See Taïthe, Citizenship and Wars, 172.

207 This was especially true after the National Assembly passed the code de l’indigénat after the Kabylia uprising, which included thirty-three infractions that only applied to native Algerians. See Ruedy, Modern Algeria, 89.

208 In 1876, a group of colonial advocates decided to form the Société des études coloniales et militaires with the express purpose of popularizing the colonies, explaining them, and advocating for their development. See “Origine de la Société,” Bulletin de la Société des études coloniales et militaires 1 (May 1876), 3.
to provide a new working definition of “colonization” and explain the purpose, problems, and potential benefits of “colonizing” for European countries. Like Juillet Saint-Lager, many of these writers explicitly drew on British theoreticians and modeled their ideas after British colonial policy. They invoked Britain partly because they saw it as successful but also because it enabled them to distinguish between colonial expansion and the discredited Napoleonic Empire, distance their ideas from Napoleon III’s, and show that colonization was not necessarily in contradiction with republican values.

Scholars have long debated whether these scholarly attempts to define and justify colonization were influential, the nature of the role they played in French colonial expansion, and the scope of their popular influence. In 1972, Raoul Girardet contended that the theorists writing in the 1870s were largely responsible for formulating what he called the *l'idée coloniale* that would ultimately lead to the French colonial conquests of the 1880s and 1890s. More recently, other scholars have argued that most of these theorists in the 1870s were not necessarily calling for widespread colonial expansion at all, but instead were attempting to change France’s relationship with its existing overseas territories. Still others have insisted that France’s colonial ideology and especially its colonial policies were shaped by colonial administrators and settlers – and not by armchair theorists back in France. It seems clear that much of this literature was not very influential when it was first published: it lacked a popular audience, and

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209 He argued that the *idée coloniale* was created by a group of academics, economists, and missionaries, and maintained that it was based on three principles “economic theory… political reflection, and moral conscience.” These figures did not always agree with one another, but for the most part they insisted that France should pursue policies of colonial expansion because it would benefit the country economically, it would enable it to compete politically with its European competitors, and that it would improve the moral standing of colonizers and colonized alike. See Raoul Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1972), 41.

210 Lehning, *To Be a Citizen*, 132.

only a narrow range of specialists read it.\footnote{212}{Leroy-Beaulieu’s work was probably the most influential: by 1874, he had become an influential economist who published a number of economic treatises and journal articles. His work was not ignored – but it did not see wide circulation. See Warshaw, \textit{Paul Leroy-Beaulieu}, 48; J. P. Daughton, \textit{An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of the French Colonialism, 1880-1914} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10.} But it nevertheless provided an ideological foundation that would help ground justifications for French republican expansion in later years. This was partly because the theorists who wrote about colonization also worked to define the relationship between “empire” and “colonies” that had become so complicated in French political discourse in the wake of Napoleon III.

One of the earliest of these theorists was Jules Duval, a French liberal who originally published his \textit{Les Colonies et la politique coloniale de la France} in 1864 during the Second Empire. This book, which reemerged in the 1870s along with \textit{L’Algérie et les colonies françaises}, attempted to explain the meaning and purpose of colonization. Duval argued that it was an “ancient” practice that consisted of “the foundation of new societies; it is an art because of the practical methods it employs, a science because of the laws it uses.”\footnote{213}{See Jules Duval, \textit{Les colonies et la politique colonial de la France} (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1864), xviii.} Although material interests might impel a society to embark on a project of colonization, colonies also involved “moral, religious and political interests… it initiates savages and barbarians to the arts and the faith of civilization; it is the moral education of young societies.”\footnote{214}{\textit{Ibid.}, xx.} He claimed that the French practice of colonization began with the ancient Gauls, re-emerged during the Crusades, and reached its first apogee in the early modern era. He devoted much of his attention to explaining how these different colonies emerged, how they functioned, and why many of them ultimately fell apart. He then turned to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, noting that during that period, France’s colonizing efforts had largely derailed – with the exception of the 1830
conquest of Algeria and the Second Empire’s occupation of New Caledonia and Cochin.

As a result, Duval argued, contemporary France ranked only fourth among the colonizing peoples: its colonies were less numerous than England’s, the Netherlands’, and Spain’s. He argued that France needed to adjust this imbalance in order to command international respect because “all colonies… are a source of honor for the metropole.” They lent the colonizing nation prestige, moral authority, and global influence.

Even in 1864, Duval had thus described colonization as a unique kind of enterprise that was separate from metropolitan political questions and from European contiguous empires. Colonization, he argued, was the practice of founding new societies – and it thus had little to do with politics or European conflicts at all. He did imply that in order for colonies to succeed, governments needed to regulate them with policies that encouraged political, economic, and religious liberty. By demonstrating that the French had founded colonies under a wide variety of circumstances and systems of political organization, he distinguished between the practice of overseas settlement and European imperial formations, and indicated that Bonapartism and the Napoleonic Empires were unrelated to French overseas political conquests.

Nearly a decade later in 1874, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu published the first edition of *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes* – a work that tried to describe the colonizing efforts of

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216 He continued, “All nations that have… founded far away and prosperous establishments, enlightened savage and barbarous peoples, and who have… actively contributed to the civilization of the human species and to the culture of the planet, is a great nation in the eyes of humanity. The compensation [the nation] obtains in prestige transforms into useful influence… and its material power also accumulates in valiant struggles against nature.” See *ibid.*, 445.


218 Duval was not necessarily advocating for widespread colonial expansion. Instead, he hoped to encourage the French to improve their policies towards their existing colonies, and extend their authority over territory that they already had vague claims to, like Madagascar. He focused much of his attention on Algeria. See *ibid.*, 443.
all modern nations. Like Duval – whose work he drew on in a number of ways – Leroy-Beaulieu sought to define the meaning of colonization and explain its history. The scope of his work, however, was wider because he compared France’s colonizing efforts to those of other European powers. At the same time, he also worked more systematically than Duval to create an ideal model for colonization and to develop a robust theoretical justification for the practice.

Much of Leroy-Beaulieu’s first edition was devoted to an account of the history of European colonization. His narrative began in early modern Europe and examined the French, English, Spanish, and Dutch colonial projects during that era. By comparing the methods of colonization they used, he claimed that he could elicit a general theory of colonization and a model for future French colonial policy. He devoted the second half of the work to explaining this theory and recommending policies that he believed metropolitan governments should adopt vis-à-vis their colonies. Above all, he argued, colonies required both economic and political “independence.” From an economic standpoint, he contended that colony and metropole alike

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219 Leroy-Beaulieu composed the first version for a competition for the Léon-Faucher prize. The Academy of Moral and Political Science granted the prize every year to the “author of the best essay on a question of political economy.” The subject of the 1868 prize was the “colonial system of modern people.” In early 1870, the Academy pronounced Leroy-Beaulieu’s submission the winner. He published the manuscript several years later in 1874. This first edition was similar to the manuscript. See Dan Warshaw, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu and Established Liberalism in France (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1991), 84; Pierre Trépanier, “Du système colonial des peuples modernes - Un inédit de Rameau de Saint-Père.” Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française, vol. 34, n. 1, (1982), 55-56.

220 He maintained that colonization was an act undertaken, to various degrees, by all civilized peoples, and noted that both the ancient Greeks and the Romans engaged in it. He maintained that only “civilized” people could colonize and in fact invoked colonization as a sign of civilization. See Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes (Paris: Guillaume, 1874), ii.

221 He did not imply that colonization had not changed over the period he studied; in fact, he maintained that profound political and cultural shifts had occurred – mostly for the better. But he claimed that by studying past mistakes, nations would be able to avoid them in the future. Earlier colonists had mistakenly seen the colonies as exclusively “serving” the metropole. By always sacrificing the interests of the colony to those of the metropole, he maintained, European politicians had essentially ensured their failure. See Ibid., v.

222 This model sought to “fix the administrative, economic, and political principles that must preside over the creation and development of colonies.” See Ibid., vi.

223 He drew many of these insights from English colonial policies. He maintained that the absence of liberty and independence was what had caused France’s earlier colonies to fail. See Ibid., 446, 167.
would prosper most if colonies could trade on the free market. On the political front, he claimed that colonies needed to have the authority to act on internal matters independently of the central government. He insisted that settlers should elect local administrators and politicians democratically. Only once the settlers had the ability to trade and govern themselves as they saw fit, he argued, would the colonies prosper. He lamented that the French government had failed to follow these basic guidelines throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. If France hoped to keep its remaining colonies, he warned, the new republican government would have to increase these territories’ economic and political freedoms.

Leroy-Beaulieu sought to define the meaning and significance of “colony” much more systematically than his predecessor. Duval had simply equated “colony” with “settlement.” Leroy-Beaulieu, on the other hand, insisted that not all colonies were the same, and that they could take several different forms. He maintained that there were three main types of colonies: commercial colonies, agricultural colonies, and plantation colonies. Each of these colonial forms had different purposes. Commercial colonies consisted of trading outposts designed to bring goods and wealth into the metropole. These colonies, however, neither “augmented the power nor extended the race of the metropole.” Plantation colonies, by contrast, cultivated particular consumer goods like sugar and tobacco to serve the specific market for such commodities. Agricultural colonies, on the other hand, were founded by large settler populations and contributed most directly to the country’s influence and power, but they rarely did much to

224 He condemned the “colonial pact” that forbade colonies from trading with other countries. See ibid., 524

225 Ibid., 593, 235, 341.

226 Ibid., 537.

227 Ibid., 534.
enrich the metropole’s economy. Of the three types, however, he maintained that agricultural colonies were both the most complex and the most rewarding.\textsuperscript{228}

Leroy-Beaulieu’s preference - at least in the early 1870s - for settler or agricultural colonies was reflected in his justification for colonial expansion.\textsuperscript{229} He contended, “Colonization is the expansive force of a people: it is its power of reproduction… it is the submission of the universe or of a large part to its language, ideas, and laws.”\textsuperscript{230} In other words, colonization – and especially the establishment of agricultural colonies – was beneficial primarily because it would secure the future of the French language and culture by spreading it globally. Despite the fact that he was an economist, Leroy-Beaulieu thus saw the benefits of colonization as political, cultural, and national in nature. Like Duval, he believed that colonizing would help bolster France’s prestige around the globe. But he was even more concerned about the ways in which colonization would bolster the nation’s ability to compete demographically, linguistically, and culturally with other European powers.\textsuperscript{231}

Although Leroy-Beaulieu explained the purpose of colonial expansion differently from Duval, they both employed similar strategies to distinguish between the practice of overseas colonization and the Napoleonic European Empire. Leroy-Beaulieu’s approach was more explicit, however, at least in part because of its comparative methodology. Whereas Duval had argued that many different governments throughout French history had founded colonies, Leroy-Beaulieu insisted that all “civilized” peoples practiced colonization. His narration of the history

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., 535, 536.

\textsuperscript{229} He debunked what he saw as “myths” about colonies. He maintained that they would not reduce overpopulation – but at the same time, they would not strip colonizing countries of their population. He also noted that colonies did not enrich the metropole, but insisted they were less expensive to maintain than many thought. See ibid., 472, 529.

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 606.

\textsuperscript{231} He did not argue that it would benefit France economically, and in fact, most contemporary economists were very skeptical about his ideas. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, Thobie, \textit{Histoire de la France coloniale}, 561.
of colonization implied that colonial expansion had little to do with domestic political organization at all, though he did insist that governments needed to adopt specific liberal policies if they wanted to keep their colonies. And whereas Duval’s work implied that military expansion within Europe was a different enterprise than colonial expansion overseas, Leroy-Beaulieu opposed them to one another. By definition, he maintained, overseas colonization denoted the spread of one particular nation across the globe in the form of small “new” societies that would come to dominate the surrounding territory. Colonial empires were thus distinct from all older European empires because European empires ruled over a diverse set of pre-existing societies while colonial empires founded new ones. Tellingly, his history of colonization made no mention of French metropolitan empires like the one constructed by Napoleon I.

In 1874, Leroy-Beaulieu saw Algeria as the obvious site to begin to rebuild France’s colonial holdings. He argued that by adopting the right kinds of policies towards the territory, France could make it prosperous once more. But from there, he hoped, France would be able to expand its influence from Algeria towards Senegal, which would enable it “to dominate and civilize the entire northwest of Africa… We could have there beneath our influence a territory almost as large as Europe.” He also encouraged the government to invest in the French territory of Cochinchine in order to increase its influence there.

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234 He championed the “assimilationist” model for the territory. He maintained that Napoleon III’s vision of Algeria as a royaume arabe was a “deadly chimera” that would only serve to undermine the French presence in Algeria. Instead of treating the indigenous people who lived in Algeria as a separate nation, he argued, the state should take a series of measures to integrate them into settler society. See *ibid.*, 339, 354.

235 He described it as the “largest field that is open to our colonizing activity and that which will be the easiest to make prosper.” See *ibid.*, 356.


thus looked beyond Algeria, placing the North African territory in the context of a wider set of French overseas colonies instead of describing it as part of France. He also expressed the hope that France would expand its overseas holdings overseas and extend its colonizing efforts into new territories – albeit in limited ways.\textsuperscript{238} He concluded by encouraging France to improve its policies towards its existing colonies, and informing his readers that “the people who colonize the most are the first people; if they are not today, they will be tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{239}

Napoleon III had sought to secure the prestige of the Second Empire in the early 1860s by promoting a vision of empire that combined a particular political program with overseas imperial expansion. His vision of a multinational Mediterranean Empire dominated by France drew heavily on his uncle’s attempt to establish a modern version of the Roman Empire across Europe. Both Duval and Leroy-Beaulieu, on the other hand, differentiated between metropolitan and colonial expansion in no uncertain terms. The political organization of France, they implied, did not determine its relationship to the territory it conquered. These writers rebuffed Napoleon III’s specific political goals and policies and rejected his broader vision of a multinational empire, which they saw as at odds with the colonial holdings they hoped to establish. French expansion would not bring new nations into a wider French Empire, they argued: instead, it would allow the French culture, language, and “race” to spread across a wider geographical expanse. They thus provided a foundation for justifying republican colonial expansion with a model that was more flexible than “national assimilation” but remained distinct from Bonapartist

\textsuperscript{238} He argued, “It is necessary to abandon huge ambitions… Reduced today to a more modest role… we still have a vast theater for our colonizing activity. Our recent conquest, Algeria, has a magnificent future; other possessions, old or new, continental or island, Senegal, New Caledonia, Cochinchine, have natural resources and riches that European intelligence must fertilize… Finally our colonies… will recover their strength.” See \textit{ibid.}, 383.

\textsuperscript{239} See \textit{ibid.}, 606. He warned specifically that France needed to abandon its “old vices” that had long hampered its colonial ambitions: “administrative arbitrariness, the absence of municipal and provincial liberties… we have also noted persistent faults among the colonists… risky tastes, amateur characteristics, conduct full of imagination and fantasy, a spirit of improvisation, and impatience for gradual results.” See \textit{ibid.}, 385.
imperialism. At the same time, however, these descriptions of “colonization” offered no clear way to explain the relationship between the established “colony” and European “metropole.” Although Duval and Leroy-Beaulieu prescribed a number of policies that the metropolitan government should use to regulate its colonies, they did not explain the specific mechanisms that bound the two together. By avoiding the term “empire,” they were left without a vocabulary to describe the overarching political structure that connected France to its overseas territories.

If the liberal and republican thinkers who formulated theories of colonization in the 1860s and 1870s usually avoided using the term “empire” to describe the kinds of global formations they hoped to build, some more conservative theorists did use it. In 1877, L’abbé Pierre Raboisson, a conservative Catholic theorist, published one of the most influential of these texts under the title *Étude sur les colonies et la colonisation au regard de la France.* 240 In this work, instead of attempting to separate “empire” and “colony” like Duval and Leroy-Beaulieu, he explicitly linked the two concepts together. He argued, “The grandeur and prosperity of colonies makes the grandeur and prosperity of empires. As a result, it is of paramount importance that France possesses great and prosperous colonies.” 241 Raboisson went on to indicate that all empires did not necessarily possess colonies. But he insisted that all of the strongest and most successful empires in history had extensive colonial holdings. Moreover, he

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240 This work focused primarily on what Raboisson saw as the counter-productive and defeatist attitude of many of his compatriots who believed that the French could not civilize effectively. In fact, he argued, France’s struggles with colonization only dated to the Revolution, and stemmed from a series of destructive legislative changes enacted during that period. He specifically pointed to the attempt to remove the Church from French public life and to the rewriting of family law. He also implied that the ongoing political revolutions kept French attention turned destructively towards internal affairs, preventing them from looking outside towards the wider world. See Pierre Raboisson, *Étude sur les colonies et la colonisation au regard de la France* (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1877), 53.

claimed, when these empires lost their colonies, their influence and power quickly collapsed.\footnote{Historically, the importance of a state’s colonial expansion shows the measure of its strength; philosophically, it gives the state its reason... history shows... that colonization is the most effective agent of an empire’s greatness.” He pointed to Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece, Carthage, and Rome as colonizing empires. See \emph{ibid.}, 5, 8.} This formulation had two consequences. First, it indicated that colonies and empires existed in an interdependent relationship and defined colonies above all as a necessary attribute of imperial formations. Second, it implicitly described France as an “empire.”

Raboisson also defined the term “colony” differently from Duval and Leroy-Beaulieu. He argued that colonization was “the effective action of a state on a territory (possessed through treaties or conquests) to appropriate its productions and assimilate its inhabitants.”\footnote{He emphasized that the “assimilation” was more important than “appropriation.” In fact, he explicitly distinguished between “exploitation” and “colonization,” arguing that the key benefits of colonization stemmed from the ways in which it increased French influence. See \emph{Ibid.}, 17, 61.} By assimilating inhabitants, he claimed, an empire “extended its homeland, multiplied its citizens” as long as it “communicated to its colonies’ inhabitants its spirit, its heart and its faith.”\footnote{\emph{Ibid.}, 65.} Like Duval and Leroy-Beaulieu, Raboisson thus portrayed colonization as the extension of France across the globe. But whereas both Duval and Leroy-Beaulieu had argued that colonization above all signified the “settlement” of one group of people in new territory, Raboisson implied that it primarily consisted of bringing new groups of people beneath one overarching state and assimilating them into French culture.\footnote{He argued that Rome had been one of the most successful colonizers because it gained new citizens whenever it conquered new territories. See \emph{ibid.}, 7.}

Perhaps most notably, Raboisson’s account of colonization and colonial practices did not distinguish between European conquests or imperial formations and their overseas counterparts. In fact, it confounded the two. Throughout the text, Raboisson used the term “colony” to
describe any territory conquered or occupied by an “empire.” He explicitly described Alsace, Scotland, and Ireland as “colonies” of France and Britain because they were conquered territories inhabited by different peoples whom the state had assimilated, at least to some degree. He in fact invoked the Alsatians’ continued devotion to France under German rule to demonstrate how effective French colonizing efforts could be. From this perspective, France’s relationship with Alsace or Austria-Hungary’s relationship with the Czechs was not inherently distinct from France’s relationship with Algeria. Both represented conquered territories that a central state sought to administer and incorporate. Both Duval and Leroy-Beaulieu had narrated the history of colonial expansion as an enterprise entirely distinct from European imperial expansion.

Raboisson took the opposite approach: he described colonial expansion as one aspect of a broader set of imperial politics.

In some ways, Raboisson’s vision of the relationship between empire and colony had more in common with Napoleon III’s 1860s model than with the model embraced by his contemporary republican theorists. Napoleon III had also collapsed “metropolitan” and “overseas” empire together: he had sought to restructure France’s relationship with Algeria and extend the country’s influence overseas in order to invoke the memory of Napoleon I’s extensive European conquests. But Raboisson’s vision also remained distinct from Napoleon III’s. On

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246 He described nearly all of ancient Rome’s conquered territories as “colonies,” for example. See *ibid.*, 6.
247 He argued that the Alsatian’s devotion to France showed that France was a more effective colonizing power than Britain, since the Irish and the Scottish hated the British. He also described the Austrian Empire as an (ineffective) colonizing power within Britain. See *ibid.*, 67.
248 Raboisson defended this claim in part by arguing against the idea that race “explains everything about the history of peoples.” He insisted instead that the history of a people was primarily determined instead by their “morality,” noting that the Romans had spread their culture and values to people of many different races. While the process of assimilating indigenous Algerians into France might take longer than assimilating Alsatians because the indigenous Algerians had such different morals and customs, the two processes were essentially identical. See *ibid.*, 105-106.
249 He also tried to link these overseas relationships to the structure of the imperial government, implying that the Bonapartist state sat above both France and its dependent nations.
the most basic level, Napoleon III had tied the structure of France’s government to its relationship with its overseas territories, while Raboisson did not discuss France’s political organization at all. Perhaps even more importantly, however, Napoleon III defined the French Empire as a multinational entity: he promised that it would respect the distinct customs, beliefs, and practices of its different inhabitants. For Raboisson, on the other hand, the very purpose of empire was to eliminate differences between peoples, and encourage conquered peoples to adopt the customs, beliefs, and practices of the conquering state. Notably, he argued that in order to improve its relationship with its colonies, France should encourage the use of evangelical Catholicism to encourage conquered peoples to convert. Once the indigenous inhabitants of Algeria and Indochina adopted France’s religion, he implied, they would be well on the way to becoming productive French citizens.\footnote{He argued that France should export its “Christian ideas and values,” and implied that the only way that Algeria in particular would become peaceful was after the Kabyles and Arabs converted. This was at odds with Napoleon III’s attempt to preserve the culture, beliefs, and practices of Algeria’s indigenous population. See \textit{ibid.}, 49, 113.}

Raboisson’s vision of the relationship between empire and colony had a number of features that would have made it controversial in France during the 1870s. He described Alsace as a “French colony” at a moment when most politicians were describing it as an integral part of the French nation. He also insisted that the French should use Catholicism to spread their influence throughout the globe – a claim that would not have attracted the support of either republicans or liberals.\footnote{Raboisson in fact directly posited his understanding of colonialism in opposition to the “liberal” model of colonization championed by Leroy-Beaulieu. See \textit{ibid.}, 104.} But Raboisson was not an outlier in the conversation about colonization in post-Napoleonic France: he was an active member of the newly formed \textit{Société des études coloniales et maritimes}, one of the few organizations in the 1870s devoted to studying
and popularizing the French colonies.\textsuperscript{252} His account of French colonization thus demonstrates that in the 1870s, some thinkers continued to associate European empire with colonial expansion, and perceived them as politically intertwined.

Raboisson’s explanation of the relationship between colony and empire was marked by some contradictions and gaps - in part because he explained what he meant by “colonization” much more clearly than what he meant by “empire.” He did not seem to attach any political structures or institutions to the term. At times, he used “empire” interchangeably with “nation”; at other moments, he used this broad term to refer to any state that had ever conquered any kind of territory. He certainly did not treat “empire” as synonymous with “Napoleonic Empire,” nor did he imply that an empire necessarily had to have an emperor. His vision of French empire was deeply informed by conservative values, but it nevertheless remained politically ambiguous. This text’s political acceptance of Bonapartist ideas about empire, however, reveals that the republicans’ attempts to discredit empire as a form of political organization and to separate it from colonial expansion continued to face new challenges in the 1870s.

During the 1870s, there was no major campaign to expand France’s overseas territories or embark on a major project of colonization. Even Duval, Leroy-Beaulieu, and Raboisson were primarily concerned about increasing awareness and appreciation of the colonies that France already had: they did not advocate for a major project of overseas conquest. But these texts’ basic contention – that colonization would be beneficial for the French nation – became increasingly influential over the course of the 1880s. Even in 1871, the politician Ernest Renan took up the point, arguing in his \textit{La réforme intellectuelle et morale} that colonization was a

\textsuperscript{252} \textit{Bulletin de la société des études coloniales et maritimes} 2:1 (January 1878), 31.
“political necessity of the first order.”253 To some extent, the force that drove this argument and the idea that Algeria should become part of the French nation was the same: the sense that in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, France was in danger of becoming a second-rate power, so it needed a mechanism to increase its prestige and make up for its loss. Expanding its influence outside Europe, colonial advocates implied, would protect France against Germany and enable it to compete with Britain. Even in the 1880s, this message would be controversial – partly because colonial conquest was difficult to justify in republican terms.254 But these authors helped form a conflicted republican defense of colonization that colonialism’s advocates would draw upon to defend their ideas as the Third Republic became more established.255

As more republicans came to agree that overseas expansion was necessary to secure French prestige and influence, however, the legacy of the Napoleonic Empire and Napoleon III’s conflation of “overseas” and “European” empire remained troubling – especially since some colonial theorists like Raboisson continued to associate the two political formations. Republicans in the second half of the 1870s devoted much attention to attacking empire and placing it in opposition to the new republic. As a result, they wanted to avoid describing French overseas territories as “an empire” and to develop robust theories that could explain why maintaining or even expanding these territories was in line with republican values. But colonial theorists like

253 He argued that colonization would protect nations against socialism, or conflict between rich and poor. This vision of the benefits of colonization was distinctly at odds with Leroy-Beaulieu’s, who argued that colonization would not really change the economic organization of the country. See Ernest Renan, La réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1872), 92.

254 See Schivelbusch, The Culture of Defeat, 162.

255 Some scholars have argued that French defeat and the forced annexation of Alsace-Lorraine also complicated the French relationship to “conquest” immediately following the war. Renan’s relationship to this is particularly interesting: he condemned the German annexation as illegitimate, arguing that the only type of conquest that was legitimate was colonial conquest, or the “conquest of an inferior race’s country by a superior race, who establishes itself there in order to govern.” This kind of conquest, he insisted, was morally acceptable because it would lead to the “regeneration of inferior races by superior races” and was “in the providential order of humanity.” But it remained unclear how to differentiate “superior” from “inferior” races. See Renan, La réforme intellectuelle, 93.
Duval, Leroy-Beaulieu, and even Renan who avoided the term “empire” struggled to find a theoretical vocabulary to describe the form of political organization that would structure France’s relationship with its overseas territories. As a result, the relationship between “empire” and “colonies” remained conflicted and ambiguous within republican discourse itself, and in the republican debates with anti-republican theorists.

V. Conclusion: Empire, Republic, Colony, and Nation

In the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, French republicans defended the new republic against their political opponents by arguing that the Second Empire was responsible for all of France’s political misfortunes and promising that the republic alone could redeem the country. They contended that empire was an illegitimate form of political organization and promised that any return towards imperialism would ruin France’s future. Such arguments threw the nature of France’s relationship with its colonies into question because some writers and intellectuals continued to associate “colonies” with “empire.” The relationship between these two ideas was particularly conflicted in Algeria because Napoleon III had used the territory to promote the idea of a French Mediterranean Empire that would rest on Bonapartist political principles and bind multiple nations together beneath one overarching political structure. At least on a discursive level, he thus transformed Algeria into a centerpiece example of Bonapartist imperial strategy, but republicans now wanted to connect Algeria to their new republican state.

After the Second Empire’s collapse, republicans therefore worked to transform understandings of France’s relationship with its overseas territories. They tried to distinguish between France’s colonial holdings and European Napoleonic Empire by describing those holdings in republican terms. In the 1870s, much of this conversation referred to Algeria and became a complex set of conflicts and negotiations between settlers, the French government, and
intellectuals of different political stripes. The evolving debate about Algeria was informed by the Second Empire’s legacy and also by the memory of French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the new settler political radicalism, the widespread indigenous revolt, and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. Over the course of the 1870s, two key strategies emerged in republican writing to distinguish France’s colonial holdings from the European Napoleonic Empire. In Algeria itself, French republicans and some settlers mostly tried to avoid the problem of explaining the relationship between “colony” and “empire” by (1) denying that Algeria was a “colony” and by (2) arguing that Algeria was only an “extension” of the French nation overseas.256

The government’s decision to describe Algeria as an extension of France had practical implications for the rights, duties, and positions of the different populations that inhabited the territory. It also provided immediate benefits for the settler population and republican politicians alike. Because the new conception of Algeria granted political and civil rights to settlers, but not to the indigenous population, it secured the settlers’ hegemonic position within the territory. Supporting settlers’ demands also gave the embattled republicans the much-needed support of Algerian settlers in the National Assembly.257 But the redefinition of Algeria carried ideological benefits as well. Treating Algeria as an extension of France served as a way to separate the republic’s relationship with its overseas territories from the policies of the Second Empire. In the immediate aftermath of the war, republicans had effectively discredited the term “empire,” so describing Algeria as a part of France became a way to avoid the problematic implications of maintaining an overseas empire while repudiating the metropolitan empire at home. If Algeria was a part of France rather than a component of a multinational Mediterranean Empire,

256 This line of argumentation was somewhat ironic, especially considering that throughout the 1860s, settlers in particular had insisted that the government should treat Algeria as a colony instead of as a “royaume arabe.”
257 Taithe, Citizenship and Wars, 172.
republicans could distance themselves and the new republican state from Napoleon III’s metropolitan and overseas empires without having to explain the apparent continuities in their own colonialism. At the same time, however, this model had a number of practical weaknesses, which centered especially on the place of Algeria’s indigenous population in this new system.

Over time, most republicans and many conservative politicians came to agree that Algeria was not part of a wider French empire but instead a territory that would slowly assimilate into the French nation. But some Algerian settlers and colonial theorists sought to articulate a broader and more ambitious model for colonial expansion that nevertheless divorced the concept of overseas colonialism from imperialist practices in Europe. These efforts had somewhat mixed results – in part because especially in the early years, they reached somewhat limited audiences. Moreover, it is also clear that despite republicans’ efforts, some conservative pro-colonists like Raboisson continued to associate European empire with overseas colonial expansion. The conflicted nature of the republicans’ relationship to empire and colonization would drive political conflicts in the 1880s when the Republic embarked on a major campaign of political expansion. The complex connections between Bonapartist imperialism and republican colonialism had not simply disappeared through the publication of new books that tried to deny the overlapping aspects of both systems.
On January 24, 1886, Émile Lonchampt, a reserve army officer and a member of the Société d’Émulation de Cambrai, organized a conference in Paris devoted to examining what he described as the *politique coloniale* of Louis XV. The conference focused specifically on the efforts of Joseph-François Dupleix to establish an expansive French colony in India. In Lonchampt’s speech, which he later published, he highlighted Dupleix’s achievements in India - even going so far as to claim that Britain was later able to assert its authority over the territory only because its administrators copied Dupleix’s innovative governing strategies.¹ Lonchampt acknowledged that France ultimately lost most of its outposts in India. But he insisted that Dupleix’s history showed that - contrary to popular belief - eighteenth-century France was just as effective at colonizing as Britain. France’s failures in its colonies did not stem from a lack of aptitude amongst its people, but instead from the central government’s poor management and the French people’s inability to appreciate “valiant explorers” like Dupleix who “worked for the glory of their country” and embodied “male courage.”²

In his introduction, Lonchampt made it clear that he believed Dupleix’s role in India was not just an object for historical debate. In fact, he argued, Dupleix’s attempt to expand French control in the Indies was immediately relevant to the problems facing the contemporary French

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nation.3 Even now, he insisted, many “intrepid explorers” were extending French influence into new territories. Much like Dupleix, he feared, these figures had inadequate support from France’s government and most of its population. This lack of support imperiled both the explorers’ safety and the success of their missions. It was also dangerous to France’s future. Only by fully embracing politique coloniale, Lonchampt warned, would France be able to maintain its position in Europe: unless it pursued a ruthless path of overseas expansion, it would fall behind its neighbors. He acknowledged that some republicans might object to the prospect of violently conquering other peoples and subjecting them to French rule on ideological grounds, but he insisted with a kind of Darwinian logic,

…it is a universal law that all people – great and small – are subject to the general law of terrestrial life that dictates that the great inevitably devour the small… One can dream of an ideal world where justice presides over the destiny of nations and of an ethereal vision which sees people as brothers, united in eternal concord… I do not believe in such a brilliant mirage.4

France’s commitment to its ideals, Lonchampt thus implied, had only succeeded in placing its colonies in English hands. It was also responsible for Alsace and Lorraine’s loss to the Germans. Instead of dreaming of universal fraternity, France needed to focus on the universal laws of “terrestrial” life by building up its armies and securing itself against its European enemies.5

Lonchampt’s interest in France’s former colonies and his tendency to connect them to contemporary French problems was echoed throughout the 1880s, particularly in scholarly circles, but also in political debates, newspaper articles, journals, and school textbooks.6 Over the

3 Ibid., 1.
4 Ibid., 31.
course of the decade, a wealth of literature emerged devoted to the study of France’s past and present colonies and to what commentators increasingly described as *politique coloniale*. Much like the colonial theorists of the 1870s, writers usually defined *politique coloniale* as a practice with a long history that many European states employed in overseas territories. They also indicated that despite its name, *politique coloniale* was essentially an apolitical activity practiced by a variety of governments and peoples. This definition enabled these writers to avoid having to explain the relationship between the practices of colonialism and earlier European empires – particularly the connections to the discredited idea of Napoleonic “empire.” But if these writers’ understandings of colonialism had much in common with their 1870s counterparts’, there were also several important differences that characterized this new interest in *politique coloniale*. On the most basic level, there were far more writers interested in the topic in the 1880s. These writers, moreover, also often sought to define colonialism and explain its significance more systematically than their earlier counterparts. And perhaps most importantly, most of these later writers were not simply calling for reforms in France’s existing colonies – the focus of the works in the 1870s. Instead, they were demanding widespread colonial expansion.

International events and trends partly drove both this new interest in colonialism and the belief that colonial expansion was an apolitical enterprise critical to France’s future. During the early 1880s, an increasing number of European states began to expand their reach overseas. This movement led to a growing sense of competition between European powers, especially in Africa, which led in turn to the 1884 Congress of Berlin.⁷ Although the Congress focused primarily on

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⁷ A series of complicated events led to the 1884 Congress. During the late 1870s and early 1880s, France, Belgium, and Britain supported exploratory expeditions along the Congo and Niger rivers. Competition over trading rights in those territories thus increased. In 1882, tensions between Britain and France arose over Egypt. After a series of conflicts with the Egyptian army, Britain decided to invade the country. The British initially invited France to participate in its military exercises against Egypt, but the French government had refused to vote for the credits that would have made it possible. As a result, the British went in alone and assumed control over the territory. The
establishing the claims of different European powers to various parts of Africa and determining the means by which European states could lay claim to territory on the continent, it also played an important role in defining and legitimizing overseas conquest. By laying out a specific set of rules for “colonial conquest,” the Congress helped solidify the growing consensus that war, conquest, and domination outside of Europe were both morally justified and fundamentally different from wars and conquest within Europe itself.\(^8\) At the same time, it also convinced many politicians and intellectuals across Europe that colonization was a necessary undertaking for any state that hoped to maintain its international influence. In the years following the Congress, the speed of European conquests dramatically increased.\(^9\)

In light of this growing international interest in colonial expansion, French intellectuals’ and politicians’ insistence on the importance of *politique coloniale* and their failure to explain its relationship with metropolitan political parties or ideological principles is perhaps unsurprising.\(^10\) But it is worth noting that these French writers were not simply reacting to a changing European intellectual framework – they were also contributing to it. The French government played a role in provoking the events that led to the 1884 Congress of Berlin and also participated in the

\(^8\) It is worth noting that the outcome of this conference was quite controversial in France – at least in part because the French representatives openly made alliances with the German representatives against Britain, leading some commentators in France to fear that France’s focus on overseas expansion was leading it to forget its lost provinces. See Jean Martin, *L’Empire triomphante, 1871-1936* (Paris: Denoël, 1990), 27.


accelerated pace of colonial conquests that occurred in its aftermath.\textsuperscript{11} If an international shift in the discourse of colonialism was partly responsible for this new interest in \textit{politique coloniale}, political and ideological transformations within France itself also played a role in its emergence.

For most of the 1870s, France’s basic political configuration had remained a subject of ongoing contestation. Republican deputies had declared France a republic in the wake of the September 4 revolution, but for the first half of the decade, Legitimists and Orleanists dominated the government. Especially at first, both groups devoted their energy towards finding a way to overturn the republic.\textsuperscript{12} As a result, they only took steps towards determining the regime’s shape in 1875, when they approved a series of laws that would function as a constitution.\textsuperscript{13} In 1876, Opportunistic republicans won the majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, marking the first time since the republic’s establishment that its supporters dominated one of the legislative bodies. But it was not until 1877, when Legitimist President Mac-Mahon failed to stage a \textit{coup d’état}, that public opinion definitively swung in the republic’s favor.\textsuperscript{14} In the 1879 elections, republicans gained the majority of seats in the Senate and the republican candidate Jules Grévy

\begin{footnotes}
\item[11] France’s decision to conquer Tunisia in 1881 helped provoke the scramble for Africa and its explorers contributed to the competition between European powers in the Congo. See Chamberlain, \textit{The Scramble for Africa}, 35.
\item[12] As discussed in chapter 2, the Legitimists and Orleanists tried to make common cause. The Orleanists had agreed to support the Comte de Chambord – the Legitimist candidate – in part because he was elderly and childless, and they expected the Orleanist candidate to succeed him after his death. But the Orleanists also wanted the Comte de Chambord to make constitutional promises. In 1873, it became clear that he was not prepared to make these promises, and the conservative alliance fell apart. See Alan Grubb, \textit{The Politics of Pessimism: Albert de Broglie and Conservative Politics in the Early Third Republic} (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 165.
\item[13] The monarchist-dominated government largely decided to take these measures because of the growing popularity of Bonapartism in France. Orleanists and Legitimists feared the restoration of the empire more than a conservative republic. The Conservatives agreed to use the word “republic” to refer to the French state in exchange for the establishment of a Senate in addition to the Chamber of Deputies. See Grévy, \textit{La république des opportunistes}, 27.
\item[14] He decided to dissolve the National Assembly after the 1876 elections resulted in a republican majority. See Bertrand Taithe, \textit{Citizenship and Wars: France in Turmoil, 1870-1871} (New York: Psychology Press, 2001), 172.
\end{footnotes}
assumed the presidency. By the end of the 1870s, the republicans had thus established control over all of the branches of the French government. Their political ascendancy was not without complications – the party’s political success sharpened its internal divisions, which became increasingly visible over the course of the 1880s. But at the same time, the declining popularity of the Orleanist and Legitimist parties made a monarchist restoration increasingly unlikely, just as Napoleon IV’s death that year rendered the possibility of a Bonapartist restoration remote. As a result, 1879 marked the moment when France’s future as a republic began to seem assured.

Even as the republic stabilized, however, the newly elected Opportunists remained concerned about how best to ensure the republic’s popularity and its future. As Philip Nord has shown, these politicians wanted to secure the primacy of republican ideology in French culture and therefore passed a series of measures intended to promote republican values. They declared the republican Marseillaise the French national anthem, made Bastille Day a public holiday, and decreed that the motto Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité would appear on all public buildings. At the same time, they campaigned to expand and reform public education – partly because many were convinced that the clergy’s influence in elementary education was responsible for the peasantry’s

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15 It is worth noting that the growing power of the republican party did not directly lead to the displacement of older elites. These elites were unable to overthrow the government, but they continued to have an important degree of influence over the republic’s administration. See Philip Nord, The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 3.

16 Napoleon IV’s death left Napoleon III’s cousin, Jerome Bonaparte, at the head of the party. But the party disliked him, partly because during his tenure as Corsica’s deputy to the National Assembly, he sided with the moderate republicans against the Bonapartists. See Price, The French Second Empire, 465.


18 It also passed a number of reforms to make the republic fall more closely in line with republican values. In 1881, the government liberalized the laws around the freedom of the press. In 1883, it took steps to remove conservative functionaries who opposed the republic from their positions of power. And in 1884, they passed a series of laws that outlawed the practice of nominating senators to their positions “for life” and made princes ineligible to become president of the Republic. These measures also had the advantage of further securing the republic against its monarchist and Bonapartist detractors. The law forbidding princes from becoming the president of the republic was specifically intended to prevent another Napoleon III from seizing power. See Alice Conklin, Sarah Fishman, and Robert Zaretsky, France and its Empire since 1870 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 62.
conservatism. In addition to these “pedagogical” campaigns, many republican politicians also sought to secure their party’s popularity by assuring the public that the republic could best defend France against its European enemies. They justified many of their reforms by arguing that they were part of a broader campaign to strengthen France and ensure that it never suffered another defeat at the hands of its competitors. Republican ministers thus sometimes defended the republic’s changes to France’s educational system by contending that these changes were necessary to “prevent a second Sedan,” implying that the Second Empire’s decision to leave primary education in the hands of the clergy had contributed to its loss in 1870-71.

France’s relationship to Germany continued to complicate the republicans’ attempt to paint themselves as the defenders of the French nation, however. In the early 1880s, the idea of revanche against Germany remained relatively popular. Although only a minority consistently called for war, many continued to demand that France prioritize reclaiming the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. During the 1870s, a number of republicans – following Gambetta - had

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19 Many republicans were convinced that all of France’s earlier republics had failed because most of the population was too poorly educated to understand the benefits of republicanism. Most peasants, they believed, were brainwashed by the Church or uneducated. See Gilbert G. Chaitin, The Enemy Within: Culture Wars and Political Identity in the Novels of the Third Republic (Columbus: The Ohio State University, 2009), 41.

20 As chapter 2 shows, Republicans had also made use of this line of argumentation in the 1870s. They blamed the empire and the monarchy for France’s recent defeats and claimed that the republic alone could redeem the nation.


22 Revanche’s popularity in the 1870s and 1880s has been an object of debate. For a long time, historians argued that it deeply influenced French politics throughout the Third Republic. Claude Digeon, for example, claimed that the loss of Alsace-Lorraine “transformed the French soul” by reshaping it around the idea of “revanche.” In more recent years, some historians have argued that the importance of the lost provinces fluctuated over the course of the Third Republic in response to events within both France and Germany. They have also questioned the degree to which republicans who spoke often of revanche in the early years – like Léon Gambetta – actually saw it as a feasible enterprise. See Claude Digeon, La crise allemande de la pensée française, 1870-1914 (Paris: Presses universitaires de la France, 1959), 3; Karine Varley, Under the Shadow of Defeat (Basingstroke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 191.
successfully garnered popular support by promising to restore these provinces. But once the Opportunists gained control over the government, it became clear that a war against Germany would be too expensive and was likely to end once again in defeat.

In light of these complications, some politicians began to argue that while France could not immediately pursue revenge against Germany, it could nevertheless increase its strength by pursuing other conquests overseas. Such conquests would, they contended, train the French army, increase France’s wealth and its trading opportunities, and enhance its international prestige. Over time, these thinkers argued, these conquests would make it possible for France to regain its lost provinces from Germany. They would also enable France to keep British ascendency in check. This argument – that colonial expansion would strengthen France and perhaps even enable it to regain some of its lost territories in Europe – contributed to the growing interest in *politique colonial* within France and the republican party.

The contention that colonial conquests would increase France’s continental prestige and allow it to win back its lost provinces was controversial, however. Many nationalists condemned the idea out of hand. And even if many French republicans argued that *politique coloniale* was essential both to France’s international power and the stability of the party’s position in France,

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24 The inability of the republicans to deliver on their calls for revenge when they came into power was partly responsible for the frustrations that ultimately coalesced in the Boulanger Affair. See James Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 155.

25 Scholars have long argued about the role of economic interests in France’s drive towards overseas expansion. This is at least partly because it is unclear that colonies ever brought economic benefits to France. However, it seems clear that a variety of industrial and commercial groups were convinced that colonial expansion would lead to economic growth. See Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 31.


27 Lehning, *To Be a Citizen*, 136.
the practice of colonial conquest rested uneasily with some republican political principles - especially with the republic’s theoretical commitment to supporting liberty among peoples and fraternity between nations. Even Lonchampt’s call for action made some of these tensions apparent. He tried to dismiss these apparent contradictions by describing the republican principles in question as idealistic, impractical, and dangerous in the face of France’s European competitors. But the fact that he felt the need to mention them at all makes it clear that the longstanding association in republican thought between conquest, subordination, and the Old Regime and imperial governments continued to complicate the prospect of colonial expansion. In other words, even as supporters of colonial expansion like Lonchampt argued that metropolitan politics had no bearing on colonial expansion - which they described as primarily a matter of national prestige and security - other republican intellectuals and politicians continued to see overseas expansion and metropolitan politics as intertwined. In fact, many continued to associate colonial expansion with authoritarian forms of political organization and even drew direct connections between the new “colonial empire” that France was trying to build and the older “Bonapartist empire” that had led France to defeat. These disagreements led to a series of contestations over the purpose, history, and morality of 

*politique coloniale* between different intellectuals, politicians, and writers. In a variety of mediums - including political debates, pamphlets, scholarship, textbooks, and novels – these different commentators sought to explain 

*politique colonial*’s relationship to France’s politics, describe its ramifications for the French nation, and articulate its relationship to the history of “empire.”

These debates about colonial conquest were not only theoretical: they emerged specifically in response to the Opportunist republicans’ decision to embark on a series of colonial
conquests – the first since France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Jules Ferry, who served as prime minister from 1880-1881 and 1883-1885, played an important role in orchestrating these conquests. In 1880, he encouraged the Third Republic to annex Tahiti and several neighboring islands. In 1881, he fabricated a crisis with the bey of Tunisia to justify sending French troops across the border, ostensibly to secure Algeria’s future, and used the opportunity to declare Tunisia a French protectorate. At the same time, he encouraged a series of operations in Sudan, Congo, and Madagascar to spread French influence in those areas with an eye towards expanding France’s holdings throughout Africa. And finally, he spearheaded the conquest of Annam and Tonkin between 1883 and 1885. Although almost all of these conquests and annexations incited some opposition, the conflicts in Indochina in particular proved extremely controversial. It was around Indochina that the debates over the value, purpose, political implications, and national consequences of politique coloniale would coalesce.

The controversy over France’s policies in Indochina played out in numerous spheres and on a variety of levels. Most immediately, the complications that attended the conquest of

30 Conklin, Fishman, Zaretsky, France and its Empire since 1870, 65.
31 The motivations for taking over Tunisia were economic: French companies were concerned about the Italian influence in the territory. Ferry used the incursion of Tunisian tribes into Algeria to justify a military invasion that he had already decided on. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, and Thobie, Histoire de la France coloniale, 585.
32 The French began expanding into Sudan from Senegal in the late 1870s under the guidance of Faidherbe. At the end of 1879, the National Assembly voted to grant credits to build a railroad across the Sahara desert. They also sent troops to secure the area for the railroad. At the same time, Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza conducted a series of expeditions into the Congo. In the early 1880s, France also launched a naval expedition to Madagascar to secure French influence in the territory against the growing presence of Protestant missionaries from Britain. See Denise Bouche, Histoire de la colonisation française: flux et reflux (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1991), 54; 64-68; 73; 82.
33 The term “Indochina” dates from about 1800. It first emerged in Orientalist literature. Until 1887, when the French created the Union indochinoise, the area that it referred to was ambiguous, but it included contemporary Vietnam, Cambodia, and ultimately Laos. As Pierre Brocheaux and Daniel Hémery have argued, while the idea of “Indochina” was European, it had large consequences for the different peoples who lived in the territory because the French restructured local political and economic structures around it. See Brocheaux and Hémery, Indochina, 3.
northern Vietnam sparked a series of debates in the Chamber of Deputies about its costs, methods, and implications. Many Opportunist Republicans defended Ferry’s actions in the territory, while some vocal leftist radicals and conservatives questioned both their means and purpose.34 Between 1883 and 1885, these debates became heated. Ultimately, discontent with France’s military actions in Indochina spread across the Chamber of Deputies, enabling the opposition to bring down Ferry’s government over the issue in March 1885.35

The debate in the Chamber of Deputies did not remain confined to the official political realm: it also reverberated into the public sphere, taking shape in newspapers, journals, pamphlets, and scholarly treatises. To some extent, writers and intellectuals’ arguments about Indochina reflected those that also echoed in the Chamber of Deputies. However, many writers also often connected their arguments about Indochina to wider questions about the nature, purpose, and political implications of politique coloniale. The debates about Indochina – and the wider discussion about politique coloniale that it provoked – thus marked the moment when “colonialism” became an object of widespread public discussion.

The parliamentary debates in 1885 over France’s conquest of Indochina have received much scholarly attention – partly because they are accepted as a “turning point” in France’s colonial history.36 The arguments about Indochina marked both the first and last moment of

36 Gilles Manceron has maintained that the opposition forced pro-colonial groups to change their language; it was only by conflating exploration with conquest, he argues, that Ferry secured the ascendancy of politique coloniale. Others – like James Cooke – have argued that the events brought together pro-colonial groups, creating the “colonial party.” Others have contended that events show that Ferry’s opponents did not object to colonialism, as after they overthrew Ferry’s ministry, they did not renounce Indochina. See, for example, Manceron, *1885*, 14, 17; Jean-Noël Jeanneney, *La politique coloniale: Clemenceau contre Ferry* (Paris: Magellan, 2012), 15; Lehning, *To Be a Citizen*, 139; James Cooke, *French New Imperialism, 1880-1910: The Third Republic and Colonial Expansion* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1973), 22.
major opposition to the Third Republic’s decision to embrace colonial expansion.37 Even though opponents to Ferry’s politique coloniale succeeded in bringing down his ministry, they did not stem the growing support for colonial expansion that was emerging across France. Historians have therefore sought to explain the reasons behind the opposition’s ultimate failure. Some have pointed to the political divisions in the groups that opposed colonial expansion.38 Others have argued that many who opposed colonial expansion did so primarily on practical, rather than ideological grounds. They contend that most politicians only saw Ferry’s policies in Indochina as problematic when they became expensive – both in terms of French lives and French money.39 But if scholars have sought to explain why the opposition was ultimately unsuccessful, they have devoted less attention to examining why the proponents of colonial empire took this apparently weak and divided opposition so seriously. Long after it became clear that the political opposition would not surrender the colonial conquest of Indochina, proponents of French colonial expansion continued to attack the critics of France’s politique colonial.

This chapter examines the debates that emerged during and after France’s conquest of Indochina over the republic’s new expansionary politics. It looks at the ideological concerns that underpinned the arguments justifying or condemning the conquest and considers how this conversation about politique coloniale intersected with broader contemporary political debates - especially with disputes over the meaning, value, and history of “empire” and its relationship to the contemporary French republic. More specifically, this chapter shows how the memory of

37 In the 1970s, some historians tracing the history of “anticolonialism” described these debates as prefiguring those that later occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. Charles Ageron was particularly influential in shaping this school. See Charles Ageron, L’Anticolonialisme en France de 1871 à 1914 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1973), 40.
38 See, for example, Lehning, To Be a Citizen, 137; Michel Bodin, Les Français au Tonkin, 1870-1902: une conquête difficile (Paris: Éditions Soteca, 2012), 84.
Napoleon III and France’s defeat during the Franco-Prussian War continued to play an important role in shaping the republican conversation about colonial expansion into the 1880s. For much of this period, critics of *politique coloniale* were able to mobilize the memory of Napoleon III to criticize their opponents’ ideas – partly because he was largely responsible for investing France in Indochina in the first place during the 1860s. In response to these critics, those who defended *politique coloniale* sought to develop a new vocabulary to describe it and a new historical lineage to legitimize it in the eyes of the French public. By examining the connections between these disputes over Indochina and ongoing arguments about the political organization of the French state, the chapter highlights the ways in which the memory of the Second Empire helped give shape to a specifically republican discourse about colonial expansion.

The chapter thus begins by examining the parliamentary debates over Indochina and the responses that those debates provoked in newspapers, journals, and political pamphlets, emphasizing the role played by political ideology and memory in this conversation. It then turns to the theoretical literature that these debates provoked and analyzes how different authors sought to define *politique coloniale* and provide it with a new theoretical basis and history. Through this analysis, the chapter demonstrates that the historical relationship between “empire” and “republic” remained a problem for republicans as they sought to justify new overseas conquests in the 1880’s. At the same time, it shows how republicans were increasingly able to elide those connections by formulating the idea of a “republican colonial empire.”

**II. The Conflict over Indochina, 1883-1885**

The republican government’s decision to launch a large invasion of northern Vietnam between 1883 and 1885 marked both a shift in France’s expansionary policy and a high degree of investment in Southeast Asia. But France’s involvement in Indochina itself was not new: it dated
at least from the Second Empire. In 1857, Napoleon III sent troops into Cochinchina as an addendum to the larger intervention in China during the Second Opium War. The rationale for this military action was ostensibly to protect French Catholic missionaries and the local Christian population from persecution at the hands of the Vietnamese Emperor Tu Duc. In 1858, the Vice Admiral Rigault de Genouilly landed in Tourane with about 2000 soldiers. However, he attracted very little support from the indigenous Christians he was sent there to protect - the first in a series of setbacks. Instead of a quick, decisive victory, the French engaged in a protracted conflict with Tu Duc between 1858 and 1862. Over time, they gained ground, and in 1863, they forced Tu Duc to sign a treaty that ceded three of his provinces to France, granted freedom of navigation to all French ships, opened up major cities to French trade, and declared religious freedom throughout his empire. As the concessions make clear, the Second Empire’s interest in the territory had a religious component, but it centered on securing French commerce in Southeast Asia while increasing the government’s prestige domestically and internationally.


42 At first, the French struggled to gain ground; they even evacuated the territory in 1860. It was only after the conflict with China concluded that the French found success. See Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, 24.


44 The demands of the navy also played a role. But it is clear that the promise of trade with China was a key factor. In 1863, the Vietnamese sent a diplomatic mission to France in an attempt to buy back the three lost provinces,
If the 1863 treaty met most of the Second Empire’s goals, it did not end the conflict. The government continued to antagonize the Vietnamese by supporting measures to extend France’s influence in the area and establish trade with China. In 1864, the French signed a treaty establishing a protectorate over Cambodia.\textsuperscript{45} And in 1867, the Governor General Admiral de La Grandière annexed the western provinces of Vietnam.\textsuperscript{46} Throughout the late 1860s and into the early 1870s, moreover, military officers Ernest Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier spearheaded several expeditions up the Mekong, Red, and Yangtze Rivers in order to increase France’s economic influence in northern Vietnam. Although these expeditions were only moderately successful, they increased French interest in trading with the Chinese province of Yunnan, even as they increased tensions with both the Chinese and Vietnamese governments.\textsuperscript{47} Ultimately, these tensions came to a head in 1872-3 during the first crisis over Tonkin.

In 1872, the French trader Jean Dupuis had led an expedition up the Red River in order to sell arms to the Chinese.\textsuperscript{48} On his return, Vietnamese mandarins in Hanoi detained him – an act that gave him an excuse to occupy part of the city before asking the French government for military assistance. The governor of Cochinchina, Admiral Marie-Jules Dupré, saw Dupuis’ actions as an opportunity to extend French influence in the area. He sent Francis Garnier to promising that the French would retain control over key port cities. Napoleon III found this proposition agreeable, and in fact sent a naval officer to sign the treaty with the Vietnamese in 1864. However, the republican opposition – led by Adolphe Thiers and Victor Duruy – refused to ratify it. See Brocheux and Hémery, \textit{Indochina}, 21, 23, 26.\textsuperscript{45} The King of Cambodia agreed to sign this treaty because he needed French help suppressing rebellions in his territory. See Justin Corfield, \textit{The History of Cambodia} (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2009), 23.\textsuperscript{46} Brocheux and Hémery, \textit{Indochina}, 27.\textsuperscript{47} Nicola Cooper, \textit{France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 14.\textsuperscript{48} His broader goal was to establish European trade on the Red River under French control and establish French economic hegemony in Yunnan. See Brocheux and Hémery, \textit{Indochina}, 28.
Hanoi ostensibly to negotiate with the mandarins.\textsuperscript{49} Instead, Garnier joined forces with Dupuis. Together, they seized Hanoi’s citadel and issued a proclamation declaring that the Red River was open to international trade. In the ensuing conflict, Garnier was killed. The government in Paris – still recovering from the events of 1870-71 – refused to occupy Tonkin, and ordered French troops to withdraw. They nevertheless succeeded in using the incident to negotiate a new treaty with the Vietnamese that consolidated France’s hold over Cochinchina and increased its trading privileges in Tonkin. But the incident was a setback for the advocates of expansion in Indochina – especially since France found the new treaty difficult to enforce.\textsuperscript{50}

At the beginning of the 1880s, tensions in Indochina rose once again. This was partly due to political developments in Southeast Asia. During this period, the Vietnamese Emperor Tu Duc distanced himself from France and cultivated closer ties with China.\textsuperscript{51} At the same time, the British began to advance towards Yunnan from Burma.\textsuperscript{52} These trends led some administrators and government officials to fear that France’s influence in Indochina was waning. The growing conviction that France’s ability to control territory overseas would determine its future influence and prosperity convinced many Opportunist Republicans that securing France’s position in Indochina against British and Chinese competition was critical.\textsuperscript{53} The Opportunists in Paris did

\textsuperscript{49} It seems likely that Dupré never wanted Garnier to negotiate and in fact encouraged him to take military action. But it is difficult to prove either way. He did send Garnier with 222 men. See ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{50} For the most part, many people in France lost interest in the area during this period. But Francis Garnier’s 1873 book \textit{Voyage d’exploration en Indochine}, which detailed his explorations of the Mekong, Yangtze, and Red Rivers continued to sell well, securing Indochina’s place in the popular imagination. Jean Dupuis also published numerous articles encouraging the French government to extend its investment in the area. See Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee, “Introduction,” in \textit{France and “Indochina”: Cultural Representations} (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), 3.

\textsuperscript{51} The Emperor of China was the traditional sovereign of Vietnam, so Tu Duc was following a tradition by seeking out Chinese assistance. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeigueur, Thobie, \textit{Histoire de la France coloniale}, 603.

\textsuperscript{52} Brocheux and Hémery, \textit{Indochina}, 41.

\textsuperscript{53} This conviction stemmed partly from the influence of writings of French theorists like Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, who insisted that France could find security against its European rivals by extending French culture into new territories.
not – at least at first – seek out a military confrontation. But when local officials instigated a conflict, the republican government responded very differently from the way it had in 1873.

In 1882, the Governor-General sent naval officer Henri Rivière to Hanoi to investigate the Vietnamese court’s complaints about the behavior of certain French merchants. Instead, much like Dupuis and Garnier in 1873, he used the troops accompanying him to capture the city’s citadel against the orders of the French government. Rivière only held the citadel for a few days before the metropolitan government ordered him to surrender it. The incident was thus resolved quickly, but it sparked a series of debates in France. Some republican politicians – including the Prime Minister Charles Duclerc – began to advocate for a military intervention in Indochina. For the most part, they framed this military intervention as defensive and insisted that its main objectives would center on protecting French commerce and enforcing the terms of the 1874 treaty. However, they also made it clear that France would only be able to accomplish these objectives if it occupied the country militarily.

The conquest of Hanoi also affected the Vietnamese government. It convinced Tu Duc that the only way to stave off French conquest was to resist new incursions with military force. He thus sought out aid from the Black Flags, a semi-independent army commanded by Liu Yong

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See Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonization chez les peuples modernes* (Paris: Guillamin, 1874), 606. The growing embrace of colonial expansionism across Europe also played a key role. See Manceron, *1885*, 9.

54 It is unclear exactly why Rivière decided to capture the citadel against his orders, but it seems that he did so under pressure from local traders and missionaries – two groups who desired to see France take over Indochina. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 606.


56 These debates in Vietnam took on a different tenure over time. Immediately after Rivière’s attack, the government began to prepare for war. Most officials were reassured, however, when the French surrendered the citadel. But over their time, their anger grew once again because the French continued to occupy the royal pagoda in Hanoi. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 606.
Fu and composed largely of soldiers-of fortune from Guangxi, China.\textsuperscript{57} At the same time, Tu Duc also appealed to the Chinese government for military assistance in the event of a conflict.\textsuperscript{58} In response, the Chinese government agreed to send arms to support the Black Flags against the French and to move a Chinese army into the northern provinces of Tonkin.\textsuperscript{59}

Despite the growing enthusiasm for a military confrontation, French advocates for such action were initially unsuccessful in raising money and men to send into Tonkin – at least in part because many politicians remained unenthusiastic about the prospect of an open conflict with China. Because the Chinese Emperor had traditionally exercised rights of sovereignty over Vietnam, the threat of a conflict was very real.\textsuperscript{60} French politicians also were somewhat wary of funding an overseas war so soon after France’s expensive conquest of Tunisia. As a result, there were eight months of uneasy peace.\textsuperscript{61} When Jules Ferry assumed the position of Prime Minister in 1883, however, the group advocating for a military intervention gained new influence in the Chamber of Deputies.\textsuperscript{62} This shift in the metropolitan political climate had immediate

\textsuperscript{57} The army had formed in China during the Taiping Rebellion and fled to northern Vietnam after the rebellion failed. This was not the first time that the Vietnamese government had approached the Black Flags. They had allied with Vietnamese troops to crush small local uprisings in northern Vietnam in 1872. The Black Flags had also aided the Vietnamese government’s troops against Garnier in 1873. In 1878, their numbers had increased considerably when 10,000 soldiers supporting a different Guangxi leader had joined them. By the late 1870s, this army essentially controlled northern Vietnam. Some scholars have argued that because of their presence in the territory, this part of Vietnam was on its way to becoming part of China when the French intervened. See Ella Laffey, “French Adventurers and Chinese Bandits in Tonkin: The Garnier Affair and its Local Context,” \textit{Journal of Southeast Asian Studies} 6, no. 1 (March 1975), 49; Pecquer, \textit{Indo-Chine: conquête et rupture}, 48.

\textsuperscript{58} Brocheux and Hémery, \textit{Indochina}, 43.


\textsuperscript{61} Jules Grévy, the President of the Republic, had vetoed the Assembly’s attempt to send money and men to stage a conquest of Indochina. Instead, he had sent Frédéric Bourée to China to discuss the competing French and Chinese interests in the territory. Bourée signed an agreement with China stipulating that China would withdraw its troops from the territory while France would forego its ambitions of conquering the territory. Instead, they would divide northern Vietnam between them into “zones of influence.” Ferry disavowed this treaty when he became Prime Minister. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldziegueur, Thobie, \textit{Histoire de la France coloniale}, 607.

repercussions in Indochina. Almost immediately, Rivière – with renewed hope for metropolitan support - decided to launch an attack on the Vietnamese coalfield at Hon Gay and the city of Nam Dinh.63 After a short, bloody conflict, he occupied both territories.64

News of Rivière’s most recent conquests was received with relatively positive attention in France. Many major French newspapers covered the story. In the Journal des débats, Charles Gauthier described Rivière as a brave man who was “defending our flag and our interests in the Far East. Commander Rivière has, thanks to his energy and industriousness… maintained our position in Hanoi and Haiphong…”65 He described Rivière’s most recent conquests as a matter of “military necessity,” insisting that without them, Rivière would not have been able to maintain any position in the territory at all. Le Figaro similarly implied that Rivière’s conquests were defensive in nature – even as it commended the speed and dexterity of his military maneuvers.66 An author writing for Le Temps went a step farther: he contended that Rivière’s easy military successes demonstrated that France should not hesitate to intervene in Indochina. The Vietnamese government’s hold on its territories and the loyalty of its citizens, the writer asserted, was extremely weak. The author went on to claim that the French government should immediately send reinforcements to enable Rivière to maintain control over these new territories

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63 The mines at Hon Gay were particularly important. See Oscar Chapuis, The Last Emperors of Vietnam (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 64.
64 Rivière attacked Nam Dinh with eight gunboats and 800 troops. He bombarded the fortress, and on 27 March 1883 its inhabitants surrendered. Rivière executed a large number of the soldiers that had resisted the French advance. See Bodin, Les français au Tonkin, 256.
65 See Charles Gauthiot, Le Journal des débats (16 April 1883), 1. Le Figaro also celebrated these efforts, noting, “Thanks to the energy of Commander Rivière and our brave marines, the French flag flies once again over Nam Dinh.” See “Saigon,” Le Figaro (14 April 1883), 3. A few journalists also actively opposed the measure. Le Petit Parisien warned that Rivière’s actions signaled that “the campaign to occupy Tonkin by France has begun. It was beneath a Ferry ministry that the expedition to Tunisia was undertaken – it will once again be beneath a Ferry ministry when the expedition to Tonkin will occur. We still have not escaped from the last disastrous adventure… and still we throw ourselves into a new external peril.” See “Le Tonkin,” Le Petit Parisien (13 April 1883), 3.
66 “Saigon,” Le Figaro (14 April 1883), 3.
and enforce the 1874 treaty. While many newspapers thus supported Rivière and even insisted that the government should send more troops and materials to Indochina, they continued to describe France’s purpose in the territory in relatively conservative terms. They argued that France needed to defend its position in Tonkin and protect its trading rights, but they also went out of their way to point out that France had no interest in conquering the territory.

Rivière’s actions also incited a new debate in the French Chamber about how and to what extent France should support Rivière’s attempts to extend French control over a larger part of Vietnam. Many representatives remained concerned that this heightened conflict with the Vietnamese Emperor would provoke a larger and more expensive clash with China – especially since the Chinese government had warned against larger French engagement in the territory. Advocates of intervention sought to address these concerns by promising that any military intervention would remain limited and avoid involving China. The proposed bill drafted by the Minister of the Navy and Foreign affairs to divert funds and troops to Indochina promised that France was not even “undertaking a military expedition” because, he claimed, “our troops will only act against pirates.” In other words, a French military operation in Tonkin would not seek conflict with the territory’s inhabitants or its government, let alone with China. Instead, it would simply consist of policing outlaws – like the Black Flags - who flouted both French and Vietnamese laws and thereby threatened France’s commerce and authority in the territory. At the

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70 The bill even went so far as to contend that the Vietnamese government’s failure to enforce the terms of the treaty of 1874 was not deliberate. Instead, it stemmed from the fact that the government was too weak to control these “pirates” who disrupted French commerce and threatened French nationals. The French troops would therefore not fight against the Vietnamese government – in fact, they would fight for it by enforcing laws that the government could not itself enforce. See “Projet de Loi sur Tonkin,” *Le Temps* (28 April 1883), 1.
same time, the bill went on to imply, the military action would ensure that the Vietnamese government held to its previous promises to the French state.\footnote{Ibid.} The ministry, like the press, thus sought to minimize the potential scope of the conflict and reassure the French deputies that the conflict would remain limited in size and scope. Even before this proposed bill came to a vote, however, events on the ground in Tonkin changed the nature of the conversation.

**Rivière’s Death and its Effects**

In May 1883, Rivière attempted to extend his reach north of Hanoi and died in battle with Vietnamese and Chinese Black Flag troops.\footnote{Rivière had headed north of Hanoi with 450 troops to attack the Black Flag troops in the Vietnamese countryside. But the Black Flag troops caught them at the Paper Bridge. A number of French soldiers died and the rest were forced to retreat. See Chapius, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam*, 65.} News of his death reached France at the end of the month. It created widespread anger and led to calls for revenge across a variety of publications.\footnote{This was in sharp contrast to the public reaction to the news of Garnier’s death in 1873. In 1873, Garnier’s death was mostly ignored. See Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 470.} F. Joussenet, writing for the *Journal des débats*, described Rivière’s death as “heroic” and insisted that it imposed “new duties” on the French government. He noted that “a virile nation’s most noble means of avenging its loss is to continue the work to which they were sacrificed.”\footnote{F. Joussenet, *Journal des débats politiques* (27 May 1883), 1.} *Le Temps* also argued that it was “necessary to avenge the death and maintain the honor of our pavilion.”\footnote{“Bulletin du Jour,” *Le Temps* (28 May 1883), 1.} The contention that military conflict was unavoidable because France’s honor was now at stake appeared in a number of publications across the political spectrum.\footnote{See, for example, “L’Affaire du Tonkin: Mort du commandant Rivière,” *Le Petit Journal* (28 May 1883), 1; “La mort du commandant Rivière,” *Le Rappel* (28 May 1883), 1.}

Several publications took their interpretation of this event a step further and used it to criticize the government’s recent strategies in Indochina. The conservative republican newspaper...
*Le Siècle* described the death as a “warning” and insisted that it was partly the government’s fault. If the Republic had enforced the terms of the 1874 treaty all along, the author averred, Rivièr’s military intervention would never have been necessary. The French government’s failures in Indochina, the author went on to contend, were not isolated mistakes. Instead, they were a symptom of the republican government’s “flightiness” – a trait that was endangering France’s establishments around the world. He explained that in the years immediately following the Franco-Prussian War, the French government had neglected its overseas colonies – even in the face of extensive Italian and English overseas expansion. It was only in the wake of the British conquest of Egypt that any republican politicians had become interested in colonial questions at all. But even as these politicians became convinced that overseas expansion was central to France’s future, they remained concerned that the French public would not support it. As a result, they employed “half-measures” and obscured their goals to avoid public dissent. Rivièr’s death was the result of a government that “wants and does not want, dares and does not dare” because its inconsistencies placed brave men into dangerous situations without enough support. The writer concluded by insisting that in the future, France needed to fully commit itself and its resources to defending and extending these overseas territories – regardless of public opinion - in order to protect France’s “external prestige, moral force, and commercial markets.”

Like the journalist in *Le Siècle*, writers from the republican *XIXe Siècle* and *Gil Blas*, along with the conservative *Le Gaulois* also argued that the government was responsible for Rivièr’s death because it had failed to commit enough resources to its overseas projects. H. de

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77 The author specifically pointed to Napoleon III’s misadventures in Mexico as one of the key historical memories driving this distrust. See “Un Leçon sévère,” *Le Siècle* (28 May 1883), 1.

78 In *Le XIXe Siècle*, Henry Fouquier argued, “The responsibility for his death and that of his poor soldiers must weigh on the consciences of the eternal partisans of half-measures.” See Henry Fouquier, “Chronique,” *Le XIXe*
Pène contended that “the real murderers of Rivière and his companions” were not in Indochina, but in the French Chamber of Deputies. He invoked Rivière’s death as a sign of France’s decline into decadence and warned that without major political and social changes – which he saw as unlikely - this degeneration would become worse.\(^79\) The republican writers were not as pessimistic about France’s future – but like the journalist writing for *Le Siècle*, they used the incident to call for greater commitment to France’s colonial enterprises.\(^80\)

Left-leaning journalists, on the other hand, also used the incident to criticize the government’s strategies in Indochina. *La Justice* contended that the incident revealed the “thoughtlessness” with which the government undertook overseas military expeditions.\(^81\) Henri Rochefort, on the other hand, compared the government’s strategies in Indochina unfavorably to what he saw as Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza’s “peaceful” conquest of the Congo and questioned the purpose of avenging Rivière’s death.\(^82\) But only *Le Petit Parisien* used the incident to question the basic purpose of France’s presence in Indochina. An anonymous journalist described France’s activity in the country as a dangerous “adventure” – the same term that the republican opposition had long used to describe Napoleon III’s overseas expeditions. This adventure, he warned, would lead to a “considerable war six thousand leagues from France” and

\(^{79}\) He described Rivière’s death as a French defeat and insisted that it was a sign that France had failed to recover from its losses after 1870-71. See “H. de Pène, “Le Drapeau en Péris,” *Le Gaulois* (27 May 1883), 1.

\(^{80}\) Henry Fouquier expressed the hope that Rivière’s death would be seen as “a sadness, an example, and a lesson,” that would move France to embrace more “intelligent and resolute” political choices. See Fouquier, “Chronique,” 2; Jules Richard, “Le Corps Expéditionnaire du Tonkin,” *Le Figaro* (30 May 1883), 2.

\(^{81}\) *La Justice* (29 May 1883), 1.

\(^{82}\) He noted with admiration that indigenous chiefs willingly ceded “magnificent territory” to him. See Henri de Rochefort, “Vengeance!” *L’Instransigeant* (29 May 1883), 1.
was likely to become the republic’s “Mexico.”\footnote{See \textquote{La Guerre au Tonkin: Mort du Commandant Rivière,} \textit{Le Petit Parisien} (28 May 1883), 1. Journalists writing for \textit{Le Petit Parisien} had been very critical of the Opportunist government’s policies overseas for some time – both in Tunisia and in Tonkin. They were particularly critical of Jules Ferry and his policies. For examples of articles, see \textquote{Le Tonkin,} \textit{Le Petit Parisien} (7 April 1883), 2; \textquote{Le Tonkin,} \textit{Le Petit Parisien} (13 April 1883), 3.} Although the journalist did not openly advocate against the government’s quest to avenge Rivière, he thus implied that France’s very presence in Indochina was problematic and directly compared the country’s strategies there to Napoleon III’s overseas policies. This perspective, however, was not very widespread or popular.

If a few left-leaning journalists thus protested against the military strategies in Indochina and even called on the government to rethink its ambitions in the territory, most newspapers used the incident to call for still-greater investment in the territory. Although many of these newspapers had supported an expansion of France’s control over Indochina, their calls for action in Indochina after Rivière’s death took on a new tone. For the most part, those advocating for an extension of France’s presence in Indochina had long implied that this presence was necessary simply to \textquote{restore} the terms of the 1874 treaty.\footnote{There were some exceptions to this. As early as April, some writers had begun to speculate more broadly about the future of France’s relationship to Vietnam. In \textit{Le Journal des débats}, Charles Gauthier had indicated that France’s purpose in Indochina was similar to Britain’s in India, and had posited the question of whether France should establish a protectorate in the country or annex it outright. Most writers tended to downplay this kind of speculation, however. See Charles Gauthiot, \textit{Le Journal des débats} (16 April 1883), 1.} These new calls for expansion, on the other hand, did not even mention the 1874 treaty and increasingly argued explicitly for colonial expansion as a desirable goal. In fact, many compared France’s actions in Indochina to those it had taken in Tunisia – a military conflict that ended in French control of the territory.\footnote{These comparisons were mostly negative – these commentators were implying that France was using the same \textquote{half measures} in Indochina that had created so many problems in Tunisia. But these comparisons implied that the goals of both expeditions were roughly the same – military conquest followed by the establishment of a protectorate. See, for example, Pène, \textquote{Le Drapeau en Péril,} 1; \textquote{Un leçon sévère,} 1; Jules Richard, \textquote{Le Corps Expéditionnaire du Tonkin,} \textit{Le Figaro} (30 May 1883), 2.} Others compared France’s relationship to Indochina to Britain’s colonial conquests around the globe.\footnote{\textquotefootnote{Bulletin du Jour,” \textit{Le Temps} (28 May 1883), 1; \textquote{Un leçon sévère,” 1.}}
In other words, while initially French newspapers had at least nominally called for a limited military effort that would promote French commerce in East Asia, they now began to argue that France needed to conquer all of Vietnam.

This growing interest in Tonkin was also reflected in a growing number of political pamphlets, which sought to convince their readers that a French conquest of Tonkin would bring essential political, economic, and cultural benefits to the Tonkinese and the French nation alike. Several writers went out of their way to assure their readers that France’s conquest of Tonkin was not unjust, both because France had fundamental rights to the territory and because it alone could ensure the happiness of the territory’s inhabitants.87 Charles Lemire, for example, insisted that France’s control over Indochina would be “salutary” for the peoples who lived there because it would bring order to a territory overrun by pirates and outlaws.88 Henry Thureau promised that French rule would above all “deliver” the “unhappy country oppressed by odious tyrants.”89 By contending that a French conquest of Tonkin would be both legal and morally just, these authors thus sought to convince their readers that colonial conquest fell squarely within republican political principles. Colonialism, in short, was becoming a popular nationalist theme across most of the factions in Third Republic French political culture.

87 This question of rights was important partly because China also claimed sovereignty over Tonkin. Several writers went out of their way to dispute this sovereignty. Edmond Plauchut, for example, insisted that China had surrendered its rights to the territory with the treaty of 1874. Henri Cordier, on the other hand, insisted that while France had a well-documented relationship with Vietnam, China’s was merely based on “myth.” See Edmond Plauchut, “La Chine et le Tonkin,” Revue des deux mondes (May 1883), 171; Henri Cordier, Le conflit entre la France et la Chine: etude d’histoire coloniale et le droit international (Paris: Libraire Léopold Cerf, 1883), 14.

88 Charles Lemire, L’Indo-Chine: Cochinchine française, royaume de Cambodge, royaume d’Annam, et Tonkin (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1884), 4. Lemire was a colonial bureaucrat who also published extensively on the colonies. See Daughton, An Empire Divided, 76.

89 Henry Thureau, Notre colonie, le Tong-Kin: Explorations et conquêtes, apercus géographiques, les produits naturels, les ressources commerciales (Paris: Dreyfous, 1883), 2. Not all authors argued that the Republic’s role in Tonkin would be to “liberate” its inhabitants. De Thiersant in fact contended that France would be able to rule in the territory because of the fact that its inhabitants embraced authoritarian and patriarchal political and social structures. See Philibert Dabry de Thiersant, Nos intérêts dans l’Indo-Chine (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1884), 30.
A number of authors also argued that conquering Tonkin would bring immense commercial benefits to France. Some contended that Tonkin would serve as an important market for French exports that were struggling to find buyers elsewhere. Thureau, for example, insisted that French commerce was suffering across the globe because its markets had diminished in the face of British competition. In order to protect its trade, France needed to create its own markets – and Tonkin, because of its geographic position and the size of its population, promised to be a fruitful one. Others pointed to the richness of the territory’s natural resources. Philibert Dabry de Thiersant, for example, argued that Tonkin was a fertile country that could produce rice, cotton, tea, sugar, coffee, tobacco, opium, and spices for export. Still others claimed that Tonkin was valuable primarily because it would provide France with an opening to trade with China. A. S. de Doncourt, for example, argued that Tonkin itself could become an important center to conduct commercial trade with Yunnan and other wealthy Chinese provinces. These benefits, the writers implied, would eventually offset any expenses France might incur while conquering the territory in the first place.

If many writers highlighted the economic benefits that Tonkin’s conquest would bring to France, others cast the conflict in more urgent cultural terms. Doncourt, for example, contended that France’s presence in Tonkin was a “national” undertaking with implications for the future of

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92 He also pointed to its rich mineral resources and promised that France would be able to mine them effectively. See Thiersant, *Nos intérêts dans l’Indochine*, 29. Thiersant was a military officer and the French council in China.
93 Doncourt was also interested in securing France’s influence over China more generally, and noted that France’s missionaries were best situated to secure its position in the territory. It’s worth noting that A. S. de Doncourt was a pseudonym for Antoinette Josephine Françoise Anne Drohojowska, who published a number of works about the colonies and did not necessarily have republican sympathies. See A. S. de Doncourt, *Les français dans l’Extrême-Orient: Chine, Japon, Indo-Chine, Annam* (Lille & Paris: Librairie de J. Lefort, 1884), vii, 313; Otto Lorenz, *Catalogue générale de la librairie française* (Paris: Lorenz, 1968), II: 148. But Charles Lemire made a similar argument. See Lemire, *L’Indo-Chine*, 13.
“civilization” itself. Paul Deschanel similarly claimed that France needed to conquer Tonkin and establish a secure foothold in East Asia in order to compete against other European nations. He reminded his readers of Prévost-Paradol’s *France nouvelle*, which had warned of France’s future eclipse in the face of Anglo-Saxon and German expansion. This future, he suggested, was becoming reality. In order to secure France’s future cultural influence in Europe and across the globe, France needed to embark on an expansive project of colonization – beginning in Tonkin.

These different writers did not all share the same vision for France’s future in Indochina: they described its potential values in distinct if overlapping terms. But together, they sought to secure the importance of Tonkin in the popular imagination in the wake of Rivière’s death, insisting that the benefits that the territory would bring to France would far outweigh the costs involved in conquering it. These visions of Tonkin’s promise worked together with the memory of Rivière’s death to build support for a continued French intervention in the territory.

Rivière’s death did not only echo across French newspapers and journals. It also created immediate political effects – at least partly because Rivière’s conquests had pushed him into national prominence. In fact, shortly before the government received the news that he had died, they had named him superior commander of the naval forces in Tonkin. When the Minister of the Navy announced that Rivière was dead, the Chamber of Deputies voted unanimously to approve war credits.

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97 Even the left voted for the measure. Georges Périer, one of the leaders of the left, was the first to speak on the subject. He insisted that the French pavilion was “in peril” and that “the Chamber must save it” by sending troops and supplies to avenge Rivière’s death. See Albert Millaud, “Gazette Parlementaire,” *Le Figaro* (27 May 1883), 2.
would quickly consolidate its hold over Tonkin. Like their journalistic counterparts, most deputies had come, by the end of May, to agree that a wider war of conquest in Indochina was necessary. But they continued to disagree about the ultimate aims of such a war beyond revenge. These divergences in opinion would become apparent as the conflict dragged on.

Despite Ferry’s promise for a quick French victory, the quest to avenge Rivière marked the beginning of a conflict between the French army, Vietnamese mandarins, Black Flags, and regular Chinese troops that ultimately lasted two years. France’s position in this conflict was complicated: the Opportunists who formed the majority of the government wanted to extend France’s control over Tonkin but at the same time still remained wary about open war with China. These conditions hampered the measures the army could take, especially since Chinese soldiers were actively engaged in the conflict. But despite the army’s inability to operate openly against China, French troops met mostly with success in 1883 and 1884. This success was due in part to the succession crisis that followed the death of the Vietnamese Emperor Tu Duc in July 1883, which made it more difficult for the Vietnamese government to oppose French advances in an organized manner. The dynastic struggle also weakened the loyalty of some Vietnamese mandarins to the Hue court and led them to support the French instead.

By June 1884, the French government was able to force the weakened Vietnamese court to sign the “Pâtenotre treaty,” which established a French protectorate over Tonkin and

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98 Cooper, *France in Indochina*, 16.
99 Ferry’s knew that the Assembly would not support a war with China. Over the next year, during his speeches to the Chamber of Deputies asking for more money and more men, he repeatedly assured the representatives that China would not intervene – despite the fact that there were at least 30,000 Chinese soldiers in northern Vietnam. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldziegueur, Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 608.
At the same time, the French signed a convention with the Chinese, in which China agreed to recognize the new French protectorates. However, the French government also sent China an ultimatum demanding that the government withdraw its troops from Tonkin and pay a large indemnity to the French government for participating in the conflict. The Chinese government had been willing to recognize French control over Vietnam, but it refused the terms of the ultimatum and did not withdraw its troops from northern Vietnam. As a result, France’s conflict with China moved into a higher key.

In response to China’s refusal to retreat, Ferry decided to organize an invasion of Taiwan. He sent the French navy to bombard the harbor and institute a blockade. This strategy was unpopular in the Chamber of Deputies, however, both because it was expensive and because the British opposed it. At the same time, the Chinese forces launched a counteroffensive in Tonkin itself, forcing the French government to expend considerable resources in order to counter the advancing Chinese front. Over the second half of 1884, Jules Ferry had to appeal to the Chamber several times for more money and men. While the deputies continued to approve these bills, discontent over the growing expenses resulting from France’s investment in Indochina

102 More specifically, it placed the provinces in Tonkin under direct control of French residents, and installed a French resident-general in Hue, who was to have rights to personal audiences with the Emperor. It also administratively divided Annam and Tonkin. See Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, 45.

103 In this convention, called the Li-Fournier Agreement, the Chinese agreed to withdraw their troops from Tonkin, to renounce all claims to sovereignty over the territory, and to open their border with Vietnam to French commerce. See Chapius, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam*, 68.

104 The Chinese had agreed to withdraw their troops from the territory, but a deadline had never been set. They were reluctant to force them to leave because the treaty was so unpopular in China. See Cooper, *France in Indochina*, 16.

105 The British objected to this strategy from the beginning because they were afraid it would hurt their ability to trade with China. In January 1885, they declared their neutrality in the conflict and explicitly forbid the French navy use any of their ports. Ultimately, this made it impossible for Admiral Courbet, who was in charge of the campaign, to continue his work. See Pluchon, *Histoire de la colonisation française*, 86.

began to rise on both the right and the left. This discontent would ultimately crystalize in response to the “crisis” of Lang Son in March 1885.

**Responding to the Crisis of Lang-Son**

The French had captured the city of Lang Son in Tonkin in February 1885 with a large army commanded by General François de Négrier after several months of fighting with Chinese and Black Flag troops in the surrounding countryside. In March, however, the Chinese counterattacked. During the fighting, General de Négrier was wounded, so he decided to put Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Herbinger in command of the troops. Herbinger panicked in the face of the advancing Chinese army and ordered a retreat from the city. The French troops abandoned most of their supplies and many of their cannons as they fled, leaving both in the hands of their opponents. Overall, it was a relatively inconsequential defeat – not least because it occurred after Jules Ferry had already secretly entered into peace negotiations with Chinese authorities. But because no one knew about the extent of the loss or about the peace negotiations, France’s defeat at Lang Son created a political crisis in France that played out both in the Chamber of Deputies and in the popular press. It also led to a wide debate about the meaning, purpose, and value of “empire” that would ultimately help shape French justifications for colonial expansion.

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107 Ferry asked for war credits in October 1883, December 1883, June 1884, and December 1885. Each time, more deputies voted against them. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldziegueur, Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 610.


109 The degree to which this panic was merited is a subject of some debate. General de Brière, who was in charge of French troops in Indochina, sent two separate telegrams about Lang-Son to France a week apart. In the first, he warned of a large influx of Chinese troops that had overwhelmed the French army. In the second, he blamed the events entirely on Herbinger’s incompetence. See Henry McAleavy, *Black Flags in Vietnam*, 274.

110 The cannons were one of the key advantages that the French had against the Chinese and Vietnamese troops. Leaving so many canons in Chinese hands was thus regarded as a profound failure. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldziegueur, Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 609.

111 Ferry had accepted “unofficial British mediation” to come to a peace agreement, which had already been finalized on March 15. See Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, 46.
News of France’s defeat at Lang-Son reached France almost immediately. Even more than Rivière’s death, it sparked a firestorm of controversy around France’s strategies in Tonkin and the politique coloniale that drove them. Jules Ferry announced the news on March 30 and used the occasion to ask for a credit of 200 million francs to “avenge [France’s] loss” and to “safeguard [its] honor.” Republican radicals Georges Clemenceau and Alexandre Ribot insisted that the Parliament could not discuss the question of credits until it held an inquiry that determined who was responsible for the recent events. Clemenceau even went so far as to contend that France’s defeat at Lang-Son proved that the Ferry ministry was untrustworthy, which meant, “the Chamber no longer has ministers before it, but defendants… accused of high treason.” The conservatives, led by Bonapartist Jules Delafosse, agreed. When Jules Ferry asked to prioritize the vote for credits over the inquiry, Parliament overturned the proposition, 306 votes to 149. Even a number of Opportunist republicans who had long supported Ferry’s actions in Indochina voted against him. In response, Ferry’s cabinet immediately resigned.

Lang-Son also provoked a series of newspaper debates in the press that took on a different tone from the 1883 Indochina debates. Two years earlier, most publications had invoked Rivière’s death as a call to action – even if they had also used this event to criticize government policies. The French army’s retreat from Lang-Son, on the other hand, led many authors in major leftist and conservative publications to go beyond a critique of the French government’s strategies in Vietnam and attack the wider premises of France’s presence in the

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112 He asked the representatives not to treat the request for credits as a “vote of confidence” and promised that they could overturn the ministry afterwards. See “Démission du ministère,” Le Petit Journal (1 April 1885), 1.
113 “Bulletin du Jour,” Le Temps (1 April 1885), 1.
114 “Démission du ministère,” Le Petit Journal (1 April 1885), 1.
115 Brocheux and Hémery, Indochina, 46.
116 The President, Jules Grevy, accepted the resignation. “La crise ministérielle,” La Presse (31 March 1885), 1.
territory. This line of argumentation was not entirely new – journalists in *Le Petit Parisien* had been questioning French involvement in Indochina since 1882 – but it now appeared in a much wider range of publications. At the same time, however, other journals continued to defend the Ferry ministry’s policies in Indochina and to call for an expansion of France’s military efforts in the territory. To some extent, these debates fell along ideological lines – but they also crossed over and complicated political perspectives. Ultimately, these arguments over Lang-Son expanded from specific questions about France’s future in East Asia to much wider debates about the purpose of *politique colonial* and the nature of colonialism’s relationship to French republicanism and imperialism.

Although many Opportunists abandoned the Ferry ministry in the wake of Lang-Son, a number of republican newspapers continued to defend the government’s actions abroad. They employed several different strategies to convince their readers that the Ferry ministry’s policies in Indochina had not irrevocably failed. Many contended that the deputies were overreacting to the events at hand. *Le Siècle* conceded, for example, the events in Lang-Son were “serious,” but they were not, as some deputies had implied, “irreparable.” It thus called on both its readers and the government to avoid rash actions in a “moment of exaggerated emotion.”\(^{117}\) *Le Temps* similarly claimed, two days after the ministry’s collapse, that the situation was “not as black” as it first seemed: it argued that the defeat would not affect France’s future in the territory, noting that it had not even resulted in the death or injury of many French soldiers.\(^ {118}\)

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\(^ {117}\) “Ce qu’il faut faire,” *Le Siècle* (30 March 1885), 1.

\(^ {118}\) The anonymous writer maintained that the original telegram had made the situation look significantly worse than it actually was. The first telegram had implied that the French army had fled in terror, losing men and supplies as they went. It had also indicated that General Négrier was in danger of losing his life. Subsequent information, the author insisted, had made it clear that none of these things were true. The army had retreated in a very orderly way, and it was very likely that General Négrier would recover completely. Moreover, the defeat had only effectively set
It accused the Chamber of acting hysterically by treating the minor defeat at Lang-Son as a “new Sedan” that would “merit a second September 4th.”\(^{119}\) *Le Temps* thus sought to assure its readers that France’s defeat at Lang-Son was a minor setback that could not be compared to major French losses under the Second Empire during the Franco-Prussian War.

Even as these defenders of Ferry’s policies in Indochina sought to reassure their readers about the security of France’s position in Tonkin, they also used the incident at Lang-Son to call for more troops and funds – much like their predecessors in 1883. *Le Temps* argued that the only way for France to regain the lost territory from the Chinese was to send in 50,000 soldiers.\(^{120}\) *Le Petit Journal* similarly proposed that France needed to send reinforcements and resources immediately to avenge itself against China.\(^{121}\) Both newspapers thus implied that France should not respond to its defeat at Lang-Son by withdrawing from Tonkin; the French should instead invest more resources in order to secure a more favorable future outcome. *Le Siècle* even went so far as to contend that the incident indicated that France needed to expand, not contract, its military efforts in East Asia. In order to secure France’s in Indochina, one anonymous journalist argued, France needed to send a large army immediately into China itself. Only by invading Beijing itself, he declared, would France conclude the conflict successfully.\(^{122}\)

In fact, many defenders of France’s expansionary policies in Indochina insisted that the weakness in the government’s strategies stemmed not from the Ferry ministry’s poor decisions but from both the radicals and conservatives who had blocked their efforts in the territory at

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\(^{119}\) “Événements de Tonkin,” *Le Temps* (1 April 1885), 1.

\(^{120}\) “Événements du Tonkin,” *Le Temps* (31 March 1885), 1.

\(^{121}\) “Une Journée perdue,” *Le Petit Journal* (1 April 1885), 1.

\(^{122}\) “Ce qu’il faut faire,” *Le Siècle* (30 March 1885), 1.
every turn. They claimed that the defeat at Lang-Son would have never happened if these groups had not made it so difficult to send soldiers and money to the territory. *Le Temps* argued that the Ferry ministry had been forced to wage an “inexpensive” war, which had in fact proven very costly.\(^\text{123}\) Emmanuel Arène similarly contended that the government was simply unable to “strike with decisive blows” and could not even dare to “pronounce the name of war” without being harassed by an opposition that was prepared to profit from its “smallest hesitations and faults.”\(^\text{124}\) These journalists thus implied that blame for France’s defeat at Lang-Son should fall mainly on the members of the opposition that had hypocritically brought down Ferry’s government.

If some journalists deflected culpability for Lang-Son away from the Ferry ministry, others sought to turn attention away from questions about responsibility altogether. They insisted that instead of identifying who was to blame, all political parties needed to work together in order to overcome the military setback. The republican writers at *La République française*, for example, declared, “There is no room for recrimination. There also is not any room to worry about the past: only to look towards the future. The rallying cry must be: union and action.”\(^\text{125}\) The conservative republican *Le Siècle* similarly argued that everyone’s “first thoughts must be for our brave soldiers… it is the hour where all divisions must be forgotten… where the honor of the flag imposes silence on all party considerations.”\(^\text{126}\) These journalists thus implied that internal political debates were subsidiary to this larger “national” problem. A second journalist writing for *Le Siècle* took this argument a step farther: he used the juxtaposition between divisive party politics and national unity to criticize the behavior of conservatives and leftists in

\(^{123}\) “Affaires coloniales: Chine et Indo-Chine,” *Le Temps* (1 April 1885), 1.

\(^{124}\) Emmanuel Arène, “Haut les coeurs!” *Le Matin* (30 March 1885), 1.

\(^{125}\) *La République française* (31 March 1885), 1.

\(^{126}\) “Ce qu’il faut faire,” *Le Siècle* (30 March 1885), 1.
Parliament. He claimed that by overturning the Ferry ministry, the Chamber of Deputies had chosen a petty “ministerial question” over a critical “national question” and thus complicated France’s task in Indochina. He thus implied that the ministry’s critics were shortsighted and insufficiently patriotic; they had sought to improve their party’s political position instead of working in the nation’s best interests.

These defenders of Ferry’s policies in Indochina therefore minimized the consequences of Lang-Son in the popular imagination, while simultaneously invoking the event as a reason for all political parties to rally around the French flag and invest more resources in securing Tonkin. Although they did not devote much space to defending Jules Ferry, they called on the newly appointed ministry to continue his efforts in East Asia under the banner of national honor and revenge. At the same time, they tried to depoliticize these debates over France’s expansionary policies in Indochina by describing them as “national” concerns for the whole Republic.

Even as some republican newspapers thus defended Ferry’s policies in Indochina, others took up the arguments of various deputies to criticize the French government’s strategies and goals for Lang-Son. These journals did not necessarily sympathize with the political opposition’s perspective on France’s position in Indochina. Like their counterparts at Le Temps and Le Siècle, republican journalists at Le Journal des débats and Le Petit journal argued that the Parliament had overreacted to the defeat at Lang-Son. Le Journal des débats, for example, insisted that France’s situation in Lang-Son was “grave” but not “disastrous.” Auguste Vacquerie similarly described the defeat as serious, but argued that it was important not to act as an alarmist.

127 “La démission du cabinet,” Le Siècle (31 March 1885), 1.
Notably, these writers also argued that the government should respond to the crisis by sending in reinforcements— not by pulling out of the territory.\textsuperscript{130}

If these republican critics of the Ferry ministry, much like his supporters, minimized France’s defeat at Lang-Son and proposed a military solution for solving it, their assessments of the situation differed in other ways. They were more likely to contend that the Ferry ministry was uniquely responsible for the defeat. \textit{Le Journal des débats}, for example, insisted that the Ferry ministry had allowed “events to drive [its] policies” instead of creating policies that would direct the course of the war. Although both the Ferry ministry and its Opportunist supporters had proven adept at producing “patriotic harangues,” \textit{Le Journal des débats} noted, they had waged a passive and ineffective offensive in Tonkin.\textsuperscript{131} Thomas Grimm similarly described the ministry’s actions in Indochina as “equivocal” and called on the new government to act decisively in order to avoid new disasters.\textsuperscript{132} Jules Simon contended that the ministry had not methodically pursued its goals: instead, it had embraced a policy marked by “hesitations and half-measures.”\textsuperscript{133} These republican critics thus agreed with Ferry’s supporters that indecisiveness had led to France’s most recent defeat. But Ferry’s supporters attributed these hesitations to the parliamentary opposition, whereas his critics proclaimed that they stemmed from the ministry itself.

In addition to attacking the means by which the Ferry ministry had carried out the invasion of Indochina, some of these republican critics also condemned the decision to conquer Tonkin in the first place. An anonymous journalist writing for \textit{Le Journal de débats}, for example, insisted that Ferry’s decision to attack China in particular had been a mistake. This war was far

\begin{footnotes}
\item[131] “L’évacuation de Lang-Son,” \textit{Le Journal des débats} (31 March 1885), 1.
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riskier for France than it was for China, he asserted, and it was now becoming difficult to see how France would be able to exit smoothly from the conflict. Other journalists went so far as to imply that the conflict was effectively pointless. Jules Simon declared that Tonkin offered no strategic or economic benefits for France and that as a result, Ferry’s decision to extend France’s holdings beyond Cochinchina – a colony that was useful - was “not in the interest” of the nation. Thomas Grimm took this argument a step further still by arguing that no part of Indochina would ever be useful to France. Instead of attempting to spread its influence so far afield, he maintained, France should concentrate on spreading its influence in North Africa. Territories in North Africa were more economically productive and better positioned strategically than the lands in Southeast Asia. Moreover, France would be able to defend its holdings there – unlike in Indochina, which was too far away. Although Grimm did not argue that France should withdraw from Indochina, he insisted that after resolving favorable peace treaties with China, it should pull most of its resources out of the territory.

A number of major republican publications thus used France’s defeat at Lang-Son to criticize the Ferry ministry’s attempt to conquer Tonkin on multiple levels. Many contended that the ministry had failed to organize the invasion effectively; some even implied that the decision to invade had been a mistake in the first place. But at the same time, their vision of France’s colonial future in Indochina was not markedly different from that of republicans who continued to support the Ferry ministry. Most argued that France needed to respond to the defeat by sending in reinforcements to protect its soldiers and its reputation. And perhaps even more

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134 He criticized Ferry’s decision to cast aside the peace treaty signed by Frédéric Bourée in 1883. See “L’évacuation de Lang-Son,” *Le Journal des débats* (31 March 1885), 1.
136 He argued that France did not have to worry about Africans revolting but would have a hard time controlling Asians that were so far away. See Thomas Grimm, “L’Invasion des barbares,” *Le Petit journal* (31 March 1885), 1.
importantly, even as many insisted that the invasion of Tonkin had been a mistake, they did not disavow colonial conquest itself. Instead, they differentiated between more and less useful colonies and contended that Tonkin fell into the latter camp.

Much like in 1883, the most vehement criticism of the Ferry ministry’s policies appeared in left-leaning journals. Many of these journals invoked the events of Lang-Son to condemn France’s conquest of Indochina in no uncertain terms. *Le Petit Parisien* in particular described France’s activities in Indochina as “the most lamentable of adventures” which had “compromised France’s national interest.”137 The contention that France’s activities in Indochina amounted to little more than an irresponsible “adventure” that would never bring security, material wealth, or national prestige echoed across a number of leftist publications.138

Many of these journalists argued that France’s decision to conquer Tonkin had been a mistake, which the government made even worse because it had been deliberately negligent and indeed duplicitous in promoting the conquest. They referred to Jules Ferry’s recent assurances about the security of France’s troops in Indochina as evidence that he had purposefully misled both the French Parliament and the nation about the nature of the conflict in the territory.139 Henry Maret even implied that the Ferry ministry had used “false dispatches” from Indochina in

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137 The term “aventure” appeared in a number of different publications. It is significant partly because it was the term that republicans had employed during the Second Empire to criticize Napoleon III’s overseas conquests. In the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, many republicans had in fact specifically argued that Napoleon III’s “aventures” were largely responsible for France’s defeat during the Franco-Prussian War. By describing Tonkin as an “aventure,” these writers were thus associating a policy embraced by Opportunist Republicans with what were often considered the worst excesses of the Second Empire. See “Les événements,” *Le Petit Parisien* (31 March 1885), 1.

138 *Le Radical* even implied that all *politique coloniale* was essentially a *politique aventureuse*, thereby extending its critique of Ferry’s activities beyond Tonkin and instead condemning his entire overseas policy. See “La Chute du Ministère,” *Le Radical* (1 April 1885), 2; Camille Pelletan, “La Situation,” *La Justice* (1 April 1885), 1.

139 An inquiry had been held in the Chamber on March 28th about the situation in Tonkin. During the session, Ferry had insisted that French troops were secure in the region and that the conflict with China was quickly coming to a close. See “La guerre de Chine,” *Le Petit Journal* (30 March 1885), 1.
order to convince the public that the conquest was going well. 140 S. Pichon similarly contended that Ferry had presented the public with “illusions” and “falsities” by describing the conflict as a “military promenade” and painting China as a “negligible quantity.” Pichon was quick to point out, however, that the responsibility for Lang-Son did not fall on Ferry alone: he maintained that the majority of the Chamber had followed along with his plans and served as his “accomplices.” 141 Other writers implied that the government’s obfuscations were not only dishonest but also criminal. 142 L’Intransigeant – much like Clemenceau himself - went so far as to insist that the ministry’s actions amounted to “treason” and compared Jules Ferry to a murderer who needed to be tried. 143

Even more notably, many left-leaning journals drew comparisons between the Ferry ministry and the Second Empire. Some simply implied that both regimes were equally marked by folly and blind optimism. An anonymous journalist writing for Le Petit Parisien, for example, claimed that the Opportunist republicans cried, “To Peking!” with as much enthusiasm and as little preparation as the Bonapartists before them had shouted “To Berlin!” at the outset of the Franco-Prussian War. 144 He went on to indicate that both enterprises would meet with the same fate. Other writers, drew direct parallels between the two regimes’ moral flaws. In La Justice, S. Pichon argued that the government’s conquest of Indochina had been undertaken with even more “cynicism and bad faith than the Empire itself would have permitted.” 145 He thus implied that the

140 Henry Maret, “L’Effondrement,” Le Radical (1 April 1885), 1.
141 S. Pichon, “Déchéance,” La Justice (30 March 1885), 1. Camille Pelletan also argued that the Opportunism majority was responsible for compromising France abroad and worried about the consequences of their complicity for the Republic’s future. See Camille Pelletan, “Responsabilités,” La Justice (4 April 1885), 1.
problems that many Republicans had attributed to the imperial government also affected the republican regime. Henri Rochefort proclaimed in an even more inflammatory tone, “I do not wish to do Napoleon III the dishonor of comparing him to Jules Ferry. If the former committed the odious folly of declaring war on Germany, at least he went in person to Sedan… Ferry did not even risk his insect shell for an instant during this expedition.” He went on to indicate that on some level, Ferry and all of the ministers who supported him were even more corrupt than their imperial counterparts because they sent others to die overseas without risking themselves. The contradictions of “republican imperialism” were thus apparent to some Republican critics.

All of these comparisons were to some extent hyperbolic; they compared the Ferry ministry to the Second Empire primarily to demonstrate that the ministry was problematic and corrupt. Other journalists made more direct connections between the two regime’s strategies and respective relationship to overseas territory by complaining that both devoted too many resources to expensive, never-ending overseas expeditions. In La Justice, Léon Millot argued that the Second Empire and the Third Republic undertook constant “warlike expeditions that will haunt us forever.” He noted with some despair, “after the experience of Crimea, China, Mexico, and Germany, we have thrown ourselves at Tunisia, Madagascar, and Tonkin.” He thus implied that the Second Empire and the Third Republic shared essential and equally destructive core programs. He concluded by insisting that France would only find true stability and prosperity by giving up the project of overseas conquest altogether.

146 Henri Rochefort’s attempt to draw connections between the Second Empire and the Ferry ministry was one of the most developed. He argued that the Opportunists Republicans were just as unwilling to hear criticism as the Bonapartists had been during the Second Empire and implied that they would need a “Sedan” to recognize that they were wrong. See Henri Rochefort, “Désastre au Tonkin,” L’Intransigeant (31 March 1885), 1.

147 Léon Millot, “Chronique: Champs de bataille,” La Justice (11 April 1885), 1.
Camille Pelletan, writing in the leftist *La Justice*, took the comparison between the Third Republic and the Second Empire a step farther by warning that the Third Republic’s policies were in danger of leading France towards yet another conflict with Germany. He cautioned that the government’s habit of sending its army off on “adventures” around the world would only serve to “leave Europe at the mercy of Germany” much like in 1870. He reminded his readers, “The future of France is not in China” and implored the government to act accordingly. Pelletan’s conviction that France’s colonial investment overseas would lead to a second Sedan appeared in multiple publications. In *Le Radical*, for example, Henry Maret compared the Republic’s actions in Indochina to the Second Empire’s disastrous invasion of Mexico. He warned, “Mexico led us to Sedan, beware of where Tonkin will lead us.”

Le Petit Parisien even implied that the Third Republic’s policy of pursuing overseas conquest was not only similar to imperial policies in the years leading up to 1871, but the direct result of German interference. The author claimed that Bismarck himself was responsible for pushing Jules Ferry first towards Tunisia and later towards Tonkin in an effort to distract France from its continental interests. Jules Ferry, much like Napoleon III before him, was thus allowing Bismarck to manipulate him.

Leftists’ critiques of the Ferry ministry’s policies were thus more radical than their republican counterparts’ were. They began from the premise that France’s presence in Indochina was mistaken and averred that the Ferry ministry’s strategies in the territory were incompetent and criminal. Moreover, many argued that the Ferry ministry’s mistaken decision to conquer

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148 He thus implied that France had limited resources and needed to choose whether it would focus its efforts on defending its territories in Asia or in France. See Camille Pelletan, “La Situation,” *La Justice* (31 March 1885), 1.


150 The author noted, “it is M. de Bismarck who, after having pushed M. Jules Ferry towards the expedition in Tunisia, pushed him – like towards a trap – towards the expedition in Tonkin!” See “Les événements,” *Le Petit Parisien* (31 March 1885), 1. This insistence that Bismarck was behind Ferry’s actions stemmed partly from the deliberations at the 1884 Conference of Berlin, where Bismarck largely supported France’s colonial claims. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeigueur, Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 622.
Tonkin was not unique; they insisted that all of Ferry’s colonial conquests – including Tunisia and Madagascar – were equally problematic. These writers also sought to discredit overseas conquest and *politique coloniale* in general by associating the policy directly with the Second Empire and Napoleon III. They warned that the Ferry ministry’s *politique coloniale* would again make it impossible for France to defend itself in the event of a European conflict.

Despite these criticisms of the Ferry ministry’s conquest of Tonkin and its embrace of *politique coloniale*, however, most leftists did not call for the new government to retreat from Tonkin. Although a few, like Henri de Rochefort, contended that France should focus less on “attacking the door to China” than France’s “door to the east,” most leftist journalists, like their moderate counterparts, asserted that France should respond to the defeat at Lang-Son by sending in reinforcements to defend its soldiers and avenge its honor.¹⁵¹ In other words, even as they argued that Ferry’s investment in overseas territories and his promotion of *politique coloniale* was leading France towards disaster, they did not for the most part claim that France should adopt new strategies in Tonkin. Some implied that eventually, France should consider withdrawing from the territory – but even those writers did not propose a clear exit strategy.¹⁵² These writers thus joined the attack on Ferry’s ministry but did little to overturn his policies.

Conservative newspapers and journalists also used the French defeat at Lang-Son to criticize the Ferry ministry’s strategies and goals in Tonkin. To some extent, their condemnations of Ferry’s policies echoed those of the left. Many even used the same terminology to describe France’s activities in Tonkin – they labeled it as a “disastrous adventure” that would never

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¹⁵² See, for example,
benefit the nation. Some also similarly went beyond criticizing Ferry’s specific strategies in Tonkin and implied that his entire foreign policy was misguided. Like leftist journalists, they sought to cast aspersions on the *politique coloniale* that he had embraced. Conquering far-flung overseas territories, these conservatives implied, was a careless and expensive activity that would only endanger France’s position on the continent. Some writers even went so far as to imply that *politique coloniale* itself was little more than a “policy of adventures” that was much more likely to harm France than it was to benefit its economy, prestige, or military.

Conservative writers also drew parallels between the Ferry ministry and the Second Empire. A number compared the expedition to Napoleon III’s invasion of Mexico – much like the republican critics at *La Justice* and *L’Intransigeant* – but most of the comparisons were less specific. An anonymous journalist writing for *La Presse* described the Ferry ministry as “a poor imitation of the Empire” that had collapsed the same way as its predecessor had in 1870, and went on to imply that Ferry was even more blameworthy than his imperial predecessors. This contention – that the Ferry ministry was not only comparable to but worse than the Second Empire – appeared in a number of conservative publications. Several writers implied specifically

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153 The term “adventure” or “aventure” is particularly notable because it was often used by both republicans and monarchists to discredit the activities of the Second Empire. Describing Ferry’s activities in Indochina as an “adventure” was thus another way to implicitly link him with Napoleon III. For examples of newspapers that employed the term, see H. de Pène, “La mise en accusation,” *Le Gaulois* (30 March 1885), 1; Étienne Vacherot, “Un revenant,” *Le Gaulois* (6 April 1885), 1; “La Chute Honteuse,” *La Presse* (31 March 1885), 1.


156 He contended that Ferry was even worse than Napoleon III because he was openly consorting with Bismarck after France already had evidence of how duplicitous the man was. He also implied that Bismarck had been secretly responsible for France’s defeat at Lang-Son because Germany had been providing arms to China under the table. See “La Chute honteuse,” *La Presse* (31 March 1885), 1. He was not the only one to imply this – Paul de Cassagnac made the same accusation in *Le Matin*. 

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that the Republic’s defeat at Lang-Son was even worse than the Empire’s defeat in the Franco-
Prussian War because it was more embarrassing to lose to the Chinese than to the Germans.157

Conservative journalists’ descriptions of France’s future in Indochina, however, deviated more widely from their leftist counterparts’ visions. Although some leftist journalists had argued that France should withdraw from Indochina – at least as soon as the defeat at Lang-Son was avenged – most conservative journals insisted that France was now, for better or for worse, committed to the territory. Le Figaro, for example, acknowledged that France would be better served by pulling out its troops and its money instead of investing more in a fruitless endeavor. At the same time, however, the newspaper went on to contend that it was impossible for nations to back away from important commitments and keep their honor – even if they realized that they had made a mistake.158 In Le Gaulois, H. de Pène similarly stated that France could not “honorably” withdraw from Indochina: he declared that the only road to peace in the territory was “through victory.” Moreover, he argued, even after this victory, France could not “abdicate” its responsibilities in East Asia. After all, France was a “Catholic nation” and could not abandon the Christians in Indochina to persecution at the hands of their own government.159 Even more than their leftist counterparts, most conservative journalists thus proposed a future plan for Tonkin that did not deviate that markedly from the one proposed by Ferry himself.

Perhaps the most significant difference between left-leaning and conservative journalists’ assessments of the situation in Indochina lay in their understandings of the event’s consequences

157 Le Figaro, for example, insisted that the loss to Asian troops was much more humiliating than losing to Germany and compared Jules Ferry’s role in the conflict to that of François Bazaine, the general put on trial for treason in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. See, Ph. De Grandieu, “Appel au Pays,” Le Figaro (31 March 1885), 2; Paul de Cassagnac, “Il…!” Le Matin (31 March 1885), 1.


159 This argument that France had a duty in Indochina to protect Catholics dated back to Napoleon III. By advancing this argument, Pène was effectively suggesting that France return to an earlier colonial policy in the territory that centered specifically around religion. H. de Pène, “La mise en accusation,” Le Gaulois (30 March 1885), 1.
for France’s political future. Like their leftist counterparts, conservatives often believed that the government’s conduct in Indochina had been duplicitous and criminally negligent – at least in part because the dangers of the Tonkin campaign were so clear and its potential benefits so remote. H. de Pène described Jules Ferry as an “assassin” who was responsible for both Lang-Son and the death of Rivière. La Presse described the Ferry ministry as “odious” and “dishonorable” and maintained that it pursued “idiotic” policies. But conservative journalists particularly emphasized that the Ferry ministry alone was not responsible for France’s recent poor decisions: in fact, they insisted, the entire Opportunist Republican majority was complicit. Le Gaulois described the majority as “Ferry’s accomplices” who had “revolted too late” against him. Its writers claimed that this majority was the “real culprit” and expressed concern that it would escape its responsibilities. Writing in Le Figaro, Perry implied that turning over the Ferry ministry was futile because the Chamber majority that remained in power was only “under the illusion” that it had been oppressed: in fact, it was just as responsible for Lang-Son as Ferry himself. Le Soleil similarly contended that although Ferry had deliberately lied to the nation, the Opportunist majority “was only tricked because it wanted to be.” La Presse even implied that Grévy, the president of the Republic, was implicated in the disaster. These charges thus

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160 The contention that Ferry had known that the situation in Tonkin was worse than he had claimed also appeared in conservative papers. See “La Guerre de Chine,” Le Gaulois (30 March 1885), 1; F. M., “Échos de Paris: La Politique,” Le Figaro (30 March 1885), 1.


162 “La Crise,” La Presse (31 March 1885), 1.

163 De Pène held them responsible because they allowed Ferry to violate the constitution by waging war without declaring it. See H. de Pène, “La mise en accusation,” Le Gaulois (30 March 1885), 1; “La Crise,” La Presse (31 March 1885), 1.


165 Le Soleil (31 March 1885), 1.

166 “La Chute Honteuse,” La Presse (31 March 1885), 1.
implied that changing the Ferry ministry alone would not solve France’s problems because the entire government needed to be overturned to prevent a future Lang-Son from occurring.

More notably still, conservatives’ critiques of the government’s policies in Indochina invoked the events in Lang-Son to criticize the nature of the Republic itself. *Le Gaulois* claimed that the defeat put “the entire governmental system into play.” Élémir Bourges, on the other hand, implied that the events proved that France’s decision to “abandon itself to the spirit of rebellion of democracy” had undermined its ability to wage war. De Grandieu similarly contended that the Republic had weakened the army and that the Republic’s only legacy would be the Paris Commune and military defeat at the hands of the Chinese. Étienne Vacherot went so far as to proclaim that the events proved that France required a prince to guide it wisely.

The conservative perspectives thus diverged most notably from the republican views in their discussions of the overall significance of Lang-Son. Conservatives charged that the Ferry ministry was corrupt – a claim that also appeared in leftist publications – to attack the structure of the Republic. Increasingly displaced by the Opportunist Republicans, these conservatives saw France’s failure in Tonkin as an opportunity to unseat the republicans’ newfound dominance. They hopefully compared the Ferry ministry’s collapse to the Empire’s collapse on September 4 and envisioned a new, conservative government taking its place.

France’s defeat in Lang-Son provoked strong, divided reactions from the French press as different political groups used the event to either defend their political position or attack their opponents. These groups were not otherwise united in either their political opinions or their

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167 “La crise,” *Le Gaulois* (1 April 1885), 1.
rhetorical approaches, and their perspectives on the significance of Lang-Son often crossed political lines. Each group nevertheless staked out positions on Lang-Son and its significance, relationship to *politique coloniale*, and implications for the French Republic. French republicans who defended Ferry for the most part argued that France’s control over Indochina was a matter of national urgency and should transcend petty political debate. They thus sought to depoliticize both Tonkin and *politique coloniale* more generally by implying that both required national consensus. There were other republicans, however, who criticized the government’s strategies in Tonkin. Some even implied that the decision to invest French troops in the territory was unsound. But they did not generally criticize colonial expansion itself: they simply implied that Tonkin was a poor colonial target. Leftist writers were much more likely to condemn both the Ferry ministry’s policies in Tonkin and all colonial expansions by tying such interventions to the Second Empire. Conservative journalists offered a similar argument: they implied that *politique coloniale* was an irresponsible strategy that had led to the disaster in 1870 and was certain to do so a second time. At the same time, they sought to show that the Republic’s embrace of this flawed policy revealed the weakness of a corrupt regime that was on the brink of collapse.

Despite these many critiques of Ferry’s policies in Tonkin and *politique coloniale* more generally, it is striking that most commentators from all sides of the political spectrum promoted almost exactly the same strategy in response to France’s recent defeat at Lang-Son. Nearly all of the critics argued that France needed to immediately send in troops, supplies, and money in order to recoup the recent losses, even though there were some differences in how the different camps proposed to follow up on this new aid. Republicans who supported Ferry were more likely to call for a radical expansion of France’s efforts in the territory and to contend that France would only be able to resolve the conflict by invading Beijing. Some leftists, on the other hand, argued that
France should consider leaving Tonkin after it avenged itself against the Chinese and secured the position of its soldiers. Conservatives wanted a completely new government to manage future campaigns. But for the most part, writers in all political factions declared that France needed to protect its national honor. Protection of this honor did not necessarily mean that France should try to conquer China, but it did seem to require a continuing French presence in the territories that France had recently brought under its control. Although these writers thus objected to Ferry’s strategies and even his guiding philosophy, they did not for the most part reject the Republic’s new *politique colonial*.

**After-Effects of Lang-Son**

This equivocal reaction to Lang-Son in the press and public debates was echoed in the French government itself. A new ministry headed by Henri Brisson, a deputy from the left, took power in April 1885. When the new minister of foreign affairs, Charles de Freycinet, proposed to send 200 million francs and 8,000 soldiers into Tonkin, the majority of the Chamber – including 46 of the 147 radical republicans - voted for the measure, demonstrating that they were willing to support intervention in Indochina as long as the Ferry ministry was not behind it. 171 Perhaps even more importantly, the Ferry ministry’s collapse did not interrupt the secret peace negotiations with China, which concluded provisionally with a ceasefire on 4 April 1885. 172 China and France signed the Tsien-Tsien treaty two months later on 11 June 1885, ending the conflict between the two countries. By signing this treaty, China formally withdrew both its soldiers and its claims to sovereignty from Vietnam – thereby leaving space for France to consolidate its control over

171 This measure was almost identical to Ferry’s. See Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, 47.

172 Grevy and Ferry had appointed Albert Billot, the director of political affairs at the Quai d’Orsay, to negotiate peace with China, so Ferry was not critical to the ongoing proceedings. See McAleavy, *Black Flags in Vietnam*, 276.
Tonkin and Annam.\textsuperscript{173} In other words, even though the opposition brought down Ferry’s government over its policies in Tonkin, most of its members ultimately voted for measures that had emerged directly from his policies. Moreover, at no point in the days leading up to the peace treaty did any deputies in the Chamber propose France’s withdrawal from the territory.\textsuperscript{174}

If the debates around Tonkin in March 1885 thus ended in a tacit victory for Ferry’s supporters, neither the internal conflicts nor the problems in Indochina itself disappeared. This was at least partly because the Tsien-Tsien treaty that ended France’s conflict with China did not bring peace to Vietnam. After the Chinese troops withdrew, the Vietnamese Emperor, mandarins, and larger population all rose up against French rule in Tonkin. As a result, the Brisson government was unable to recall French troops from the territory.\textsuperscript{175} The ongoing conflict’s unpopularity became apparent in the election results in October 1885, when both leftists and conservatives gained ground against the Opportunist republicans who had supported French expansion in Asia.\textsuperscript{176}

Ongoing tensions over Tonkin reached another political crisis in December 1885, when the Brisson ministry asked the Chamber of Deputies to approve more credits to support the army’s efforts to put down the ongoing revolt in the territory. This request led to extended

\textsuperscript{173} The Tsien-Tsien treaty essentially upheld the provisions of the 1884 Li-Fournier agreement, which was never enforced. However, it did not include the indemnity that had provoked the second round of conflicts in the first place. France also agreed to retreat from Taiwan. As a result, it effectively returned France’s position in Tonkin to where it had been in 1884 before the second wave of conflicts. See Chapius, \textit{The Last Emperors of Vietnam}, 71.

\textsuperscript{174} There was fear that the Opposition would not vote this way – many of the journalists who had supported Ferry’s activities in Tonkin in fact devoted a fair amount of space to denouncing a possible French withdrawal from the territory that no one in the Chamber had even proposed. See Brocheux and Hémery, \textit{Indochina}, 47.

\textsuperscript{175} In July 1885, after France signed the peace treaty with China, the Hue court under the new Emperor Ham-Nghi launched the first of many revolts against French rule. The French put it down and exiled Ham-Nghi to Algeria, replacing him a puppet ruler. France then divided Vietnam into three territories to make it easier to rule: Tongking, Annam, and Cochinchina. But the revolts continued until 1892. See Charles Meyer, \textit{Les Français en Indochine} (Paris: Hachette, 1985), 170; McAleavy, \textit{Black Flags in Vietnam}, 278; Bodin, \textit{Les Français au Tonkin}, 268.

\textsuperscript{176} The right elected 220 deputies (in comparison to 90 in 1881), while the republicans elected 382 (instead of 457), 168 of which were radicals. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, Thobie, \textit{Histoire de la France coloniale}, 624.
debates over France’s position in northern Vietnam that continued through four parliamentary sessions. The new debates in many ways echoed both the form and themes of previous political disputes because conservatives and left-leaning deputies again came together to challenge the funding of government policies in Vietnam, while Opportunist republicans in the center were more likely to defend the government’s project. Some deputies, especially on the left, even proposed for the first time that France should consider withdrawing from a territory that was so costly to maintain. Ultimately, however, the Chamber approved the ministry’s proposition to increase credits for the territory by a majority of four votes. Although the opposition succeeded in limiting France’s military and monetary investment in Tonkin and Annam – and in making new colonial expeditions impossible for the rest of the decade - it did not succeed in blocking the Opportunist republicans’ plans to establish colonial control over northern Vietnam.

At least in part because of the opposition’s limited effects on France’s policies in Tonkin, some scholars have contended that most critics of the conquest of Indochina did not oppose colonial expansion per se. They have pointed out that Ferry’s actions in Indochina only became problematic when they became extremely expensive – both in terms of French lives and French money. French historians Brocheaux and Hémery in particular have argued that the debates

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177 Brocheux and Hémery have noted that the goals of most members of the opposition during this debate were also similar: they wanted to limit France’s military investment in Annam and Tonkin and to establish parliamentary control of foreign policy. See Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, 47.

178 In December 1885, the Brisson ministry asked for more credits to support France’s efforts to suppress rebellion in Tonkin. A commission of 33 members was appointed to review the requests and prepared a report that opposed the request. Camille Pelletan presented the report to the Chamber on 17 December 1885. Casimir-Périer drew up a report for the commission’s minority opposition. The government upheld its demand, leading to a debate that lasted across for four sessions. Seventeen speakers participated. On the left, Camille Pelletan, Georges Périn, George Clemenceau, and Frédéric Passy spoke against it. They were joined by Edgar Raoul-Duval and Jules Delafosse on the right. Supporters included Mgr. Freppel on the right, along with Opportunists Paul Bert, Ballue, Jean-Marie de Lannesan, and Édouard Lockroy. The Chamber ultimately approved the credits, but with only a majority of four deputies. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeigueur, Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 624.

179 The vote was close enough that it led the Brisson ministry to resign almost immediately afterwards. Charles de Freycinet, who replaced Brisson, was careful to respect the most pressing concerns of the opposition by limiting France’s military investment in Tonkin and Annam. See Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, 47.
about Indochina were not even about colonization at all, but instead about the wisdom of war with China, the amount of money and resources France could afford to devote to colonial expeditions, and the relationship between the Prime Minister and Chamber of Deputies. Ferry had advocated a policy of “strong government,” which alienated everyone besides the Opportunists. The opposition’s decision to bring down his government – and its protests against Brissot’s ministry - was thus as much a response to the way that both governments sought to control parliamentary assemblies as it was a response to their strategies in Indochina.180

Even if much of the opposition was motivated by concerns over money and manpower rather than political principles, however, the critics succeeded in sparking a public debate over the practice of colonial conquest that spread outside the formal political realm into both intellectual and popular spheres. These debates took on new shapes both in the Chamber and in theoretical literature during the late 1880s. As republican politicians and writers developed new arguments to defend colonial expansion, they also reacted specifically to their critics’ attempts to link France’s overseas empire to its discredited Bonapartist continental empires by drawing comparisons with the expansionary efforts of other European nations. Over time, these debates transformed the republican conversation about empire itself.

III. The Development of New Colonial Theory

During the mid-1880s, a more theoretical debate surrounding politique coloniale and its connections to republicanism and imperialism thus emerged alongside the disputes about France’s policies in Tonkin. To some extent, the wider debate echoed elements of specific arguments about Tonkin: leftists and conservatives in particular came together to argue that

180 Brocheux and Hémery, Indochina, 47.
politique coloniale was endangering and impoverishing France in relation to its European competitors. They also sought to discredit politique coloniale by tying it directly to the failed politics of the Second Empire. This linkage to the former Empire forced defenders of politique coloniale to articulate ever-more-complex theoretical structures to explain the practice of republican colonialism, justify it politically, and define it as essential to France’s future. Defenders of colonial expansion drew on older colonial theories advocated by thinkers like Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, but their definitions of politique coloniale also reflected new concerns and shifted over time in response to their opponents’ critiques.

Jules Ferry made one of the first attempts to explain politique coloniale and justify its practice in July 1885, several months after his ministry collapsed.¹⁸¹ In a speech to the Chamber, he defined politique coloniale as a system that rested on a combination of “economic principles and interests… humanitarian beliefs of the highest order, and political considerations.” He argued that nations could build two fundamentally different types of colonies. The first type of colony was a settler colony, which required European settlers to emigrate to territories where they could create new societies. The second type of colony was a commercial or economic colony, which established overseas markets for national products. The first type of colonialism was best suited to European countries that had excess population, while the second was best for modern societies that created too many goods. France, Ferry acknowledged, did not have excess population, and so the French did not need to establish settler colonies. However, he insisted, France was in an excellent position to create commercial colonies – which he found to be more

¹⁸¹ He was defending the practice of colonial expansion in the context of a debate about Madagascar. France had committed troops to the territory and the Parliament was arguing about whether the project was worth more money. See Jeanneney, ed., La Politique coloniale, 9.
rewarding than their settler counterparts. His ministry had conquered Tunisia and Tonkin and invaded Madagascar, he explained, in order to create these commercial establishments.

Ferry went on to contend that establishing commercial colonies was critical to France’s future because it was one of the best ways to ensure the nation’s economic prosperity. He declared that France’s agriculture and industry had been suffering since 1860 since both lacked international markets. This problem would only get worse, he argued, as other nations conquered their own colonies and established protective tariffs that would make it effectively impossible for France to expand its trade either within Europe or overseas. In order to prevent an economic crisis, he maintained, France thus needed to create its own markets around the world.

Ferry also defended *politique coloniale* on political and national grounds. He claimed that all countries in Europe – no matter their political organization or sympathies – were pushing to expand their reach in Asia and Africa. If France did not join in colonial expansion, he insisted, it would become unable to compete overseas or within Europe. The lack of overseas colonies would weaken the French navy because French ships needed outposts where they could refuel and build bases from which to defend French commercial interests. Even more importantly, he contended, abstaining from colonial conquest would also weaken the country’s moral fiber. Staying on the continent and avoiding conflict would only lead to a “decadence” that would cause the nation to fall “from the first rank of nations to the third or fourth.” Ferry thus affirmed that *politique coloniale* was a national political, economic, military, and moral mission that transcended all party affiliations and conflicts.

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182 Manceron, ed., *1885*, 55, 56.
183 He argued that Germany and the United States would soon create tariffs to protect their industries. See *Ibid.*, 57.
184 He claimed that Germany would start conquering colonies to create markets for its industry. See *ibid.*, 57.
Even as Ferry placed *politique coloniale* above French political divisions, he also sought to show that it converged with republican politics and moral principles. He contended that France’s decision to dominate others was justifiable because it would contribute to the republican mission of spreading liberty and justice across the world. He drew upon the language of racial hierarchy to differentiate between conquest within Europe – which he implied was suspect – and conquest overseas:

> It must be stated that superior races have a right over inferior races… they also have… the duty to civilize inferior races… [which] was often misunderstood in earlier centuries… But in our days… European nations have been fulfilling… this duty… Could anyone deny that there is more justice, more material and moral order, and more social virtue in North Africa before France conquered it?\(^{186}\)

Ferry thus argued that European nations could conquer peoples in Africa or Asia because Europeans were racially superior to Asians and Africans. This right to conquest, he was quick to explain, did not mean that Europeans could treat these “inferior races” however they pleased; he condemned the way that the Spanish in particular had treated the indigenous population in the Americas.\(^{187}\) Europeans’ “rights” over inferior non-Europeans therefore came with a moral duty: they were required to “civilize” the people they conquered. In the past, Ferry conceded, European nations had not always fulfilled this duty. But contemporary England and France now understood this duty. As a result, they were neither oppressing the peoples they conquered nor depriving them of their political freedom: they were liberating them.\(^{188}\)

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\(^{188}\) He began this speech by describing Europeans’ rights over civilized peoples in an instrumental way. He contended that in Tunisia and Tonkin, “We have acted according to necessity and right: we have been directed by the obligation and duty that is imposed on all civilized peoples – to make barbarous nations respect the signature of their representatives made at the bottom of treaties.” See *Ibid.*, 54, 62.
Ferry’s defense of politique coloniale drew heavily on earlier thinkers. His insistence that politique coloniale was an apolitical endeavor critical to the future of the French nation echoed Prévost-Paradol’s and Leroy-Beaulieu’s claims about the benefits of colonization. Even Ferry’s division of colonies into different “types” was a more simplistic version of Leroy-Beaulieu’s classification of different types of colonial enterprises. Yet Ferry’s definition of politique coloniale also added new elements. His appraisal of the value of settler and commercial colonies, for example, was quite different from Leroy-Beaulieu’s preference for “settler” colonies over commercial colonies. This difference was partly a simple reflection of the fact that Ferry was using the theory of politique coloniale to defend conquests in Tonkin and Tunisia, where large European populations would never want to emigrate. But Ferry’s themes also reflected a different understanding of the kinds of benefits that colonization could bring to the nation. Leroy-Beaulieu had contended that colonization did not create wealth, whereas Ferry invoked France’s colonies as critical to the country’s commercial interests.

Perhaps even more importantly, Ferry also articulated a more elaborate defense of colonial conquest than most of his earlier counterparts had developed. Many of these earlier thinkers – like Jules Duval and Paul Leroy-Beaulieu – were not interested in promoting new colonial conquests: instead, they had sought to encourage the French government to reform its relationship with its already existing colonies. In the process of defending new colonial conquests, however, Ferry also simultaneously proffered new descriptions of racial hierarchy and

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189 He had argued that there were three types of colonies: commercial, agricultural, and plantation colonies. See Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes (Paris: Guillamin, 1874), 537.

190 Ibid., 535, 536.

191 Leroy-Beaulieu had argued that colonization was beneficial because it would secure the future of the French language and culture by spreading it globally. Despite the fact that he was an economist, Leroy-Beaulieu thus saw the benefits of colonization as national in nature. See ibid., 606.
its relationship to “civilization” and “civilizing processes.” The idea that France had an obligation to “civilize” the people it conquered was not new – many of the Saint-Simonians discussed in the first chapter had in fact articulated the same notion for Algeria in the 1850s and 1860s. But Ferry’s contention that this obligation to “civilize” gave European powers rights over other peoples assumed an even more unequal relationship between Europe and other parts of the world. Ferry’s juxtaposition of “superior” and “inferior” races also drew sharper racial lines than many of his republican predecessors, who tended to describe races as more or less “advanced” – a term that at least implied that progress was theoretically possible for all peoples.

Ferry’s defense of *politique coloniale* sent reverberations through the Chamber, which soon played out in two debates in 1885 – the first in July and the second in December. During these debates, deputies on both the right and the left set forth strong objections to Ferry’s *politique coloniale*. They did not all use the same reasoning to attack his ideas, however. Some objected to his economic justification for *politique coloniale*, while others criticized his attempt to connect *politique coloniale* to France’s future or to align it with republican political principles.

A number of speakers specifically rejected Ferry’s contention that *politique coloniale* would bring economic benefits to France. Edgar Raoul-Duval, a liberal monarchist, for example, insisted that while colonial conquest might make certain merchants wealthier, it would never enrich the nation itself. Leftist Camille Pellézan, on the other hand, maintained that “cannons

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192 The Saint-Simonians had insisted that all races, cultures, and societies could reach the same advanced level of civilization, but at any point, some would be ahead of others. Thus, the Saint-Simonians did contend that Europeans were superior to Africans and Asians, if not necessarily permanently so. They also argued that by intervening in the affairs of “inferior races,” Europeans could push them towards civilization. In Saint-Simonian thought, imperial relationships with “inferior” peoples were thus not only defensible, but a positive force to bring “backwards” peoples into the present. See Prosper Enfantin, *Colonisation d’Algérie* (Paris: P. Bertrand, 1843), 499; “Note du Père Enfantin sur la civilisation de l’Asie, 19 Août 1827,” in *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon et d’Enfantin*, 13, 167-68.

193 He implied that some merchants – especially those selling opium – had interests in the colonies. See Manceron, *1885*, 139.
do not create commerce” and that “far-flung conquests do not open markets but close them.”

France’s conquests, he went on to declare, would never pay for themselves; in fact, they would continue to require an indefinite supply of money and military personnel to prevent the indigenous population from revolting. Frédéric Passy, a liberal economist, similarly argued that “merchandise does not follow the cannon” and implied that colonial conquests endangered both international trade and the French merchants who tried to pursue it.” Émile Vernhes, a radical deputy, noted that even Algeria had done very little to enrich France over the years.

Several deputies also objected to Ferry’s claim that overseas conquest would be critical to France’s ability to compete with its neighbors. Paul de Cassaganc, the Bonapartist deputy, described Ferry’s solution to European competition as little more than “an apology for war.” He implied that France could find better ways of securing itself against its European rivals than committing to an endless series of overseas conquests. Georges Clemenceau similarly averred that Ferry’s insistence that France had a “national interest” in conquering territory all over the world was misleading; he claimed that such expeditions would only weaken France because of their financial and human costs.

Most critics, however, went beyond the practical problems and objected to Ferry’s attempts to align overseas conquest with republican principles. They took issue with his claim that politique coloniale was morally and politically justifiable because it enabled “superior” races to civilize their “inferior” counterparts. Georges Périn, a radical deputy from Haute-Vienne, noted that it was a nice abstraction to think that superior nations would have a “civilizing

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194 Ibid., 91.
195 Ibid., 116, 70.
196 Ibid., 66.
197 Ibid., 73.
influence” in conquered territories. However, he insisted, conquering nations were more concerned with material gain than moral progress. He held up France’s promotion of opium trade in Indochina as evidence of the nation’s lack of interest in the wellbeing of conquered peoples. Ferry’s claims that France would “civilize” inferior peoples was thus obfuscation; in fact, *politique coloniale* asserted the right of superior races to take the property of inferior races. 198

Far from aligning with republican principles of liberty and justice, *politique coloniale* was greedy, ruthless theft. Périn thus argued that the idea of a “civilizing mission” was disingenuous because advocates of *politique coloniale* had no intention of carrying it out. His fellow deputy, Camille Pelletan, claimed that the idea that violent conquest could lead to civilization was inherently contradictory. He contended that it was absurd to think “we have a pressing duty, as men of a superior race, to go civilize all of the barbarians in the world with cannon fire! If we consulted these barbarians, I suspect they would allow us to leave!” 199 For Pelletan, the problem was not that governments who promised “civilization” failed to deliver on their promises, but that violence and civilization were inevitably at odds.

Georges Clemenceau also objected to Ferry’s claim that France had both a right over and a civilizing duty towards the “inferior peoples” that it conquered. But he took the argument a step farther by objecting to the underlying logic that drove both claims. He contended,

Superior races! Inferior races! …For my part, I have recoiled [from this idea] ever since I saw German intellectuals scientifically demonstrating that France had to be defeated in the Franco-Prussian War because the French are a race inferior to the Germans. Since that time… I have looked twice before turning away from a man or a civilization and pronouncing: inferior man or civilization!” 200

200 He went on to note, “Are the Hindus an inferior race? With that great Buddhist religion that left India for China, with that great efflorescence of art that we still can see the magnificent vestiges of today? Are the Chinese an inferior race? …Is Confucius inferior? In truth, even today, permit me to say, when the Chinese diplomats are struggling against certain European diplomats… they make a good impression and if you could consult the
By linking Ferry’s description of racial inequality to German intellectuals, Clemenceau implied that it was both prejudiced and unscientific. Moreover, Clemenceau maintained, using an intellectual system that classified peoples as “inferior” and “superior” to justify conquest violated republican principles. He argued that France’s history since the Revolution was a protest “against this unjust pretention” and asserted that Ferry was effectively “clothing violence in the hypocritical name of civilization.” Colonial conquest, Clemenceau asserted, had nothing to do with “civilizing duty”: it was the “pure and simple abuse of the power of scientific civilizations over rudimentary civilizations to appropriate and torture men …for the profit of the pretended civilizer.” Ferry’s justification for *politique coloniale* simply obfuscated a political program that privileged “might over right.”

Some authors took the argument that *politique coloniale* was at odds with republican values a step farther by linking the policy to other forms of political organization – especially the discredited Second Empire. Republican deputy Émile Vernhes, for example, insisted that colonial conquest was “not an act of republican politics.” On the contrary, it represented the continuation of imperial strategies and values into the politics of the Third Republic. “Since 1870,” he complained, “the majority of ministers… have acted like Napoleon III, who, fearing above all the demands for domestic political liberty, threw himself… into Mexico and other expeditions. This sovereign thus sought to use war to create a diversion… you practice the same diplomatic annals of certain peoples, you could see documents that would prove that the yellow race… is not at all inferior to those that hasten to proclaim their supremacy.” See *Ibid.*, 78.

_201_ Jules Miagne and Joseph Fabre, republicans, and Joseph Guilloutet, a Bonapartist, also objected to Ferry’s racial hierarchy. Miagne and Fabre implied that it contradicted the values of “a country where the rights of man had been proclaimed,” and Guilloutet argued that it relied on the same theory that had justified slavery. See *Ibid.*, 61.

_202_ Clemenceau insisted that most colonial conquests had not led to the development of morality or social virtue. Instead, they were marked by “atrocious and terrible crimes committed in the name of justice and civilization.” The Europeans also brought their “vices” to the peoples they conquered by bringing opium and alcohol. See *Ibid.*, 79, 80.
Vernhes thus argued that the Third Republic was using colonial conquest for the same purpose as Napoleon III. In both cases, these conquests abroad served as a distraction from more important political matters at home and became key components in political systems that sought to deny sufficient rights to French citizens.

Vernhes’ effort to tie the Republic’s *politique coloniale* to Napoleon III and the Second Empire was also echoed by other deputies. Monarchist deputy Armand de Baudry d’Asson, for example, remarked that the republic’s commitment to *politique coloniale* showed that “the Republic means war.” He thus deployed the old republican critique of the Empire – “the empire means war” – against Jules Ferry. Georges Périn similarly insisted that the Republic seemed to share the Empire’s taste for “far-flung adventures.” Edgar Raoul Duval, a liberal monarchist, connected the Republic’s colonial expeditions more specifically to the Second Empire’s adventures in Mexico, reiterating a theme that many of his counterparts had introduced in earlier debates over Indochina. He warned that these expeditions were likely to end in a repetition of the disasters in 1870-1871 if the government did not check them. Georges Clemenceau, on the other hand, claimed that a Republic that embraced *politique coloniale* would be even worse than the Second Empire. The Second Empire at the very least, he contended, had promised to pursue peace – even if it had not actually acted on that promise. *Politique coloniale,* on the other hand, was little more than a promise for unending conflict.

203 Ibid., 70.
204 He promised Ferry, “We will print your speech at our cost and circulate it through all of the… electoral districts.” *Ibid.*, 68.
205 Ibid., 28.
206 Ibid., 140.
207 Ibid., 81.
Frédéric Passy, a liberal economist, proposed a different negative comparison by drawing explicit parallels between the Republic’s *politique coloniale* and Germany’s policies in Alsace-Lorraine. He noted that while republicans condemned “the crimes committed in European conquest,” they pretended that they

…not only had the right but the duty to dominate, enslave, and exploit other peoples who… have their own personality and nationality… and are not less attached to their independence… These territories are the life, the body, and the blood of these poor people, they are their Alsace and their Lorraine.”

By annexing territories around the world and subjecting their inhabitants to French rule, Passy averred, France was not acting like the Second Empire but like the German Empire itself. If the Opportunist Republicans wanted to insist that Germany had committed a crime by annexing Alsace and Lorraine, they could not then commit the same crime as they stole territory from other peoples. He noted that although advocates of *politique coloniale* asserted that France needed to expand in order to remain a great power, truly “great peoples” protected the independence of others. The French, in short, should not behave like the Germans.

Clearly, these deputies wanted to refute Ferry’s contention that *politique coloniale* would enrich France and strengthen it against its European competitors while enabling it to spread republican principles throughout the world. Notably, the majority of deputies from across the political spectrum who criticized *politique coloniale* also focused above all on its relationship with republican politics and values. They insisted that *politique coloniale* was not republican and declared that it reestablished the policies of the discredited Second Empire. Colonial conquest could not spread liberty, they argued, because it was an imperial enterprise predicated on armies and might. Such imperial enterprises, moreover, had endangered France before and would do so

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again. Although this argument ultimately failed to convince the majority of the French Chamber to vote against French investment in Madagascar and Tonkin, it did push the advocates of \textit{politique coloniale} to alter their arguments for colonial expansion.

\textbf{Wider Debates over Politique Coloniale}

These debates over \textit{politique coloniale} spread far beyond the Chamber of Deputies. Although the parliamentary debates were influential – they were reprinted in a number of pamphlets and newspapers – they entered a wider conversation about the meaning and purpose of \textit{politique coloniale} that played out in the scholarly and popular press. Both advocates and opponents of \textit{politique coloniale} joined this broader conversation to explain their ideas about \textit{politique coloniale} and the nature of its relationship to republicanism and Bonapartism.

Public critics of \textit{politique coloniale} echoed many of the arguments that had been set forth by their counterparts in the Chamber. Several prominent economists thus echoed the liberal Deputy Frédéric Passy and criticized \textit{politique coloniale} on economic grounds. They maintained that despite promises made by supporters of \textit{politique coloniale} in the Chamber of Deputies, colonization would never increase trade enough to make conquered territories profitable. R. Lavollé in particular declared in an economic journal that it was extremely expensive both to conquer colonial territory and to preserve French control over it. Even in Algeria, he averred, France had almost always lost money.\footnote{R. Lavollé, “Le bilan de la politique coloniale,” \textit{Journal des economists} (March 1887) found in Charles-Robert Ageron, \textit{L’Anticolonialisme en France} (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973), 53.} The economist Yves Guyot took the argument a step farther in a pamphlet that insisted the colonies were so expensive that they made it difficult for France to develop the metropolitan infrastructure it needed to stay competitive within Europe. He argued that the Opportunist republicans foolishly worried about “civilizing the Cochinchinese”
when they lacked the money to adequately pay for instructors who would educate their own citizens. Instead of fretting about “policing” the Tonkinese and building infrastructure in distant colonies, he maintained, France should focus on building its own infrastructure.\textsuperscript{210}

Other writers – on both the right and the left – argued that politique coloniale was undermining France’s national security. Albert de Broglie, in a speech to the Senate that was later printed and distributed in pamphlet form, conceded that colonial conquest was not always problematic. If a country was strong at home and within Europe, he implied, it could afford to expend strength and money exerting its influence overseas.\textsuperscript{211} But the attempt to conquer colonies overseas when France was already weakened was nonsensical. Colonies, he insisted, were a “luxury” that would only further compromise France’s position on the continent, and a weakened France would have to use more of its limited resources to assert its authority overseas.\textsuperscript{212} France would find it difficult to control the people it had conquered, he warned, but it would also struggle to hold its conquests against its European rivals. It was not an accident, he argued, that Germany was encouraging France’s embrace of politique coloniale. The German government was in fact pleased to see that France’s overseas struggles diminished its military power and alienated its English ally.\textsuperscript{213} When the Germans felt that their strength was secure and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{210} Yves Guyot, “Lettre LXXV,” Lettres sur la politique coloniale (Paris: C. Reinwald, 1885) found in Ageron, L’Anticolonialisme en France, 47.
\item \textsuperscript{211} Even so, he insisted, colonies would necessarily weaken its finances and its army to some degree. He invoked Algeria as evidence that colonies inevitably weakened the metropole. See Albert de Broglie, “Projet de loi pourtant ouverture du credits s’élévant à la somme de 59,569,368 fr. pour le service du Tonkin, séance du 11 decembre 1884,” extrait du Journal officiel (Paris: Imprimerie de la Société Anonyme de publications périodiques, 1884), 22.
\item \textsuperscript{212} He argued that it was no accident that France had conquered its earlier colonies at a moment when the country was strong and then subsequently lost nearly all of them when it became weaker. See ibid., 20.
\item \textsuperscript{213} These pamphlets insisted that these overseas conflicts weakened the army for several reasons. On the most basic level, they required the French government to commit huge numbers of troops overseas. But at the same time, some authors implied, the conflicts themselves weakened the troops. When French soldiers fought against Africans and Asians, some writers implied, they became unused to the demands of “great war.” As a result, they found themselves unable to fight against European armies. See Chaudordy, La France à la suite de la guerre de 1870-1871 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1887), 129.
\end{itemize}
France was diplomatically isolated, Germany could declare war on France, secure a second, easy victory, and take all of France’s newly conquered colonies for itself.\textsuperscript{214} The Republican government might dream of creating a “colonial empire,” but such an empire was destined to end in disaster.\textsuperscript{215} This sense that \textit{politique coloniale} would necessarily compromise France’s position within Europe – and the belief that Bismarck was encouraging the policy with precisely that result in mind - reappeared in a numerous pamphlets across the political spectrum.\textsuperscript{216}

Leftist republicans, on the other hand, were more likely to criticize \textit{politique coloniale} by insisting that it violated republican principles and moral values – much like their allies in the Chamber. Louis Guétant, the vice president of the Lyonnaise section of the \textit{Ligue des Droits de L’Homme}, argued that \textit{politique coloniale} was little more than the “official organization of international brigandage”; it involved above all the “exploitation of the weak” and the destruction of “the independence of young peoples who are forming their nationalities,” so that France could steal their riches.\textsuperscript{217} Claiming that France’s intervention in these territories would benefit or “civilize” the indigenous population was an absurd “pretext” that allowed France to “steal [these peoples’] liberty and their country.”\textsuperscript{218} The only examples of “civilization” that France had shown thus far in its conquered territories consisted of “massacring prisoners” and “destroying private property.” France’s behavior in Tonkin and Madagascar – and even in Algeria itself - proved that the French Republic’s ostensible support for “liberty and

\textsuperscript{214} Broglie, “Projet de loi,” 26.
\textsuperscript{215} He used this word quite deliberately, noting that it had appeared in an “government publication.” See \textit{Ibid.}, 19.
\textsuperscript{216} See, for example, \textit{La vérité politique} (Paris: E. Dentu, 1885), 18; Chaudordy, \textit{La France à la suite de la guerre de 1870-1871} (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1887), 128.
\textsuperscript{217} Louis Guétant, \textit{La politique d’extension coloniale et les principes républicains: lettre d’un travailleur à M. Jules Ferry} (Lyon: Imprimerie Nouvelle, 1885), 2.
\textsuperscript{218} \textit{Ibid.}, 9.
independence” was little more than a lie. This behavior was particularly embarrassing, he argued, because France had protested so loudly against Germany’s behavior in Alsace-Lorraine.

Like some leftist republicans in the French Chamber of Deputies, Guétant drew parallels between the Opportunist Republicans’ *politique coloniale* and the Second Empire. He noted that ironically many of the same deputies who supported France’s overseas colonial expeditions had opposed Napoleon III’s expedition to Mexico in the name of the Mexican people. But after they rose to power, they had engaged in the same unsavory behavior that they previously condemned. Their newfound politics were not only embarrassing for advocates of republicanism; they were dangerous for the country, as the results of Napoleon III’s disastrous attempts to extend France’s influence overseas had shown. Guétant noted that in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, many politicians had come to see Algeria as “compensation” for France’s loss. However, he asserted, Algeria itself had actually “played a role” in the defeat. If Napoleon III had not invested so many resources in controlling the territory, France “would not have needed to be compensated” in the first place. All societies that built empires eventually succumbed to “decadence,” so France should focus on strengthening itself at home instead of trying to conquer distant colonies.

A. Laison similarly insisted that the politicians who embraced colonialism were “republicans in name” but “reactionaries in fact.” He invoked the Opportunists’ activities in Tunisia, Tonkin, and Madagascar as evidence that their politics contradicted “democratic principles.” These expeditions, he claimed, were “ruinous” for the public because they sacrificed

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219 He also insisted that the very idea of bringing a nation’s civilization to another place was problematic. Every society, he argued, was unique and had its own strengths. As a result, they would never willingly adapt another society’s norms and customs. He pointed to the Netherlands’ experience under Spain and Poland’s experience under Russia to show that the idea that one society could “civilize” was foolish. See *Ibid.*, 7.


221 He pointed specifically to Rome and Alexander the Great and implied that England ultimately would follow them while countries like Germany, Switzerland, and Norway would remain strong. See *ibid.*, 10.
“honor, French blood, the financial equilibrium, [and] national defense” to the needs of “high finance.” They thus might reward particular scheming members of the *haute bourgeoisie* but would never enrich the nation itself.\(^{222}\) Where Guétant had argued that France’s policies overseas were hypocritical and problematic, Laison took the political-economic argument a step farther by implying that *politique coloniale* undermined the practice of democracy in France itself as it sacrificed the needs of the people to the selfish demands of one class.

Like their counterparts in the Chamber, the nongovernmental critics of French *politique coloniale* did not attack all colonial expansion on the same grounds or for the same reasons. Some indicated that it was economically unsound, while others worried that it would affect France’s ability to keep up with the nation’s European competitors. Still others felt that the seizure of new colonies violated France’s republican principles or even undermined those republican principles within the metropole itself. To some extent, these concerns overlapped, but they also functioned as independent critiques among different commentators who did not necessarily agree on other issues. Perhaps even more importantly, these different commentators were also divided on the question of whether colonial expansion was always problematic or whether it was merely unwise given France’s current circumstances. In other words, while some thinkers opposed *politique coloniale* as such, others objected on pragmatic grounds to the ways that the government was trying to build a colonial system. These disagreements made it difficult for the critics to develop a coherent platform. Despite their different purposes and ideological orientations, however, many employed the same strategy to criticize *politique coloniale*: they linked it with the Second Empire either by charging that both were characterized by a regrettable taste for “adventure” or by indicating that both shared despotic political orientations. The

\(^{222}\) A. Laison, *La politique radicale en 1885* (Paris: Librairie Henri Messager, 1885), 60, 78-80
frequent appearance of this criticism across the political spectrum demonstrates the degree to which French intellectuals and journalists continued to see colonial expansion or colonial empire as closely intertwined with the Napoleonic Empire well into the 1880s.

In the face of these critiques, supporters of *politique coloniale* tried to explain and defend the term, which they claimed was often used but seldom understood.\(^223\) Their explanations of the idea, however, did not always align with Jules Ferry’s – at least in part because they were not all equally committed to defending his specific colonial conquests. Gabriel Charmes, a popular journalist, was among the most influential of these pro-colonial writers. He described *politique coloniale* as a movement “so natural, so legitimate, so useful and so necessary that it has slowly won over all of Europe and that no one can resist it today.”\(^224\) He acknowledged that *politique coloniale* had recently fallen into disfavor in France, but claimed that the public’s distaste for it stemmed primarily from the disorganized and disastrous way that the government had pursued colonial expansion.\(^225\) He therefore sought to change the views of those who saw *politique coloniale* as a “hoax” and to help critics recognize its value. Meanwhile, he also wanted to “turn the Republic away from the errors that have compromised it and threaten to ruin France.”\(^226\)

Only once the country gained a clear understanding of the aims and purpose of *politique coloniale*, he argued, would the policy be able to serve the ambitions of the country.

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\(^223\) A. Bordier insisted that many used the term because they felt that it gave their conversation “an apparent clarity,” but that very few actually reflected on the true meaning of the words. Louis Vignon similarly noted that the discussion about *politique coloniale* had not been impartial and that as a result, misunderstandings abounded. See A. Bordier, *La colonisation scientifique et les colonies françaises* (Paris: C. Reinwald, 1884), xi; Louis Vignon, *Les colonies françaises* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1886), 2.

\(^224\) Gabriel Charmes, *Politique extérieure et coloniale* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), iii.

\(^225\) He noted that so far, the government had largely succeeded in getting caught up in faraway wars that “swallowed up so many millions [of francs] and so many human lives, and has brought us England’s animosity, Italy’s jealous rivalry, and the friendship… of Germany.” See *ibid.*, xi.

Charmes began by delineating the different opponents to *politique coloniale*. First, he noted, there were radicals who “rejected as a crime all idea of conquest… Their system is founded on a series of negations and one single affirmation: the pretended solidarity of peoples opposed to a league of oppressors.”\(^{227}\) He also maintained, however, that a second camp of opponents was more respected and influential than the radicals. This group, influenced by the memory of the Franco-Prussian War, argued that France should abstain from all overseas conquest in order to focus on defending itself against Germany. Both of these perspectives, Charmes averred, were misguided. On the one hand, he claimed that if France and England worked together to exert their influence over the “Orient,” they would contribute to “liberty” and “civilization” overseas and help secure peace in Europe.\(^{228}\) On the other hand, he argued that it was foolish to assume that the failures of the Second Empire’s foreign policy meant that overseas conquest itself was dangerous. Charmes insisted that the Bonapartist “Empire was lost because it never knew how to maintain a wise and stable foreign policy; it oscillated between alliances; it threw itself into all adventures; and it finished with the most terrible of all, in which it perished.”\(^{229}\) He argued that the Second Empire attempted to make conquests overseas without a centralized and coherent plan. The Republic’s overseas conquests, he acknowledged, had also at times suffered from this problem, but if the republican government could pursue a more systematic policy, its colonial conquests would strengthen the country instead of weakening it.\(^{230}\)


\(^{228}\) Charmes was concerned that debates over the Ottoman Empire’s future would result in war. See *ibid.*, 9, 38.

\(^{229}\) He noted, “The greatest danger for the Republic is that the disastrous mobility of impressions that succeeded each other in the troubled spirit of Emperor Napoleon III is found again in its changing majorities and its ministries tossed about by events. It has not yet developed a rule of conduct and followed it with resolution.” *Ibid.*, XLI

\(^{230}\) He implied that all modern French governments had suffered from this problem to some degree. He contended, “attributing our misfortunes to a form of government is an illusion. The problem that we suffer is not there; it lies in the fact that democracy developed too quickly in France.” See *ibid.*, 147.
Charmes contended that *politique coloniale* was above all an apolitical set of policies and strategies that would work together to strengthen the French nation at home and abroad. Charmes rejected the idea that foreign policy was dependent upon a single kind of internal political organization. He noted that republics and monarchies across Europe had embraced similar foreign policies.\(^{231}\) An older argument – which he traced back to the French Revolution – wrongly assumed that monarchies only enacted foreign policies based on “personal interests” while republics concerned themselves with “the emancipation of the people” and the “expansion of liberal ideas.”\(^{232}\) Even the first Republic, he argued, had embarked on ambitious conquests across Europe. The history of Europe itself showed that, contrary to many radicals’ ahistorical theories, different peoples were not “brothers,” but in fact often had “opposing interests.” As a result, popular governments were usually just as prone to war as their absolutist or monarchist counterparts. France thus needed to act accordingly to its needs rather than in accordance with an abstract ideological principle.\(^{233}\) For Charmes, then, *politique coloniale* above all involved enriching and empowering the country while enabling it to act in its own self-interest.

Like Jules Ferry, Gabriel Charmes sought to justify France’s conquest of overseas territory by appealing to its “civilizing” potential, but he described this process of “civilization” in distinct terms. Charmes accepted the claim that some races were “inferior” to others, yet he also insisted that even “inferior” races were “susceptible to education; the day will come where… they no longer need masters and tutors. But we are far from that day. Until then, it is necessary to dominate them, not to oppress them… but to elevate them and to keep them from

\(^{231}\) *Ibid.*, 95.

\(^{232}\) *Ibid.*, 94.

abusing their material strength against us.” Although Charmes thus emphasized that “inferior races” could be educated and perhaps one day could live independently, he also asserted that these peoples could not educate themselves without French interference. Civilization, he argued, could only come from Europe and imperial domination alone could “spread generous ideas, disseminate germs of progress.” Charmes’ account of France’s “civilizing mission,” like Ferry’s, was thus predicated on racial hierarchies. His vision, however, remained more open because it implied that in some distant day, this racial hierarchy might disappear. It was also markedly less idealistic: France might help other peoples to progress, but it would meanwhile be acting in its own interest by preventing colonized peoples from opposing its demands.

Charmes’ vision of how France should go about pursuing politique coloniale also differed from Ferry’s. Ferry had proposed that politique coloniale was above all a secular enterprise that was dependent upon the French state. Charmes, on the other hand, insisted that Catholicism would be critical to France’s ability to exert its influence overseas. He argued that republican France’s decision to suppress the influence of Catholicism was a mistake, because Catholic missions could play a critical role in spreading French values. He thus wanted France to establish a “Catholic protectorate,” particularly over North Africa, where Catholic missions would work to “civilize” the Muslim population. He did not indicate that he hoped these populations would themselves become Catholic; in fact, he implied, by “civilizing” these barbarous peoples, the missions would ultimately have the effect of turning these conquered populations in North Africa away from religion altogether and towards French secular values.

He nevertheless argued that France should follow the English model of colonization and “make
use of religious missions instead of fighting them.” Charmes’ advocacy for religious missions was thus based on a utilitarian perspective similar to the one that drove his understanding of politique coloniale in the first place.

Ferry’s politique coloniale had been marked by tensions that emerged when he simultaneously described politique coloniale as a republican enterprise and an apolitical, national agenda. Charmes did not struggle with the same contradiction. Although he argued that failing to systematically embrace politique coloniale might lead to the republic’s collapse, he in no way suggested that politique coloniale was dependent on a particular political system or agenda. Instead, it was above all a matter of national strategy. At the same time, Charmes also sought to dispel radicals’ claims that politique coloniale was unsound because it was linked to the Second Empire. He insisted that the Second Empire was one example in a long list of French governments that had sought to pursue politique coloniale with more or less success, and he claimed that the Second Empire’s ultimate failure stemmed from the disorganized ways in which it had pursued its goals – not from the goals themselves.

A number of other authors echoed Gabriel Charmes’ attempt to portray colonization as an apolitical enterprise. Some, like J. L. de Lanessan, the future governor of Indochina, insisted that colonization was a “universal movement” that was “pushing all the nations of Europe towards territory that civilization has not yet conquered.”

This movement, he argued, was not created by politicians; instead, it was a “natural” outgrowth of the history of humanity itself. It resulted from the fact that Europe had entered a new “scientific” stage of civilization that was defined by

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237 Ibid., vi.

238 He noted that England, Italy, Russia, Spain, and Germany had all joined in. See J. L. de Lannesan, L’Expansion coloniale de la France: Étude économique, politique et géographique sur les établissements français d’outre-mer (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1886), iii.
growing markets and industrialization. As a result, it was not subject to political or moral debates but evolved as a simple reflection of human historical forces. The influential economist Charles Gide claimed that all the major European powers embraced *politique coloniale*, so France was the only country in which some citizens remained unconvinced. Like Lanessan, he averred that *politique coloniale* was a “force of nature” that transcended political questions.

Barbié de Bocage, on the other hand, warned his readers that the embrace of *politique coloniale* across Europe would leave France politically and economically behind if it did not join in. All three writers thus contended that *politique coloniale* had nothing to do with French political debates: instead, it was a global broad phenomenon that was transforming much of Europe.

Other authors sought to render *politique coloniale* apolitical by grounding it in narratives about French history. Louis Pauliat, for example, insisted that the republic’s embrace of *politique coloniale* had a long tradition that dated back even before the *ancien régime* and was already an integral part of France’s history in “ancient times.” Like Charmes, he argued that some


241 He contended that Britain, the United States, and Germany would take France’s colonies if France tried to give them up. See Barbié du Bocage, *Essai sur la politique coloniale* (Évreux: Imprimerie de Charles Hérissey, 1885), 5. Other authors made similar arguments. Paul Deschanel, for example, drew on Prévost-Paradol’s contention that France was doomed to international irrelevance if it did not expand its influence across the Mediterranean. He insisted that the competition that Prévost-Paradol foresaw was now even broader and encompassed the entire world, and warned that if France did not conquer new territories globally it was doomed to become irrelevant. See Paul Deschanel, *La question du Tonkin* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1883), 2.


colonizing policies were more effective than others, but he claimed that the French people should
not oppose this ancient tradition simply because a number of recent French politicians had
enacted a few ineffective colonizing policies.\footnote{Pauliat, notably, criticized many of the republic’s most recent conquests and was also very critical of the empire’s. He insisted that the \textit{ancien régime} was far more effective at colonizing than any of the contemporary regimes and suggested that the republic adopt its policies. See \textit{ibid.}, 163.} Alfred Rambaud, a professor of history with
close ties to Jules Ferry, contended in his lengthy collaborative historical account of French
colonization that France was in fact one of the oldest colonizing countries. He averred that
explorations and encounters with other peoples had always been a key element of French
national identity.\footnote{Alfred Rambaud, ed. \textit{La France coloniale: histoire, géographie, commerce} (Paris: Armand Colin, 1886), xxxviii.} Aristide Couteaux, writing under the pen name Jacquillou, similarly insisted
in a pamphlet intended for a more popular audience that colonial expansion was “independent of
any form of government.” It represented a “politics of the nation” that was “traditional” to all
governments that have “cared about the prosperity, the grandeur, and the glory of the country.”
The Republic had thus simply embraced expansion policies that France’s most effective leaders
had always promoted.\footnote{He noted, “In antiquity like in modern times, beneath both monarchies and republics… in the Orient as in the Occident, everyone has always agreed that a nation enriches itself by increasing its colonies and is ruined when it loses them.” Couteaux concluded by contending that those who opposed the Republic’s recent conquests only did so because they were hoping for political revolution. See Jacquillou, \textit{Lettres d’un paysan: la politique coloniale} (Paris: Édouard Robbe, 1885), 6, 12.}

Many defenders of \textit{politique coloniale} also sought to render it apolitical by defining it as
a set of policies that would benefit the French nation. They often articulated their understandings
of these benefits in diametrical opposition to their critics’ attempts to demonstrate the ways in
which \textit{politique coloniale} would harm France. A number of authors – much like Jules Ferry –
thus insisted that colonial expansion would improve France’s economy. Lanessan, for example,
argued that colonial expansion alone would enable France to secure resources and new markets
that would eventually improve its material wealth. He noted that critics of *politique coloniale*
rightly stressed that conquering colonies could be expensive, but he argued that these critics also
underestimated the economic benefits that these colonies would bring. Over time, Lanessan
asserted, these territories would more than make up for the costs of their conquest.\(^{247}\) Jules
Bossière and Alfred Rambaud, on the other hand, were more cautious. Bossière acknowledged
that poorly run colonies could cost the metropole money. He contended, however, that well-run
colonies would eventually bear the costs of their own administration while providing France with
critical natural resources.\(^{248}\) Alfred Rambaud similarly conceded that modern colonies might
never produce as much wealth as their 18\(^{th}\) century predecessors, but they would increase French
trade in important new markets.\(^{249}\) Neither of these authors saw colonies as a likely source of
income but they assumed that colonized territories would indirectly help industry and trade.

Other writers insisted that pursuing *politique coloniale* would strengthen the French
nation militarily. Louis Vignon explained, for example, that France’s colonies had always
supported the nation in times of conflict and war, so there were historical reasons to believe these
recent conquests would help secure France’s continental security – not weaken it, as some
opponents of *politique coloniale* had claimed.\(^{250}\) An anonymous pamphleteer, who identified
himself simply as “a sailor,” took this argument further by repeating Ferry’s claim that France
needed more colonies so that its navy could operate. Conquering Tunisia, Tonkin, and ultimately

\(^{247}\) Lanessan, *L’expansion coloniale de la France*, xviii. This argument was also made by other authors. See Vignon, *


\(^{249}\) This was both because he thought that the location of these earlier colonies was in some sense superior and also
because he felt that modern colonies were no longer run in the same exploitative way as their predecessors. The
purpose of colonization was no longer to simply enrich the metropole; instead, colonizing countries were also
working to improve the places they conquered as well. See Rambaud, *La France coloniale*, 687, 695.

\(^{250}\) Vignon, *Les colonies françaises*, 177.
Madagascar would create a network of ports for the French navy to refuel in a global conflict against its two rivals, Germany and England. Some authors also insisted that new colonial conquests would enable France to fight ground wars more effectively. Alfred Rambaud – objecting to critics’ contentions that France’s engagements overseas would limit the number of troops it could draw on during a European conflict – argued that France’s colonies would actually extend the “theater of war” and force France’s opponents to send their troops around the world. Moreover, the colonies would add soldiers to France’s armies as “citizens of color” came to form a “colonial army” that could fight in “intertropical wars.”

A number of writers also repeated the argument that politque coloniale would help secure France’s cultural and intellectual influence on a global scale. Louis Vignon argued that colonization would “bring its name, its language, [and] its ideas to distant places,” which would ultimately secure France’s “moral and intellectual grandeur.” Charles Gide made a more dramatic version of a similar argument by contending that France was losing its position as one of the “greatest” nations in the world because of its declining population. In fact, it was in danger of becoming a “small nation” at a moment when the fate of such nations was especially precarious. In the past, a small but civilized people such as the Greeks could conquer large empires, but in a world where all peoples were becoming “equal,” the economic prosperity, military power, and intellectual influence of each nation would be “mathematically proportional.

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251 He noted that the best French officials – including Richelieu – had always understood this connection. This pamphlet was heavily cited by many other writers supporting colonization, including Gabriel Charmes and Alfred Rambaud. See Les colonies nécessaires: Tunisie, Tonkin, Madagascar (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1885), 17.

252 He also insisted that France’s new colonies, unlike its old colonies, would not themselves become a source of conflict between European powers. Colonies were too costly and labor-intensive, he argued, to be “worth the risks of a European war.” These colonial conquests would thus only involve conflicts “with little danger against savages” that would never compromise France’s situation in Europe. See Rambaud, La France coloniale, 688, 700.

253 Vignon, Les colonies françaises, 174. This argument appeared in other pamphlets. See, for example, P. Dabry de Thiersant, La solution, 5; Onésime Reclus, France, Algérie et Colonies (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1883), 4.
In order to secure the nation’s future influence, Gide argued, France needed to expand in Asia and especially in Africa. In the face of its demographic crisis, France was left with no other choice than to “adopt and assimilate people from foreign races” in order to increase the size of its population. These people might be of different races and separated by an ocean, but one day, he promised, they would come to “speak our language, read our books and our journals, nourish themselves on our ideas, [and] associate themselves with our history and our political destiny.” With such a large adopted population, he implied, France would be able to remain among the ranks of the greatest nations.

Although many of these writers thus argued that colonization was above all an apolitical enterprise ultimately intended to benefit the French nation, a number of defenders of colonization also sought to show that *politique coloniale* did not violate republican principles. On the most basic level, they declared that France’s activities in these countries were contributing to the larger republican project of spreading liberty and promoting progress. By conquering “savages” or “half-barbarian peoples,” France was spreading civilization to all corners of the world. Colonial wars thus ultimately benefitted both conquered peoples and humanity in general. Other authors tried to reconcile conquest even more directly with republican beliefs. Charles Gide, for example, noted that although a number of “humanitarians” insisted that colonization amounted to very little more than “oppression” and “robbery,” their arguments suffered from a fundamental misunderstanding. Although it was true that “men of all races… must be considered...

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254 He insisted that the Netherlands, Denmark, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Belgium, and Switzerland were all in danger of disappearing for these reasons. Gide, “A quoi servent les colonies,” 47.

255 He argued that France was adept at assimilating peoples because of their Roman heritage. See *Ibid.*, 51.

equal in rights,” some “political organisms” were still “inferior” and “defective.” The “rights of individual barbarians” could not be violated, but the “rights of barbarian states… were not sacred.” By differentiating between the rights of individuals and the rights of states, Gide was able to argue that invading “barbarian states” and establishing governments subservient to France could be reconciled with republican principles. Overthrowing such states would not only benefit France, it would also enable the indigenous inhabitants to “pass from barbarism into civilization.” As a result, these conquests contributed to the “general good of humanity,” and colonization, he insisted, was one of the “duties that rests on great nations.”

Conquest and domination could thus coexist with a national commitment to individual liberty and equality.

Other defenders of colonization justified its status in republican thought by distinguishing sharply between republican colonial expansion and its antecedents. They acknowledged that earlier European efforts at colonization had been problematic but maintained that contemporary colonizers employed new methods and pursued different goals. A. Bordier, for example, noted, “colonization in the past had mostly been a work of destruction.” However, he claimed, the new colonization “would not destroy but revitalize races… substitute the spirit of conquest with peaceful association.” Republican colonial conquest was thus an enterprise entirely distinct from monarchical or imperial colonial conquest: it did not rely on exploitation but instead promoted peace and prosperity. Aristide Couteaux expanded this argument by claiming that the Republic’s politique coloniale did not involve war at all. Instead of attacking peaceful societies – like the European colonial powers of the 17th and 18th centuries – the Republic was simply “repressing the brigandage committed by hordes of savages on the frontiers of our overseas

\[258\] Bordier, La colonisation scientifique, xv.
\[259\] Ibid., xvi.
possessions.” The Republic was thus behaving like a police force rather than as an invading army in the territories it occupied. Its incursions and conquests were intended above all to impose order and peace, which would benefit both France and the indigenous population.260

For the most part, the scholarly and journalistic defense of colonization echoed many of the same themes that appeared in Ferry’s speech. This is perhaps not surprising because these writers both influenced and were influenced by Ferry’s activities and speeches for much of the 1880s. They defended politique coloniale by describing it as a “national politics” that would improve France’s global mercantile, military, political, and cultural position. But at the same time, they defined politique coloniale’s relationship with metropolitan political questions in distinct and sometimes contradictory ways that went beyond Ferry’s views. Some figures – like Gabriel Charmes – divorced politique coloniale from republican political values, which he implied were either misguided or irrelevant. Notably, Charmes insisted that France should make use of the Church in order to spread its influence in its overseas territories at a moment when the republicans under Jules Ferry were developing strong anticlerical policies in France.261 He also described the republicans’ theoretical commitment to promoting liberty and fraternity as foolish in a world where political dominance ultimately lay in the hands of the strongest. Charmes thus implied that the republicans’ values and theoretical commitments – while perhaps adequate for shaping France’s domestic policy – had little place in the Darwinian struggle for colonial conquest. Politique coloniale, he averred, required strategic planning instead of moral principles.

Most republicans, however, still drew strong lines between republican colonial conquests and imperial or monarchist colonial conquests – even if they simultaneously contended that

260 Jacquillou, Lettres d’un paysan, 10.
261 Chaitin, The Enemy Within, 41.
*politique coloniale* was apolitical. Unlike its monarchist and imperial predecessors, they argued, republican France was not conquering overseas territories to amass power or riches. Instead, it was spreading French culture and values to “uncivilized” peoples. As a result, these conquests were not despotic; in fact, they would organize uncivilized societies, improve their material well-being, and introduce them to the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The republic’s *politique coloniale* would thus ultimately promote human progress by exposing societies around the world to republican ideals.

These thinkers’ ability to differentiate between republican conquest and monarchical or imperial conquest was, like Ferry’s, predicated on a belief in racial or – increasingly often – “cultural” hierarchy. In his speech to the French Parliament, Ferry had insisted that “superior races” like France had rights over “inferior races” like the Vietnamese. After the opposition condemned this language as violating the principles of *The Rights of Man*, a number of commentators began to substitute the words “culture” or “civilization” for the word “race.” To some extent, the change in vocabulary implied that the differences between France and the places that it conquered were more mutable. But the hierarchy that all of these terms invoked performed essentially played essentially the same role. In all cases, commentators argued that colonial conquest was just if the conquering civilization was “superior” to the conquered and planned to “improve” the peoples now under its control. Because most of these thinkers classified all peoples who were not of European descent as “inferior,” they were thus able to justify any French conquest in Asia or Africa.

These attempts to distinguish republican colonization from its monarchical or imperial predecessors emerged in part out of a desire to reject critics’ attempts to discredit *politique*

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*262* Manceron, 1885, 14.
coloniale by associating it with Napoleon III’s expansionary politics during the Second Empire.

Much like earlier colonial theorists, these defenders of politique coloniale sought to demonstrate that colonial conquest was a fundamentally different enterprise from Napoleonic imperialism. But even as these thinkers insisted that politique coloniale had nothing to do with imperial politics, many began to use the term empire coloniale or empire d’outre-mer to describe the territory that France was conquering. Throughout the 1870s and even into the early 1880s, most colonial theorists has avoided using “empire” to refer to any of France’s overseas territories or conquests – at least in part because the term had been so discredited by Napoleon III. Even in the mid and late 1880s, none of the advocates of politique coloniale used “empire” without attaching some kind of descriptor to it or explicitly explained the term’s meaning and significance. However, an increasing number of writers attached empire coloniale to politique coloniale by implicitly describing the former as the ultimate goal of the latter.

The new use of the term empire coloniale to describe France’s conquered territories in the mid-1880s resulted from a number of contributing factors. On the most basic level, it partly stemmed from the growing strength of the international discourse on colonialism. British colonial theorists had for some time regularly used “colonial empire” to refer to Britain’s overseas conquests. During the 1880s, French advocates of politique coloniale saw Britain as both a competitor and a model. Many of them explicitly drew on British colonial models in their

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263 See, for example, Rambaud, La France coloniale, 685; Dabry de Thiersant, La solution, 36; Solar, La campagne, 30; Bossière, “Les colonies françaises,” 3; Lanessan, L’Expansion coloniale, iv; Pauliat, La politique coloniale, 82; A. Bordier, La colonisation scientifique, 498; Charmes, Politique extérieure, 226; Deschanel, La question du Tonkin, 1; Rivièr, La guerre avec la Chine, 17; Notes sur l’organisation de l’Indo-Chine (Paris: Librairie Militaire de L. Baudoin, 1885), 4; Desdevises du Dezert, La France dans l’Extrême-Orient, 22; Olivier Martelliére, La question du Tonkin (Paris: E. Dentu, 1886), 37; L’avenir de la France au Tonkin (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1885), 17; Bonnetain, Au Tonkin, 198; Bouinais and Paulus, La France en Indochine, v, vi; Hippolyte Gautier, Les Français au Tonkin, 1787-1883 (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1887), 460.
work to create their visions of France’s colonial future. As a result, it is perhaps unsurprising to see translated British terminology appearing in their work. Given the complex history of “empire” in France, however, it remains noteworthy that these French advocates for colonial expansion felt comfortable borrowing the term. The *empire colonial* nevertheless operated as an extension of the distinction that these thinkers were already drawing between republican colonial conquest and imperial or monarchical colonial conquest. If republican colonization could be understood as a distinct enterprise, then republican colonial empire could also function entirely differently from continental or Napoleonic Empire.

**IV. Conclusion: Popular Colonization**

The Third Republic’s decision to invade, conquer, and occupy Tonkin and Annam unleashed a debate that played out both in Parliament and in the press over *politique coloniale*, its relationship to republican politics, and its implications for the French nation. Both right-wing and left-wing critics of France’s policies overseas sought to discredit *politique coloniale* by associating it with Napoleon III and the Second Empire. Their critiques gained enough support to overturn Ferry’s government and push a number of Opportunist Republicans out of the French parliament in the elections of 1885 – even if they ultimately proved both unwilling and unable to end Ferry’s policies. In response to these challenges, supporters of *politique coloniale* defended and explained their ideas in numerous publications that simultaneously defined the policy as apolitical and in line with republican principles. For the most part, they sharply separated republican colonial conquest from despotic imperial or monarchical conquest. This delineation in turn enabled them to articulate a new idea of republican colonial empire, which they implied had

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as little to do with the Second Empire as republican colonial conquest had to do with French
colonies under the *ancien régime*.

Despite the political setbacks that advocates of *politique coloniale* encountered in 1885,
they were quite successful at promoting their understanding of the policy, its relationship to
French politics, and its implications for the French nation in various mediums – including,
increasingly, in popular publications. During the 1880s, a number of writers published books
aimed at general audiences that sought to describe France’s colonial holdings and convince
readers of their importance. These publications also promulgated some of the new republican
defenses for *politique coloniale*. Alexis-Marie Gochet, a member of the society of geography in
Paris, for example, published several editions of an illustrated atlas that described the history,
resources, and inhabitants of France’s conquests. These texts all argued that republican France
was spreading its values into these territories and improving the lives of their inhabitants, while
stressing the importance of these territories to the future of the French nation.265 A popular
history of France’s relationship with its colonies for young readers by E. Guillon similarly
stressed the republic’s unique mission in its overseas territories.266 Such publications would
become even more numerous in the 1890s as advocates of *politique coloniale* sought to secure
the ascendancy of their ideas and promote the unique virtues of republican colonial expansion.

As popular approval for colonial expansion grew during the 1890s, the memory of the
Second Empire, Mexico, and France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War would begin to fade
from the public conversation about France’s *politique coloniale* and *empire coloniale*.
Increasingly, French politicians, journalists, and intellectuals would come to see continental

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empire and colonial empire as distinct enterprises. This dichotomy did not emerge organically, however, and it was not without its contradictions. In fact, it was partly because of the way critics mobilized the memory of the Second Empire during the 1880s that republican commentators formulated their defenses of *politique coloniale* in the way that they did. The republican defense of colonial expansion thus in many ways evolved out of the shadows of France’s problematic relationship to Napoleon III and the Napoleonic empire that he had failed to construct. During the 1890s, advocates for colonial expansion would continue to develop a more robust justification for the colonial empire that they were trying to build by recasting its relationship to republican politics in more positive terms.
CHAPTER 5: THE DEFENSE OF A “COLONIAL EMPIRE” IN REPUBLICAN FRANCE AFTER 1890

In 1889, the French Republic held a large Universal Exposition in Paris. This Exposition – remembered primarily for the construction of the Eiffel Tower – put France’s scientific advancements and engineering capabilities on display for an international audience. At the same time, however, the organizers of the Exposition also devoted space to celebrating France’s expanding colonial territories. As many scholars have noted, organizers envisioned this space as part of a broader attempt to “popularize” these newly conquered overseas territories. Although later Expositions would overshadow it, at the time, 1889 marked the most ambitious attempt yet to recreate colonial spaces and display colonized people for a metropolitan audience.

The exhibit was structured around a central palace, painted with “bright colors according to colonial tastes” and decorated with sculpted panels portraying colonial fruits and flowers. Indigenous troops flanked the building. The organizers also constructed a number of pavilions dedicated to representing France’s different colonial possessions – theoretically modeled after

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1 Alice Conklin, Sarah Fishman, Robert Zaretsky, *France and its Empire since 1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 81.


the territory’s traditional architecture. These pavilions included a range of native flora and fauna, artwork, cultural productions, religious objects, and photographs of “diverse types of indigenous peoples.” Sometimes, indigenous people themselves were on display, especially in the exhibits devoted to Indochina, Senegal, and the Congo, where they engaged in “habitual” activities. These pavilions thus, according to the organizers, served as “monuments to the civilizations that they represent,” while demonstrating France’s territorial expansiveness, its commitment to the principles of assimilation, and the spread of its culture across the globe.

The exhibition was accompanied by an extensive illustrated guide, published by order of the colonial ministry under the direction of Louis Henrique. Divided into five lengthy volumes, it aimed to “make our overseas possessions known to the public in the most realistic, most lively, and most attractive way possible.” The work was intended to provide an “experience” of the colonies – much like the exhibition itself. The volumes relied on maps along with botanical, ethnographic, and architectural sketches to enable their readers to envision the territories and peoples who lived under France’s control. At the same time, they provided extensive descriptions of the different colonies’ climates, economies, and histories – combined with even


7 As Anne Maxwell demonstrates, these villages both connected audiences to the empire and justified that empire by promoting a vision of colonized peoples as racially and culturally inferior. If these overarching purposes continued to mark subsequent “village” exhibitions, their flavor changed over time; in 1889, the organizers described them as “pedagogical,” whereas in 1900, they emphasized entertainment, desire, and consumption. Eugène Monot, as quoted by Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzieger, Thobie, Histoire de la France coloniale des origines à 1914, 638; Anne Maxwell, Colonial Photography and Exhibitions (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), 18.

lengthier explanations of France’s administration of the territories and the “civilizing” efforts that administration had undertaken. The works thus served a dual and at times contradictory purpose. On the one hand, they sought to provide a picturesque and exoticized vision of France’s overseas territories that justified French dominion by demonstrating that colonized peoples were racially and culturally inferior. At the same time, they also emphasized the success of the colonizing project by highlighting the ways in which the French administration had succeeded in making these territories more like France itself.9

The colonial ministry was not the only organization to publish a guide to the colonies represented at the French exhibition. The Société des études coloniales et maritimes also published one, which similarly sought to popularize France’s overseas territories by presenting them in a heavily illustrated, descriptive format. The introduction - written by Paul Leroy-Beaulieu himself – noted that colonization had long been “the object of much misunderstanding and contempt” in France.10 This was in part, he acknowledged, because the French government had not always pursued colonial policy in a logical fashion. However, he insisted, no rational person could witness the colonizing efforts of the English, the Dutch, and the Russians - “the most practical and efficient nations in the world” – and conclude that colonizing was “useless” or “dangerous.” As the ever-improving fortunes of France’s own colonial holdings showed, colonization was “good in itself”: it was a “civilizing work that would profit both the colonizing and the colonized.”11 The positive value of colonization, he noted, had in fact become even more

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9 The works were not just meant to spark interest; they were intended to attract colonists and merchants. See ibid.
11 He then went on to list the advantages that colonization would have for the metropole. On the most basic level, he argued, it would create markets for goods produced by the metropole. Colonies also created employment opportunities for workers and investors alike. And finally, they encouraged emigration. He devoted considerably less space to explaining why and how colonization would benefit the colonized. See Ibid., vi.
marked in recent years, as European powers gave up colonizing by force and increasingly used peaceful means to assert their authority over new territories. He concluded by expressing hope that the popularity of the colonial exhibits at the Exposition reflected a newfound enthusiasm in France for the colonizing project.¹²

If this exhibition and the publications that surrounded it thus focused on promoting and popularizing France’s colonies, it also served as an opportunity for specialists – primarily from France, but also from other countries - to meet and discuss colonization, its aims, and its future. From July 30 to August 3, an international colonial congress organized by Victor Schoelcher and General Louis Faidherbe met in the central colonial palace. In the inaugural session, Édouard Barbey, a senator and the former French minister of the navy and the colonies, welcomed the delegates to the conference. In his speech, he noted that colonization had now become a matter of concern for all European countries. While in the past, he acknowledged, European powers had pursued colonial conquest out of a desire to enrich the metropole, modern colonization sought above all to contribute to the “grandeur of colonizing nations” and to the “prosperity of the colonies.” European nations thus no longer “exploited” the places that they conquered; instead, they tried to spread both their civilization and their population to new territories overseas.¹³ This vision of a “modern,” humanitarian colonization, which had also appeared in Paul Leroy-Beaulieu’s introduction to the colonial exhibit, would structure most of the congress.

Over the next few days, the delegates met to discuss a variety of topics, including whether and how a colonizing power should seek to civilize the indigenous population, how to


¹³ Jules Léveillé, the general secretary, went on to note that the congress would focus on three main themes: “the European education of indigenous people… the colonies’ general constitutional regime, and the deportation of criminals.” See *Congrès international colonial, tenu à Paris du 30 juillet au 4 août 1889: procès-verbaux sommaires* (Paris: Imprimerie 1890), 8.
increase the profitability of colonized territories, and what kind of political regime colonies should be placed under. The topics themselves were hardly new; indeed, many appeared in Paul Leroy-Beaulieu’s work from the late 1860s. If anything, they demonstrate that many French colonial theorists continued to publically espouse a vision of colonial expansion that had its roots in the early Third Republic. Notably, most French speakers expressed a theoretical commitment to the principle of assimilation and continued to promote colonial expansion primarily as a way of contributing to national influence and prestige. At the same time, however, many speakers also drew on the theoretical apparatus that republican politicians and intellectuals had developed earlier in the decade in order to defend politique coloniale and colonial expansion. They implied that the French republic’s relationship to its overseas territories was entirely distinct from France’s relationship with its earlier imperial holdings by describing colonialism as a modern enterprise that had been undertaken by all of Europe. Moreover, they differentiated between European wars and colonial conquest by drawing on Social Darwinism and racist logic.

For the most part, neither the colonial exhibit nor the congress that accompanied it produced a new way of understanding colonization and its relationship to French politics. But

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14 Ibid., 18.
15 Scholars long contended that the French government primarily ruled their colonies according to the logic of “assimilation” until the late 19th century, when they switched to the policy of “association.” As more recent work makes clear, these policies coexisted in French thought for much of the nineteenth century. Moreover, as Osama Abi-Mershed points out, the two policies in fact had much in common. Both “aimed above all to legitimize colonial hegemony, absorb the natives and their characteristics into the superior culture of the colonizer, and thereby secure the colonial dominion and state.” But they were “polarized over their preferred methods for carrying out their civilizing mandates… Assimilation… devised policies that brooked no compromises with… local institutions… Association… was conjured up as a strategy for cadenced progress.” See Osama Abi-Mershed, Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 9. For a longer discussion of “assimilation” and “association” in colonial thought, please see Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.
16 Even during the opening speech, Édouard Barbey described colonization as the “spread of the white race” into new territories. This spread, he implied, was natural; less civilized peoples necessarily ceded space and power to their more civilized counterparts. See Congrès international colonial, tenu à Paris du 30 juillet au 4 août 1889, 9.
17 In some ways, this is in fact ironic. As other scholars have argued, the Universal Exposition of 1889 celebrated the principles of “assimilation and liberalism” that had long characterized French discourses about colonization at a
both the Exposition and the Congress nevertheless marked a shift in colonial discourses. Both represented a new effort by the republican government and other colonial advocates to popularize the French colonies in France and to locate France in the center of the broader conversation about colonization that was occurring across Europe. The 1890s would be marked by a growing campaign to promote the colonies to an ever-widening group of French people while simultaneously securing France’s international reputation as a colonial power.

This widening popular – and political – interest in colonial empire in 1889 and especially in the 1890s is particularly notable in light of the debates and controversy that had surrounded politique coloniale in 1885, when the Chamber of Deputies had brought down Jules Ferry’s government over France’s policies in Tonkin.\(^\text{18}\) Especially after radicals and conservatives unseated the Opportunist republicans who had followed Ferry in the elections of October 1885, a popular rejection of colonial expansion seemed to have solidified.\(^\text{19}\) As Chapter 4 demonstrates, however, the crisis over Tonkin primarily served to illuminate the ideological tensions in the Opportunists’ embrace of politique coloniale and revealed that many French people continued to have reservations about the wisdom of extensive overseas expansion. It is less clear that the political turmoil represented a widespread rejection of colonialism itself. And in the years that followed – as the 1889 International Exposition and Colonial Congress both demonstrate -

\(^{18}\) Brocheux and Hémery, Indochina, 46.

\(^{19}\) The right elected 220 deputies (in comparison to 90 in 1881), while the republicans elected 382 (instead of 457), 168 of which were radicals. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, Thobie, Histoire de la France coloniale des origines à 1914, 639.

As some scholars have noted, the comparative success of the right in these elections was not just a reflection of the Opportunists’ unpopularity; it was also the result of the conservatives’ new electoral strategy. Before the election, Bonapartists and royalists had united together as part of a “conservative union” to create a combined list of candidates. As a result, they more than doubled their share of the popular vote. See William Irvine, The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulangism, and the Origins of the Radical Right in France (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 28.
political advocacy for colonial expansion would ultimately spread across most French political parties and a number of cultural platforms.

This new popular and political interest in colonialism was the result of a combination of factors, including ongoing changes to France’s internal political configuration, growing international competition, and increased advocacy on the part of groups and individuals with financial or personal interests in France’s overseas territories.\(^{20}\) Partly because of these changes, colonialism became much less politically controversial during the 1890s than it had been during the 1870s and the 1880s. Even colonial conquest itself faded as an object of debate. Politicians, journalists, and theorists continued to argue about its means, but far fewer contended that the prospect of conquest was itself problematic.\(^{21}\)

The 1890s were also marked by a new effort by a variety of politicians, intellectuals, and writers to define France’s colonial possessions and explain their relationship to republican values and the French nation. These efforts were themselves not new. Much like the speakers at the Congress in 1889, many republican intellectuals, politicians, and authors drew on theoretical work about colonization drafted decades before. However, these new publications on the colonies were much more prolific than their earlier counterparts had been; they were also aimed at a wider audience. At the same time, they also increasingly drew on a new term – *empire colonial* – in order to describe these colonial possessions.

\(^{20}\) Both the Boulanger Affair and the Dreyfus Affair disrupted the political order in ways that helped create new consensuses around the idea of colonial expansion. At the same time, the competition between European powers over territories in Africa did not die out during the nineteenth century – if anything, it accelerated. And finally, the 1890s saw the emergence of a loosely organized “colonial party” that was actively invested in increasing the popularity of France’s colonies. See M. E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 65.

\(^{21}\) This shift is visible in the responses to the problematic invasion of Madagascar in 1894-95. French troops encountered many setbacks in the territory – much like their counterparts in Tonkin the decade before. And in fact, many politicians and journalists were critical of how the invasion was carried out. But they did not contend, like the radical republicans and conservatives in the 1880s, that the conquest should never have been undertaken in the first place. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale des origines à 1914*, 669.
As Chapter 4 makes clear, a number of writers began using the term “colonial empire” in the mid-1880s to describe France’s colonies.\footnote{As the chapter explained, these thinkers were partly borrowing the term from the British. British colonial theorists had used “colonial empire” to refer to Britain’s overseas conquests for some time. During the 1880s, French advocates of politique coloniale saw Britain as both a competitor and a model; many of them explicitly drew on British colonial models in their work to create their visions of France’s colonial future. See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Picador, 2001), 213.} This marked a shift from the first years of the Third Republic, when republicans avoided using the term “empire” to describe France’s relationship to its overseas territories because of the term’s negative connotations.\footnote{As Chapter 3 emphasizes, the term did not entirely disappear from political discourses, but it was usually only used by monarchists and Bonapartists – not by republicans. See, for example, Pierre Raboisson, *Étude sur les colonies et la colonisation au regard de la France* (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1877).} However, most writers in the 1880s only invoked the term tentatively; they neither used it consistently nor tried to define it. The debates over Indochina in the 1880s showed, moreover, that many on both the left and the right continued to associate colonial conquest with the Bonapartist legacy and continued to connect the two in order to discredit colonial expansion. The word “empire” – even when attached to the word “colonial” - thus remained fraught. But in the 1890s, Bonapartism and the Second Empire increasingly faded from political discourse and popular consciousness.\footnote{The death of Napoleon IV in 1879 had already weakened Bonapartism as a political movement. His uncle and heir had alienated most of the party by associating himself with the republicans. The rise – and fall – of Boulanger would consolidate the growing sense that the Bonapartists were irrelevant. In the wake of his fall, many of them would join together with the new conservative opposition movement that accepted the republic. See James Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 180.} As a result, the negative connotations towards “empire” faded away, and the term “colonial empire” took on a place of increasing importance in popular discourse.

This chapter examines the emergence of “colonial empire” as the key linguistic and conceptual category for understanding France’s overseas territories in the wake of the Boulanger Affair and the conquest of Madagascar. It looks at the different ways in which politicians, journalists, and writers used and defined the term over the course of the 1890s. Its analysis
focuses on several interrelated questions. First, which factors led republican thinkers to embrace “colonial empire” as a conceptual category during this period? Second, how did different figures explain and defend the term? And finally, how did they explain its relationship to the Third Republic and the French nation? The chapter considers these questions by considering how this conversation about “colonial empire” played out across political pamphlets, academic writing, and popular publications over the course of the decade. It begins by examining some of the key political crises of the 1890s and considering how they affected the conversation about colonization and its benefits. It also looks at the growing prominence of racialized and racist discourses in this conversation. From there, it turns to reflect on the emergence of a wider discussion about *empire coloniale* and its significance during this period.

This chapter argues that empire could only re-emerge as an organizing concept in republican colonial thought when the possibility of a Napoleonic imperial restoration faded. However, it also demonstrates that the new political climate was not alone responsible for making “empire” a safe conceptual category for republicans to embrace. Colonial and continental empire were also understood as separate during this period as a result of the growing body of racialized and racist thought, which drew sharp lines between Europe and the colonies. As a result, concerns about “empire” as a form of political organization became irrelevant to the conversation about overseas territories. In fact, the colonial empire became increasingly integral to the way that republican thinkers defined both the Third Republic and the nation-state itself.

II. A New Colonial Synthesis? Political Crisis and Imperial Conquest

During the late 1880s and 1890s, France was beset by a number of political crises, including the Boulanger Affair, the Panama Scandal, and the Dreyfus Affair. Taken together, these crises and the political transformations that accompanied them had important effects on
France’s colonial discourse and its colonial policies. They simultaneously altered the Third Republic’s political configuration and moved colonial expansion away from the center of political debate. As a result of these changes, for most of the decade, France was ruled by a governing coalition that saw colonial expansion as a political tool that could unite a divided nation and increase France’s international prestige. This vision of the colonies’ political advantages was hardly new – in fact, Napoleon III had envisioned colonial expansion in much the same terms. But the 1890s marked the first time that this vision of the colonies’ promise did not encounter any effective opposition.

The growing enthusiasm in France during the early 1890s for France’s existing colonies and the prospect of further colonial expansion was due in part to the rise and fall of Georges Boulanger. Although the Boulanger Affair did not directly involve France’s colonies or the question of colonial empire, it posed a challenge to the republican political order that ultimately helped bolster the popularity of colonial expansion as a national strategy in the years that followed. In the wake of Boulanger’s fall, a coalition of moderate republicans and conservatives would increasingly turn to the colonies as a means of strengthening their political legitimacy.

Georges Boulanger, an army general with an unremarkable military career, rose to prominence in 1886 when Georges Clemenceau put him forward as minister of war. Clemenceau nominated Boulanger because of his anticlerical and progressive reputation. During his tenure as minister of war, Boulanger enacted a number of military reforms, including the removal of military officers associated with the Orleanist and Bonapartist houses. At the same time, he courted widespread popularity by advocating for revanche against Germany. The moderate

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25 Boulanger began his career by serving in Austro-Sardinia and Cochinchina under the Second Empire. He also fought during the Franco-Prussian War and was wounded while suppressing the Paris Commune. See Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered*, 34.
republicans – who had initially supported Boulanger’s appointment – objected to these measures and allied with conservatives to block his return to government after the ministry fell in May 1887. The new administration, concerned about Boulanger’s growing popularity, sent him to command the XIII Army Corps at Clermont-Ferrand.\(^\text{26}\) In the months that followed, however, radical republicans and conservatives rallied against the new administration. The radicals in particular saw Boulanger, who was eager to return to politics, as a potential avenue for political reform. They supported his candidacy in a series of by-elections, where he won the support of radical and Bonapartist working-class voters on a platform calling for constitutional revision.\(^\text{27}\)

Even as the left organized around Boulanger politically, however, conservatives began to underwrite the costs of his campaigns. As scholars have shown, conservative support emerged from the ground up: conservative leaders came to support him when they saw their followers rallying around his revanchist message and opposition to the Third Republic’s institutions.\(^\text{28}\) At the same time, however, these leaders hoped that he would dismantle the Third Republic and perhaps even restore the monarchy. Bonapartists and Orleanists came together to advocate for a return to the imperial plebiscite, which they hoped would secure Boulanger’s power.\(^\text{29}\) This

\(^{26}\) The moderate republicans also objected to a number of other measures that the radical republicans – theoretically their legislative allies – had pushed through. See Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution: The French, 1799-1914* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 258.

\(^{27}\) They were in part reacting against or making use of a scandal around President Grévy’s son-in-law, who had been selling honors. The radicals were using Boulanger in an attempt to establish a presidency elected by direct universal suffrage. See Lehning, *To Be a Citizen*, 156.

\(^{28}\) Over the years, a number of historians have debated about whether Boulangisme was a political phenomenon belonging to the left or the right. It is certainly true that many republican radicals and socialists supported Boulanger, especially at first, and that many of his reforms as war minister seemed in line with a radical republican platform. But at the same time, much of his growing influence came from his ability to win provincial elections in conservative districts. The Royalist press was also largely responsible for supporting him. Boulanger also drew heavily on Bonapartist appeal. See Kevin Passmore, *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 46; Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered*, 13.

\(^{29}\) The Bonapartist and Royalist leaders both asked for and received permission from their respective pretenders to financially support this campaign. Boulanger, in return, sent emissaries promising that he would advocate for a return to the monarchy if he received their support. See Gildea, *Children of the Revolution*, 268.
alliance between left and right was not without its tensions. Eventually, many of the radicals and socialists who had initially supported Boulanger withdrew their support as the movement moved farther to the right. But enough support remained on both sides of the political spectrum to enable Boulanger to run in and win an increasing number of elections in 1888, although he was unable to serve because he remained an active military officer.30

Boulanger’s increasing popularity threatened the Third Republic’s conservative republican and parliamentarian order, which had sought to restrict direct democracy and limit political debate. Boulanger, by contrast, promoted populist political engagement across all registers in French society. He used elections as an opportunity to mobilize voters and encourage them to participate directly in the political process. This populism, which drew on radical republican and Bonapartist traditions, challenged the elitist, moderate republic.31 Tellingly, when he was elected deputy of Paris in January 1889, the moderate republican leadership and mainstream republican press expected a coup d’État.32 Instead, he hesitated, which gave the government the opportunity to prosecute both Boulanger and the Ligue des patriotes that supported him. In response, Boulanger fled the country, and Boulangisme died out over the course of the next two years – well before Boulanger committed suicide in 1891.33

The Boulanger Affair was short-lived, but it affected both French politics and popular debates over colonialism and colonial empire. On the most basic level, Boulangisme’s collapse strengthened the centrist republicans who had supported colonial expansion throughout the 1880s while weakening their radical, Bonapartist, and monarchist counterparts who had

32 Lehning, To Be a Citizen, 160.
33 This was partly because there was a concerted effort in the press to attack the movement and reveal its indiscrete alliances with members of different political parties. See Irvine, The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered, 4, 159.
criticized it. Even the Panama Scandal, which discredited some of the coalition’s members, did not shake its hold on power. Moreover, some monarchists and the majority of Catholics – reacting both against the demagogic character of Boulangisme and in accordance with an order from the Vatican - rallied to the Republic and to the Republic’s colonial policies. As a result, the Third Republic emerged with a strong political center committed to defending its political order and to extending its reach overseas.

Boulangisme also affected moderates’ attitudes about the security of the republic. On the one hand, the Boulanger Affair strengthened many moderates’ concerns about the likelihood of popular violence and political revolution. This ongoing concern in fact helped drive the alliance between conservatives and moderates for much of the 1890s, especially in light of the growing strength of the socialist party. At the same time, however, the Third Republic’s ability to contain the Boulangiste threat also helped create a new optimism about its future. In the years following Boulanger’s death, it became increasingly clear that both monarchist and Bonapartist threats to the Republic’s political order had faded. The Legitimist, Orleanist, and Bonapartist parties fractured and realigned, and their successors were largely willing to work within the republic’s legal and political framework.

34 Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, Thobie, Histoire de la France coloniale des origines à 1914, 639.
35 In the 1890s, the Church instructed its followers to accept the Republic in order to defend social order. Catholics came together with former Orleanists to form the droite républicaine. For most of the 1890s, Opportunists (now usually known as “Progressists”) allied more frequently with the right than with the radicals. At the same time, the diminishing health of the Count of Paris and the scandalous behavior of his presumptive heir created further fractures among Royalists. See Passmore, The Right in France, 74.
36 The socialist and anti-Semitic movements further consolidated these connections. See Lehning, To Be a Citizen, 180; Robert Lynn Fuller, The Origins of the French Nationalist Movement (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 47.
37 New threats to the republic’s political order had emerged, of course, including the nationalist and socialist movements. But while these opposition movements sometimes continued to argue for reformation or revolution, they did not propose to restore the monarchs of earlier centuries. By 1892, some of the key members of the monarchist leadership – including figures like De Mun, Breteuil, and Mackau – were declaring that the monarchist cause had become hopeless. Some monarchists continued to dream of carrying out a coup d’état, but they lost hope for electoral victory. See Irvine, The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered, 162-166.
These dual legacies of Boulangisme affected the discourse surrounding overseas expansion. First, the fear of rebellion led moderate leaders on both the right and the left to view colonial expansion as a way to unite a French populace prone to political division and disorder. Much like Napoleon III in the 1860s, they saw colonial expansion as an attractive strategy to direct popular bellicose sentiment and strengthen France’s military reputation while avoiding the dangerous European war that revanchisme threatened. And at the same time, the problematic specter of Napoleonic Empire, which opponents of colonial expansion had invoked to criticize the Republic’s activities overseas for much of the 1870s and 1880s, faded along with Bonapartism itself. Republicans’ increasing concerns about mass politics and the growing weakness of their former political opponents thus worked together to strengthen the appeal of colonial expansion and unsettle the ability of its opponents to criticize it.

The turn towards colonial expansion among moderate and conservative politicians and intellectuals in the wake of Boulangisme was not only driven by a reaction against the movement’s tactics and values, however. In fact, during the 1890s, advocates of colonial expansion often drew upon some of the same discourses that Boulangisme had made use of and further popularized, including discourses of racial science and nationalism. These discourses would help underwrite the new, more comprehensive visions of colonial empire articulated by French writers, intellectuals, and theorists during the 1890s. They would distinguish France’s new colonial empire from other imperial configurations while creating a vision of empire that could fall in line with French republican principles.

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38 Boulanger drew on these discourses in order to raise popular resentment against foreigners and immigrants and to increase support for the prospect of a war of revenge against Germany. Boulangists used Social Darwinism in order to emphasize the competition that divided interest groups. Immigrants, some Boulangists implied, were dangerous to France’s national character because they were racially degenerate. The Boulangiste movement also drew on anti-Semitic discourses that would re-emerge during the Dreyfus Affair. See Passmore, The Right in France, 50.
Racial science was far from new in 1890s France; in fact, it had long played an important and contradictory role in French colonial policy. Napoleon III himself had drawn on a Saint-Simonian vision of racial progress in order to justify his plan to restructure France’s relationship to Algeria, while colonists had used an alternative system of racial classification to mobilize against that plan. But over the course of the 1880s and 1890s, biological explanations for racial difference played an increasingly prominent role in French culture and political discourse. These biological explanations were not necessarily Darwinian – indeed, even French scientists had somewhat ambivalent attitudes towards Darwinism until the end of the nineteenth century. But even if Republican thinkers were as likely to draw on Lamarck as on Darwin, they nevertheless applied principles borrowed from evolutionary biology to explain society and politics. During the 1890s, Republican thinkers were especially likely to apply these principles to explain the relationships between different nations or peoples.

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39 Modern racial theory arguably had its roots in Enlightenment thought, but it was only systematized in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as scientific thinkers sought to classify and rank human races. During the early nineteenth century, European scientists and philosophers had divided over the question over whether human races were defined by monogenism or polygenism. Advocates of monogenism held that all humans had descended from a common source, while advocates of polygenism contended that humans had descended from different sources. See Nancy Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 85.


41 Darwin’s work was not ignored in France. While *The Origin of Species* was ignored in French journals, and was only translated into France in 1862, *The Descent of Man*, published in English in 1871, was translated in 1872. In the 1850s, evolution or *transformisme* was relatively unpopular in France – in part because of the lasting influence of Georges Cuvier, a paleontologist opposed to the philosophy. Darwin’s growing importance in England did have an impact on the fortunes of evolutionary biology in France; during the 1870s and 1880s, an increasing number of scientists, intellectuals, and politicians adopted the theory. Many of them, however, did not adopt Darwin’s vision of evolution, but Lamarck’s – in part because Darwinism was seen as an import. Slowly, over the 1890s, the Darwinian model won out. See Robert E. Stebbins, “France,” in *The Comparative Reception of Darwinism*, ed. by Thomas F. Glick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 117, 120, 125, 155, 162; Rae Beth Gordon, *Dances with Darwin, 1875-1910: Vernacular Modernity in France* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 60-65.

42 Darwinism tended to emphasize competition between species while Lamarckism tended to focus on inherited and environmental changes. As Linda Clark shows, French politicians who sought to apply these biological explanations to social life often drew on some combination of them. See Linda Clark, *Social Darwinism in France* (University, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1984), 178; Alice Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 23.
The growing popularity of racialized thinking was reflected in the rising fortunes of Arthur Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, which had originally been published in the 1850s (when it had been almost entirely ignored). In this text, Gobineau sought to describe “the fall of civilizations” – a phenomenon that could only be explained, he insisted, by examining race. He contended that all major civilizations had been established by the white race – especially Aryans – and that the same civilizations began to fall when the white race began to mix with other peoples. Over time, he warned, the white race would disappear, especially in France – a trend that would ultimately lead to universal decay and barbarism. This vision of racial decay was not formed by evolutionary biology, whose advocates contended that the forces of evolution led to human progress. But the growing popular interest in race led to new printings and a growing reception during the 1880s and 1890s – despite the fact that Gobineau’s political opinions were far from republican. If Gobineau’s vision of racial inequality remained more controversial than its evolutionary counterparts, it demonstrates both the new influence of racist thinking and the contradictions that could characterize these kinds of explanations.

The growth of racist and biological thinking thus affected French discourses about colonial expansion in two ways. On the one hand, a number of Republican thinkers drew on the

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44 In fact, he insisted that the French Revolution revealed above all the extent of France’s racial decadence. See Gobineau, *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, 169.

45 It contradicted Darwinist principles. Gobineau insisted that there were three races whose characteristics did not change over time. While he did not embrace polygenism, he argued that “black” and “yellow” races were separate from “white.” See Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology*, 248.

46 As Stephen Kale has shown, Gobineau was a “heretical legitimist” who originally wrote the *Essai* to criticize the French aristocracy and modern French society. Kale argues that Gobineau’s racial theories were intended above all to explain “the irredeemable degeneracy of the French nobility” and “account for France’s uniquely tragic historical development.” See Stephen Kale, “Gobineau, Racism, and Legitimism: A Royalist Heretic in Nineteenth-Century France,” *Modern Intellectual History* 7.1 (April 2010), 35, 36.
language of Darwinian competition to justify France’s overseas colonial expansion. They insisted that all nations were competing with one another for influence and indeed survival, and that ultimately, the largest and most powerful of these nations would come out on top. Unless France extended its borders and expanded its population, it would find itself unable to keep up with its British and German rivals. In its substance, this kind of argument was not new – Prévost-Paradol had articulated a version of it in the late 1860s. But it became both more widespread and more biologized in the 1880s and 1890s.

On the other hand, a growing number of thinkers also relied on this more robust vision of racial inequality to differentiate more thoroughly between conquest within Europe and overseas colonial conquest. By arguing that the peoples living in Africa were biologically inferior to Europeans, French republicans were able to simultaneously argue in favor of democratic political practices in Europe and non-democratic domination of non-Europeans overseas. Of course, not all Republican thinkers adopted this biological vision of racial inequality. In some ways, after all, it posed a racial problem to the republican justification for colonial expansion. Republicans claimed that they had a moral right to colonize overseas places because they would bring “civilization” to the peoples who lived there. But if the peoples who lived there were biologically inferior, how could a new “civilization” or “culture” improve their status?

The tension between this vision of biological inferiority and the promise of republican civilization had been present even in the 1889 Universal Exposition, and it would continue to

47 Clark, Social Darwinism in France, 161.
mark much republican thought about colonial expansion. For example, in his 1897 *Principes de la colonisation*, Jean Marie Antoine de Lanessan, the republican former governor-general of Indochina, insisted that racial inequality was the driving factor for much of human history; it explained which peoples had expanded over new territory and which had contracted or disappeared. He claimed that conflicts between peoples over territory were inevitable and implied that modern colonization was the extension of this underlying natural law. As a result, he acknowledged, colonization was undeniably “savage”; moreover, “the degeneration or the destruction of one of the races in contact” inevitably followed. This destruction was not necessarily violent – it might take the form of “miscegenation” or displacement instead of slaughter – but it was the inevitable consequence of contact. Colonization thus did not necessarily improve colonized peoples, but simply reflected the permanent and necessary conflict over resources and land that drove all of human history. At the same time, however, this destruction was not purposeless. While it might negatively affect colonized peoples, the spread of civilization across the world contributed to the progress of humanity.

In this vision of colonial expansion, Lanessan drew on the Darwinist notion of “survival of the fittest” in order to argue that racial conflict was a central part of human history.

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50 Like Leroy-Beaulieu, Lanessan argued that the earliest “colonization” was difficult to disentangle from human migration. However, he argued, the most “inferior” peoples – like the Hottentots in South Africa – had never migrated at all. See Jean Marie Antoine de Lanessan, *Principes de la colonisation* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1897), 6.

51 He insisted that histories of colonization “never lack motives for explaining the acts of barbarity committed by Europeans. It is always the indigenous peoples who are always wrong; they steal from Europeans, they destroy their plantations… and thus attract just reprisals… The most superficial examination of the conduct of the [colonizers] is sufficient to establish that the indigenous people are only avenging their injuries.” See *ibid.*, 24.

52 This brutal vision of human nature and human conflict was typical of many thinkers who borrowed the Darwinian notion of “survival of the fittest” and applied it to human society. See *Ibid.*, 25.

Colonization thus did not require moral or political justification; it simply reflected human nature. At the same time, however, he also used a positivist notion of “progress” that implied that colonization would ultimately contribute to a broader project of civilization. In other words, Lanessan did not abandon the idea of the “civilizing mission,” but instead reoriented it. Instead of spreading civilization to different peoples around the world, he implied, colonization spread civilization to different territories. Moreover, instead of benefiting the specific groups of people that fell beneath French control, it benefited humanity as a whole. This reorientation effectively effaced the peoples who lived in the territories the French conquered and the violence of the French occupation.

Other republican thinkers did not necessarily share Lanessan’s attempt to reconcile evolutionary biology and the “civilizing mission.” A number insisted that France’s civilization would be able to improve or alter the biological inferiority of the people that it conquered. Others avoided the language of evolutionary biology entirely. In fact, this disagreement about whether people identified as racially inferior could over time become equal would continue to create tensions in republican colonial thought into the twentieth century. But even if applying the language of evolutionary biology to republican colonial conquest created contradictions, it helped justify a vision of racial hierarchy that secured the popularity of politique coloniale and supported new attempts to outline a comprehensive vision of a republican colonial empire.

This new agreement between right and center on the potential political and cultural benefits of colonial expansion was particularly notable in the popular and political response to the disastrous invasion of Madagascar in 1894-1895. France had long claimed some rights over

Madagascar, and in the mid-1880s, Jules Ferry had worked to further consolidate French control over the territory. In 1890, France even succeeded in establishing European acceptance of its rights to the island. However, the French administration was able to exercise little effective authority over the island’s interior. In 1894, in the face of rising conflicts with the Malagasy population, the republican government sought to impose a protectorate on Queen Ranavalona III’s government. When she refused, the Chamber of Deputies voted to fund an expedition led by General Jacques Duchesne that would impose the protectorate by force.\(^56\)

From the beginning, Duchesne’s expeditionary force ran into a number of setbacks. When French troops actually encountered the Malagasy army, they met with little serious resistance. But if almost no French troops died in combat, nearly 6,000 of the 15,000 troops sent to the territory died of disease.\(^57\) Moreover, almost as soon as France succeeded in forcing the Malagasy government to agree to the sought-after protectorate, a popular uprising spread across the territory. The movement, often referred to as the *menalamba* or “red shawl” uprising, took the form of a guerrilla war. Its adherents singled out foreign missionaries and indigenous

\(^{56}\) France had claimed some rights over Madagascar dating from the mid-17th century. However, for much of the 19th century, the British had had a larger presence on the island. In the 1880s, French republican leaders became increasingly interested in exerting French authority over the island more thoroughly. Between 1883 and 1885, France had waged a war in Madagascar in an attempt to establish a protectorate over the territory. The conflict was concluded in the Treaty of Tamatave on 17 December 1885, which recognized Queen Ranavalona III as the sovereign of Madagascar. In return, France received the bay of Diego-Suarez and an indemnity. Perhaps most importantly, it also gained the right to install a resident who would control Madagascar’s foreign affairs. French officials clearly saw this as a step towards declaring Madagascar a protectorate, but the treaty was not perceived the same way in Madagascar itself. Then, in 1890, France signed an Anglo-French accord which recognized France’s rights over the territory. In 1894, in the wake of attacks on French nationals, Charles Le Myre de Vilers attempted to enforce a French protectorate. The Queen refused, sparking the conflict. While socialists and some radicals opposed the expedition, the majority of the Chamber voted for it – at least in part because they were concerned about the influence of Britain in the territory. See Michael Finch, *A Progressive Occupation? The Gallieni-Lyautey Method and Colonial Pacification in Tonkin and Madagascar, 1885-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 169-172; Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale des origines à 1914*, 667-668; J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 171.

Christians for attack.\textsuperscript{58} In 1896, chaos spread across the island as the republican government tried and failed to exert order.\textsuperscript{59} In the face of this upheaval, the republican government replaced the territory’s administration and sent in Colonel Joseph Gallieni to serve as Governor-General; he eventually succeeded in suppressing the revolt.\textsuperscript{60}

France’s invasion of Madagascar thus ended with French control over the territory, but it consumed more resources and lives than initially predicted. The French government found itself investing both money and men in an increasingly expensive and unpopular expedition. Although the French army did not encounter any serious military resistance, a high number of French soldiers died during the conquest – largely because of poor government planning. The Ministry of War had failed to supply the invading troops with enough porters to carry supplies or sufficient medicine to treat those who had fallen ill.\textsuperscript{61} To make matters worse, ongoing conflicts between the Ministry of War and the Ministry of the Colonies further complicated the treatment of sick soldiers. In order to avoid having to collaborate with colonial officials, army officers decided to ship sick soldiers back to France instead of bringing them to nearby Reunion. Many of them died on the journey because of the heat and unsanitary conditions.\textsuperscript{62}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[58] The uprising did not seriously threaten French rule, but it did upset European residents, especially since the rebels went out of their way to target missionaries. See Daughton, \textit{An Empire Divided}, 175.
\item[59] Louis Brunet, \textit{L’oeuvre de la France à Madagascar} (Paris: Challamel, 1903), 119.
\item[60] Finch, \textit{A Progressive Occupation}, 173.
\item[61] Brunet, \textit{L’oeuvre de la France à Madagascar}, 133-135.
\item[62] The Minister of the Colonies and the Minister of the Army articulated different versions of this conflict. The Minister of the Army claimed that the Minister of the Colonies had insisted that Reunion could only house 300 sick soldiers at a time. Moreover, he had decided that the ministry of war would need to pay 9 francs per day for each sick soldier housed there. As a result of these difficulties, the Minister of War claimed, the army had no choice but to ship the ill back to France. The Minister of the Colonies reported, on the other hand, that he had often offered the army assistance of all kinds throughout the expedition, but that all help had been entirely refused. He insisted that the Ministry of the Colonies had offered to house as many sick soldiers as necessary in Reunion, and claimed that the only reason that the Ministry of War could not afford to pay 9 francs per day was because they had misallocated the resources necessary for the expedition. See “Revue des Journaux,” \textit{Le Figaro} (19 September 1895), 3; Henry Laupauze, “Le général de Montauban et l’expédition de Madagascar en 1861,” \textit{Le Gaulois} (20 September 1895), 1;
\end{footnotes}
The problems that accompanied the invasion of Madagascar received considerable attention in the French press. To some extent, this coverage echoed the debates over Indochina that occurred a decade previously. Journalists from the left, right, and popular press came together to attack the government’s policies and practices. The right-leaning *Revue hebdomadaire*, for example, described the invasion of Madagascar as “poorly prepared, organized, and conducted” and accused both the Minister of War and the Minister of the Colonies of incompetence. The popular *Monde illustré* similarly wondered how the government “could have thrown itself into this deadly campaign with so little thought or foresight.” The left-leaning *Rappel* complained that the expedition had been organized in a way that “delivered our troops to all of the forces of destruction posed by a murderous climate” instead of putting them in a position to adequately fight the Hova. These journals thus implied that the French government – and especially the Ministry of War – had acted incompetently and foolishly endangered the lives of French soldiers.

A number of journalists even went so far as to contend that these mistakes were consequential enough to warrant immediate consequences. The popular *Petit Parisien* condemned the expedition’s “incapable organizers” and averred that they had committed an “unpardonable crime” that “mocked” the French nation. A journalist writing for the

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63 “Bulletin Politique,” *La Revue hebdomadaire* (September 1895), 636. Maurice Talmeyer, writing for the same publication, implied that the government’s incompetence was directly responsible for killing soldiers. See Maurice Talmeyer, “Causerie,” *La Revue hebdomadaire* (September 1895), 631.


65 Pelletan went on to imply that the ministry of war’s incompetence was in fact endangering the entire army, and warned that their abuses had put the “military spirit” itself under attack. See Camille Pelletan, “Pour l’armée,” *Le Rappel* (22 September 1895), 1.

conservative Gaulois argued that the deputies needed to determine who was responsible for “the thoughtless waste of French resource and the sacrifice of so many of its children.”\footnote{“Responsabilités,” Le Gaulois (22 September 1895), 2.} The leftist Justice agreed that Parliament should launch an inquiry into the expedition.\footnote{“À Madagascar,” La Justice (22 September 1895), 1.} The insistence that the administration’s behavior was not simply foolish but criminal had also characterized the criticism of the Tonkin expedition in 1885 – although in 1895, most journalists did not suggest that the officials responsible were guilty of treason.\footnote{See, for example, Camille Pelletan, “Responsabilités,” La Justice (4 April 1885), 1; “Les événements,” Le Petit Parisien (31 March 1885), 1; Henri Rochefort, “Désastre au Tonkin,” L’Intransigeant (31 March 1885), 1; “La Chute honteuse,” La Presse (31 March 1885), 1.}

The Ministry of War’s decision to repatriate French troops through the Suez Canal in the middle of the summer was the object of particular criticism from all sides.\footnote{It also received considerable coverage, as journalists interviewed the returning soldiers. A correspondant from Le Figaro who met soldiers that had arrived on a transport ships noted that many who survived the journey were likely to perish in France. See Charles Chincholle, “Retour de Madagascar,” Le Figaro (23 September 1895), 1.} In the Senate itself, Arthur Ranc, the head of the Gauche démocratique, wanted to question the Minister of War over the incident; journalists on both the right and the left supported these efforts. The centrist Temps, conservative Figaro, and left-leaning Justice all in fact used the decision on the transport of ill soldiers to accuse the Minister of War of corruption and heartlessness. They implied that the Minister of War had decided to send French troops home on ships – even though he knew that it would likely kill them – because he was hoping that if they died in France after their return instead of in Reunion, they would not be counted as casualties of war. The Ministry had thus sacrificed the lives of French soldiers, these journalists contended, in a misguided attempt to seem less incompetent.\footnote{None of these newspapers made this allegation directly. Instead, they noted that another publication had made the claim, and asked their readers to reflect on whether it seemed likely. See “Reveux des Journaux,” Le Figaro (19 September 1895), 3; “A Madagascar,” La Justice (20 September 1895), 1.} Other writers claimed that different, but equally questionable
motivations had determined the ministry’s decisions. Camille Pelletan, for example, argued that the Ministry of War refused to send soldiers to Reunion because it did not want to share the riches of Madagascar with the Colonial Ministry. Even if journalists did not necessarily agree on the motivations behind these repatriations, many thus suggested that the Ministry of War had sacrificed the lives of ordinary French soldiers for its own purposes.

The press coverage of the invasion of Madagascar was far from uniformly critical, however. In fact, a number of popular journals defended the Ministry of War and the government more generally against these charges. Many of the journalists writing for the *Journal des débats* and *Liberté* in particular – conservative republican newspapers – sought to demonstrate both that the expedition’s problems were minor and that the government was not responsible for them.

One article, for example, argued that the intensity of the criticism over Madagascar did not stem from the events that had transpired, but instead was the result of socialist meddling. These socialists, the author implied, were not interested in the welfare of French soldiers; instead, they were attempting to use Madagascar to divide republicans and discredit the government. Gaston Calmette, writing for *Le Figaro*, similarly claimed that the discontent was due above all to English propaganda. These journalists were not uncritical of the government or the ministry’s efforts, but they believed that the incident did not merit as much attention as it was receiving.

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72 Pelletan was a journalist and a politician who was also a member of the *Bloc des gauches*. He implied that the Minister of War was afraid of involving the Ministry of the Colonies in the conquest of Madagascar in any way. See Camille Pelletan, *L’Éclair* (25 September 1895), as quoted in Brunet, *L’œuvre de la France à Madagascar*, 137.

73 *Le Temps* published an article – republished by *Le Journal des débats* – that sought to disprove the accusations against the Ministry of War. The article claimed that the sickness was unavoidable and had been anticipated from the beginning. Both also claimed that there was plenty of medicine in Madagascar, along with well-trained doctors to administer it. It also sought to explain the reasons behind the absence of supplies. See “Madagascar,” 1.


75 Gaston Calmette, “Ce qu’il faut penser de Madagascar,” *Le Figaro* (6 August 1895), 1.

76 These journals also questioned the government’s decision to send the sick back to France through the Suez Canal. See, for example, *Le Temps* (18 September 1895), 1; *Le Journal des débats* (19 September 1895), 1.
Although the invasion of Madagascar thus succeeded in provoking a debate in the French press, this debate took on a shape very different from the debates over Indochina in the 1880s. During the earlier debates, a wide coalition of journalists and politicians on both the left and the right had invoked Indochina as evidence of the flaws intrinsic to both *politique coloniale* and colonial expansion. They associated both strategies with the Second Empire and Napoleon III and in fact implied that Napoleon III’s embrace of colonial expansion was responsible for leading France to defeat at Sedan in 1870. Together, these criticisms forced the proponents of colonial expansion to articulate more elaborate theoretical defenses for their expeditions.

In 1895, on the other hand, the debate was both less intense and less elaborate. Over the course of August and September, many journalists and some politicians condemned the Ministry of War’s tactics and strategies. Some even linked the Third Republic’s army to the Second Empire’s by implying that the events in Madagascar demonstrated that the French military was no more competent in 1895 than it had been in 1870. Others held up the conflict between the Ministry of the Colonies and the Ministry of War as evidence of broader political problems in the Third Republic. Still others – especially on the right – insisted that the incident reflected badly above all on the Chamber of Deputies. However, most journalists did not question the outcome or the value of the Madagascar conquest in the same way as their earlier counterparts had questioned the expansion in Indochina. A few journalists on the left continued to contend that *politique coloniale* was incompatible with republican principles by associating it with

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77 François Coppée, the nationalist poet, argued that the mistakes in Madagascar showed that “in the past twenty-five years, we have not become wiser… Beneath the Empire that you saw fall and beneath the Republic acclaimed by the naïve and the ridiculous… you can see the same faults, the same lack of foresight… the same frivolousness in the heart of politicians when it comes to spending the blood and the gold of France.” See François Coppée, “Vingt-cinq ans après,” *Le Journal* (26 September 1895), 1.

78 See, for example, “Politique et grandes manœuvres,” *La Lanterne* (21 September 1895), 1.

79 See, for example, Vicomte de Montfort, “Madagascar: la véritable responsabilité,” *Le Figaro* (2 October 1895), 1.
Bonapartist and German imperialism. But for the most part, even the most ardent critics avoided entering into a discussion about the benefits and drawbacks of colonial expansion – even if they questioned the government’s strategies for carrying it out.

In this context, Georges Clemenceau’s reaction to the events of Madagascar is revealing. In 1885, Clemenceau helped shape the radical left’s opposition to the Tonkin expedition by articulating an expansive critique of politique coloniale, which he insisted violated republican principles. In 1895, he remained critical of the Madagascar expedition but argued against it in different terms. In an open letter to Arthur Ranc published in La Justice, he expressed support for the decision to question the Minister of War on his policies. He condemned the Ministry of War’s “criminal destruction of lives” and claimed that the French people had the right to know “what inept ideas or negligence… led to the decimation… of our unhappy soldiers.” Clemenceau went on to argue, moreover, that an inquiry would be insufficient; if the Chambers held one minister responsible for the invasion of Madagascar, it would not resolve the problem. Instead, the Republic needed political change in order to prevent incidents like this from recurring.

Edouard Durranc, for example, insisted that the Republic had betrayed its principles by conquering overseas territory. He complained that the Republican politicians who had embraced colonial expansion had fallen to the “temptations of Berlin.” Bismarck sought to divert French attention from Alsace-Lorraine by directing it overseas; by embarking on overseas conquest, France was thus doing his bidding. This act, he warned, would have terrible consequences. First, it had distracted the French from their true concern: regaining Alsace-Lorraine. Worse, it had changed the nature of the French state itself. By conquering overseas territory, France had abandoned its political principles in order to enter into “a barbarous hierarchy of the strong and the weak.” Instead of focusing on regaining territory stolen from France, France had decided to steal territory from other peoples. As a result, it lost its moral fiber and its right to reclaim Alsace-Lorraine. This kind of critique – which associated continental conquest with overseas conquest and connected both with despotic, imperial forms of government – had been prominent in 1885, but was less common in 1895. See Édouard Durranc, “La vie de Patachon,” La Lanterne (23 September 1895), 1.


He had associated it both with the German Empire and the Second Empire. See Manceron, 1885, 78.

At the time, he was not in office; he temporarily lost much of his political popularity in the wake of the Panama Scandal. See Fuller, The Origins of the French Nationalist Movement, 53.

Much like in 1885, Clemenceau thus invoked the problems with Madagascar as part of a broader problem with republican politics. He argued that the Republic itself was corrupted and even contended that it was barely an improvement over the discredited Second Empire. But he did not imply that the problems that beset Madagascar were evidence of broader problems with colonial expansion itself. He questioned the Ministry’s methods and implied that they revealed the flaws of the Republic’s political construction – but he did not say that the government should have avoided invading Madagascar. Instead of calling for the Republic to refrain from colonial expansion, he insisted that the Republic needed broad-sweeping internal reforms. This perspective was echoed by a number of critical journalists on the left. They suggested that the conflict had revealed deep problems in the Ministry of War, the army, and perhaps even in the Republic, but they did not use the incident to criticize politique coloniale or colonial expansion.

Notably, while a number of journalists criticized the behavior of the government and the Ministry of War, they remained convinced of the inevitability and benefits of French victory. Even as Le Gaulois called for a sweeping investigation, it reassured its readers that it was only a matter of time before the French asserted military control over the island. Once word reached France of General Duchesne’s success at Tananarive, moreover, Le Gaulois insisted that the French should thank “our brave soldiers, their eminent commanders, and their general” for bringing the expedition to a successful close. The author went on to conclude that the expedition – despite its problems - had brought honor both to the army and to France itself. Although the

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85 He argued, “Republican politics have consisted… of changing men and formulas in order to maintain all of the errors of Empire.” See Ibid.

86 Ibid.

87 “Responsabilités,” Le Gaulois (22 September 1895), 1. The leftist La Lanterne also reported on the army’s success. See “Madagascar,” La Lanterne (22 September 1895), 1.

88 “La politique: le 2 octobre à Tananarive,” Le Gaulois (27 September 1895), 1.
leftist La Lanterne continued to condemn the Ministry of War even after French victory was assured, it too praised General Duchesne and his army for its successes.\(^{89}\) Journalists thus distinguished between the French government and the army and celebrated the conquest of Madagascar even if they criticized the way that the conquest had been conducted.\(^{90}\)

The conflicts over Madagascar reveal that many commentators from across the political spectrum remained suspicious of the Third Republic and of the republican coalition that governed it. Many were quick to portray the government as corrupt, incompetent, and inefficient. More generally, they argued that the government – either in the form of the Ministry of War or the Chamber of Deputies - was too engaged in petty intra-parliamentary struggles to wage war effectively. But at the same time, these conflicts also show how competing views of colonial conquest and colonial expansion had faded from the center of the debate. While some journalists continued to object to the practice and associate it with Bonapartist imperialism and Napoleon III, the majority seems to have accepted that the French conquest of Madagascar was inevitable.\(^{91}\) They simply used the government’s botched efforts as an opportunity to criticize the political coalition that had emerged in the wake of the Boulanger Affair.

This confluence of moderate republicans and conservatives that marked much of the 1890s was threatened in the second half of the decade by the Dreyfus Affair, which created a

\(^{89}\) La Lanterne did conclude by insisting that France needed to learn a lesson from the problems that beset the conquest of Madagascar. Maujan in fact insisted that although Duchesne’s ability to bring the campaign to a successful close was remarkable, it was overshadowed by the government’s corruption and incompetence. He noted, “The expedition of Madagascar cost us 200 million and ten thousand men. The glory that France has gained from this campaign will never value that.” See A. Maujan, “Une Leçon,” La Lanterne (29 September 1895), 1.

\(^{90}\) For other examples of newspaper articles praising Duchesne and the troops but condemning the War Ministry, see “La Prix du succès,” Le Petit Parisien (27 September 1895), 1; “Les responsabilités,” La Lanterne (28 September 1895), 1; Vicomte de Montfort, “Madagascar: la véritable responsabilité,” Le Figaro (2 October 1895), 1.

\(^{91}\) There were of course a few exceptions. The increasingly nationalist L’Intransigeant, for example, insisted that the expedition to Madagascar was an “awful war” that had been foolishly undertaken. It went on to list all of the members of the Chamber of Deputies who had voted for it and insist that they were all equally responsible for the deaths of French soldiers. See Ph. Dubois, “Les responsabilités,” L’Intransigeant (27 September 1895), 1-2.
new rift in the French political order and redrew the lines between left and right. For several years, anti-Dreyfusard nationalists used the Affair in order to inflame popular sentiment against the Third Republic and its institutions. For most of 1898, Dreyfus’ defenders found themselves on the defensive; some of them in fact lost their seats to rising Nationalist and anti-Semitic groups in the Chamber of Deputies. Conservative republicans or Progressistes split on the issue, and a number joined the nationalists and the remaining monarchists in opposition to the Republic. At the same time, however, the anti-Dreyfusards struggled to unite into a coherent political bloc. Moreover, as they increasingly turned to violence and rioting, and ultimately

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92 The Dreyfus Affair began in 1894, when Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish Alsatian, was convicted of treason for allegedly selling military secrets to the Germans. By 1896, Colonel Picquart, the head of the army’s intelligence service, had come to suspect that Major Ferdinand Esterhazy was in fact responsible. When he expressed his concerns to his superior officers, he was shipped off to Tunisia in 1897. He returned briefly to France in June 1897, when he met with a lawyer, Louis Leblois, to express his concerns. Leblois met with Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, an influential Alsatian politician, who went to complain directly to President Faure. His complaint was ignored. At the same time, anti-Semitic nationalist groups like the Ligue des patriotes, Ligue antisémite, and the more moderate Ligue de la Patrie Française, along with Catholic leaders began to suggest that these questions surrounding Dreyfus and Esterhazy were part of a larger Jewish conspiracy to weaken the army and the French nation. The army finally brought Esterhazy to trial in 1898 but acquitted him almost immediately. In response to these events, opposition grew in the Chamber of Deputies. Georges Clemenceau and Ernest Vaughn, an ex-Bonapartist, began to publish articles defending Dreyfus in l’Aurore, a republican-socialist newspaper. They also allowed Émile Zola to publish an open letter to the president of the republic that denounced the cover-up by the military. Zola was then sentenced to a year in prison for defamation, and anti-Semitic riots broke out. For most of 1898, anti-Dreyfusards and anti-Semites set the stage for the French political conversation. They nevertheless had trouble consolidating a hold over Republican politics, in part because they were divided amongst themselves. But it was only in 1899, when the war minister Godefroy Cavaignac admitted that evidence against Dreyfus had been fabricated, that many republicans and leftists took up his cause. Republicans allied with some socialists against nationalists, monarchists, and Catholics, and regionalists in order to secure a parliamentary majority and what they saw as the right-wing threat to the Republic’s future. That said, the division between Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards did not follow strict political lines, at least in part because some left-leaning socialists shared a number of the nationalist and anti-Semitic values. Moreover, as Christopher Forth has argued, both sides became increasingly invested in some of the same values. See Christopher Forth, The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 237; Frederick Brown, For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010), 2; Passmore, The Right in France, 102; Gildea, Children of the Revolution, 273-275.

93 For years, the anti-Dreyfusards “strengthened and unified the forces hostile to the Third Republic: Boulangists, Bonapartists, royalists, anti-Semites, and many Catholics.” These groups did not all try to overthrow the republic, but many hoped to make it authoritarian. See Fuller, The Origins of the French Nationalist Movement, 82.

94 David Drake, French Intellectuals and Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to the Occupation (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 34.

95 This was partly because of a divide between anti-Semitic groups and Déroulède’s nationalist Ligue des Patriotes. While both agreed that Dreyfus was guilty, they did not agree on anti-Semitism. Déroulède refused to adopt openly anti-Semitic language in the nationalist meetings. Moreover, Déroulède continued to believe in an authoritarian
threatened revolution – especially after the Fashoda crisis increased their anger against the French government - they pushed their opponents to make common cause against them.\textsuperscript{96} Socialists, radicals, and leftist Republicans thus united to form the government of Republican defense under Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau.\textsuperscript{97} In the wake of the affair, this new Bloc des gauches consolidated its political control over the Chamber of Deputies, while the conservatives and nationalists found themselves politically marginalized.\textsuperscript{98} The Dreyfus Affair thus reordered the political alliances that had characterized the early 1890s and while raising moderates’ fears about the threat posed by the right to the republic’s stability.\textsuperscript{99}

The Dreyfus Affair also had important effects on France’s political and intellectual culture. As scholars have shown, anti-Dreyfusards embraced a pro-Catholic, anti-rational, anti-scientific, and anti-Semitic perspective that rejected republican universalism. But at the same time, many also used made use of Darwinist thought and positivist principles in order to articulate an organicist vision of the French nation that stressed racial identities and the people’s links to the land. They argued that the Third Republic’s centralizing policies and its tolerance

\textsuperscript{96} The Fashoda crisis occurred when British and French troops conflicted over the Upper Nile River. The French government ultimately backed down, which convinced many nationalists that it did not truly have France’s best interests at heart. See Fuller, \textit{The Origins of the French Nationalist Movement}, 108.

\textsuperscript{97} Conklin, Fishman, Zaretsky, \textit{France and its Empire since 1870}, 112.

\textsuperscript{98} Some of the key leaders, including Paul Déroulède and Jules Guérin, were arrested and convicted. See Drake, \textit{French Intellectuals and Politics}, 36.

\textsuperscript{99} It also led to the creation of new political parties; the Parti républicain radical et radical-socialiste was founded in 1901, and the Dreyfusard Progressists formed the Alliance républicaine démocratique. In 1902, the Socialists also consolidated into parties, just as monarchists on the right formed Action libérale and anti-Dreyfusard Progressists formed the Fédération républicaine. Passmore, \textit{The Right in France}, 127.
towards foreigners and Jews was anti-populist and endangering the nation’s future. Although the anti-Dreyfusard position became marginalized by the end of the 1890s, the movement had succeeded in bringing public attention to these racialized discourses. Notably, during this period, scientists, intellectuals, and politicians from across the political spectrum increasingly drew upon both scientific racism and Social Darwinism to describe the French nation and its position in Europe. The Boulanger Affair had already popularized these discourses to some extent, but the Dreyfus Affair helped consolidate their influence in French public life.

The Dreyfus Affair had something of a paradoxical effect in France’s colonies. On the most basic level, the Affair – much like the other scandals of the 1890s – directed political attention away from France’s policies in its overseas territories and its colonial expansion. For the most part, France’s colonies remained outside of the center of political debate and public controversy. France’s colonial empire did not disappear from public consciousness, however. Indeed, during the late 1890s and early 1900s, new cultural productions emerged that helped further popularize these overseas colonial territories. But politique coloniale and colonial expansion no longer served as one of the key conceptual categories through which politicians from both sides of the spectrum articulated their conflicting visions of the future of the French

100 Passmore claims that nationalism was defined by “anti-capitalism, advocacy of social reforms, appeal to the people, willingness to countenance popular violence, and denunciation of the old right… [and an] anti-Socialist, anti-parliamentarian, anti-feminist, and anti-Semitic [perspective.]” See Passmore, The Right in France, 106.

101 Conklin, In the Museum of Man, 6.

102 There were some exceptions to this. Algeria became one of the key sites for anti-Semitic riots during the Dreyfus Affair. Led by Max Régis, French settlers rioted against the indigenous Jewish population and Zola alike. The government attempted to silence him, but to little avail. He was elected the mayor of Algiers. The anti-Semitic nationalist journal La Libre parole reported on news of these events. See Gilbert Comte, L’Empire triomphante, 1871-1936 (Paris: Denoël, 1988), 39; Augustin Castéron, Les Troubles d’Alger (Alger: Imprimerie Charles Zamith, 1898), 3; Guy Perville, La France en Algérie, 1830-1954 (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2012), 88; Conquête et Colonisation, 1898-1901, F80/1690. Fonds Ministérielles, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.

103 The Fashoda crisis, which deepened the crisis over the Dreyfus Affair, was the exception to this. See Fuller, The Origins of the French Nationalist Movement, 108; Gildea, Children of the Revolution, 422.
nation and republic. Even the post-Dreyfus transfer of political power to the new *Bloc des gauches* did not affect the government’s attitude towards its colonies.\(^{104}\)

If the Dreyfus Affair did not directly affect French colonial politics, it did make the army and its position in French society into an object of public scrutiny and debate.\(^{105}\) Because the army was partly responsible for both conquering and overseeing at least some of France’s overseas territories, arguments over the army and its relationship to the republic also to some extent involved colonial rule. During the late 1890s, Dreyfusards accused the army of corruption, incompetence, and anti-republican tendencies, while anti-Dreyfusards conflated the army with France’s national identity and insisted that the Dreyfusards were undermining both.\(^{106}\) At the same time, however, as Christopher Forth has shown, both sides became increasingly invested in a vision of French masculinity predicated on soldierly values and military might.\(^{107}\) In the years following the Affair, the Dreyfusard government would devote some attention towards reforming the army, but it never distanced itself as much from military officials as the anti-Dreyfusards had implied it would.\(^{108}\) The Affair thus only gave minimal support to those who continued to advocate against the preponderant role played by the military in France’s overseas territories. Its effects on the uneasy alliance between Catholics and the Republic that had characterized much of the 1890s were more profound. Notably, it broke the alliance between French republican colonial

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\(^{104}\) It is true that “colonial expansion” largely ended during the early 20\(^{th}\) century. As a result, attention turned from conquering new colonies towards consolidating France’s hold over existing colonies. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale des origines à 1914*, 641; Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 43.

\(^{105}\) This became increasingly the case over time. At first, the core Dreyfusards were mostly concerned about proving Dreyfus’ innocence. But as socialists and radicals rallied to the cause, they became increasingly vocal critics of the army. See Fuller, *The Origins of the French Nationalist Movement*, 82.

\(^{106}\) Conklin, Fishman, Zaretsky, *France and its Empire since 1870*, 104.


\(^{108}\) Johnson, *The Dreyfus Affair*, 146.
administrators and French missionaries in a number of France’s overseas territories. Although the Dreyfus Affair thus sparked a number of disagreements about the administration of France’s overseas territories, it did not threaten the Republic’s commitment to expanding its colonial influence and securing its hold over the territories it had already conquered.

The political crises that marked the late 1880s and the 1890s thus helped contribute, in different ways, to the emergence of a more prominent interest in colonial empire and colonial expansion among a wider section of French society. Both the rise of racist discourses and the Dreyfus Affair also offered new rationales for constructing that empire. This interest was consolidated by perceived competition in overseas territories on the part of other European powers – especially England – and by the emergence of new groups and societies committed to promoting France’s colonies. The “colonial lobby” – as this loose alliance of groups came to be known – was far from unified. Its members lacked a clear ideology and a united set of goals. But they formed a group of politicians, businessmen, writers, and intellectuals who came together in order to popularize France’s colonies and secure their importance.

The role of the “colonial lobby” in France’s overseas empire has been a subject of debate in post-colonial scholarship. Some scholars have insisted that the colonial lobby was largely responsible for imposing France’s empire on an uninterested French population. Others have claimed this argument overstates the colonial lobby’s role in promoting support for French

\[109\] Most of these effects would not become apparent until the early 20th century, when Emile Combes gained control over the French parliament and passed anticlerical laws. See Daughton, An Empire Divided, 88.


colonization, especially in the late nineteenth century. They have argued that enthusiasm for French colonialism spread beyond a narrow spectrum of interested parties, thereby contesting the argument that colonialism was imposed from the top down. Still others have noted that referring to the different groups who supported colonization as one “lobby” can obscure the divisions between their visions of France’s colonial project.

Lobbying groups and pro-colonial individuals certainly played an important role in many of France’s colonial conquests during the 1880s and 1890s. Many of these individuals and groups also devoted money and attention to increasing awareness of and enthusiasm for France’s overseas territories at the end of the nineteenth century. While they sometimes worked at cross-purposes with one another, the different advocates for colonial expansion nevertheless contributed to the growing popularity of the notion of “colonial empire” in the 1890s – even if they did not necessarily agree on exactly what a “colonial empire” was or how it related to the French nation and the republic. These groups did not “impose” colonialism on an unwilling French population, but they began a conversation about France’s overseas territories and their connection to the French republic that would continue across a wider span of media and a larger public during the twentieth century.

113 As Daughton has shown, advocates of colonial expansion included republican officials, Catholic missionaries, and capitalists. See Daughton, An Empire Divided, 10. Moreover, it included people from across the political spectrum. See Meyer, Tarrade, Rey-Goldzeiguer, Thobie, Histoire de la France coloniale des origines à 1914, 641.
114 Without Jules Ferry and other interested politicians, it is unlikely that France would have conquered Tunisia, Indochina, and Madagascar. See Jérôme Grévy, La République des opportunistes (Paris: Perrin, 1998), 219.
115 Some of these groups were allied with the state – partly because the Third Republic developed training programs and schools for colonial administrators in the 1880s and 1890s. See Pierre Singaravélou, Professer l’empire: les ‘sciences coloniales’ en France sous la IIIe République (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011), 142.
III: The Emergence and Development of “Colonial Empire”

In 1912, Georges Saint-Paul, a doctor who had spent his career serving the French army in Algeria and Tunisia, wrote a series of articles later collected into a book called *Vers empire*.\(^{116}\) In these articles, he insisted that the Republic needed to adopt a *politique impérialiste* and embrace “empire.”\(^{117}\) He assured his readers that he was not engaging in “politics” or trying to restore “the Bonapartist system.” Empire, he argued, was not associated with Bonapartism, but was instead a “grouping of nations with the same intellectual center, united by the common desire to help… the development and the prosperity of the whole.” Empire should thus be understood as a “republic of peoples” or “republic of republics.” The purpose of *politique impérialiste* was to “assure the homogeneity” of French territory and create “solidarity” between the metropole and colonial empire.\(^{118}\) In Saint-Paul’s model, *politique impérialiste* was thus a republican enterprise. Notably, he insisted that the way to bind the metropole and the colonies together was to spread democratic practices and principles in France’s conquered territories.\(^{119}\) Such a policy, he claimed, would enable France to harness the force of its empire more effectively, as each colony would “freely” contribute its energies toward French goals.\(^{120}\)

In these articles, Saint-Paul actively worked to reclaim the terms “empire” and “imperialism” from Bonapartist politics. He likely did so primarily for rhetorical purposes – he

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116 He published both the book and the articles under a pseudonym. The book’s preface was by Henry Bérenger, who had recently been elected to the Senate as the radical republican representative from Guadeloupe. See G. Espé de Metz, *Vers l’empire* (Paris: Librairie Ambert, 1913).
117 The articles first appeared in *Dépêche du Centre et de l’Ouest* and *La Presse coloniale*. See *ibid.*, 8, 22, 81, 195.
119 He noted that France could ensure this solidarity by promoting democratic practices in its colonies, which would only become part of France when their inhabitants had voting rights. He claimed that such rights were not yet possible, but in the meantime, France should cultivate the elite and expose them to French culture. This elite would then in turn spread French culture among ordinary people. He also argued that France needed to give its colonies a constitution. If France did not undertake these measures, its colonies would turn against it. See *Ibid.*, 6, 25.
did not spend any significant time explaining why his proposals had nothing to do with Bonapartism. But he consistently made the distinction between colonial empire and Bonapartism when he introduced the term “empire” or “imperialism.”¹²¹ Making this distinction enabled him to co-opt the term imperialism and use it to promote what he saw as a republican cause. Of course, Saint-Paul’s vision of empire in fact shared certain commonalities with the one promoted by Napoleon III in the 1860s. His contention that empire should be understood above all as a “grouping of nations” echoed Napoleon III’s earlier vision of a multinational Mediterranean empire. There were also important differences between these two models, however. Saint-Paul’s vision of empire was predicated on the slow extension of democratic principles and practices across France’s territories, whereas Napoleon III had centered his empire on a popular but authoritarian political structure.¹²² Nevertheless, Saint-Paul’s model for French empire was not as different from its Bonapartist counterpart as he claimed.

During the 1890s and early twentieth century, most writers did not distinguish between “Bonapartist” empire and “colonial” empire in the way that Georges Saint-Paul did in 1912. But over the course of the decade, an increasing number of writers, intellectuals, and politicians began to use the term empire colonial to refer to France’s overseas territories.¹²³ This term had already begun to emerge in the 1880s in the debates over French policies in Indochina. But in the 1890s and 1900s, advocates of colonialism increasingly embraced it and even sought to define it – albeit usually in indirect ways. These figures did not use the term identically; instead, each used it to articulate a particular vision of France’s colonies and their future. These visions often

¹²¹ He also claimed on multiple occasions that he was a republican, not a Bonapartist. See 40, 194.

¹²² Arguably, Saint-Paul’s vision also relied more heavily on “assimilation” than Napoleon III’s had – although, as Chapter 1 discusses, Napoleon III’s attitude towards “assimilation” shifted over time.

¹²³ They did not usually use the term impérial or impéralisme, however, except to either refer to Bonapartism or to English colonial expansion. It seems likely that the term entered French colonial discourse from England.
varied along political, religious, and personal lines. But taken together, these new publications worked together to create a more comprehensive discourse about France’s colonies and their relationship to the republic and the nation.

Arthur Girault, a moderate republican and professor of law, became one of the most influential voices in this discussion about colonization, empire, republicanism, and nation. In 1895, he published *Les principes de la colonisation et de législation coloniale*, which came to operate as the theoretical foundation for French colonial legislation and administration. The book - published in five subsequent editions over the course of the next fifty years – sought to define and defend colonization and colonial empire on legal grounds. The book’s introduction described colonization, laid out a system for classifying colonies, and endorsed the value of colonialism in ideological, economic, and political terms. At the same time, it also proposed a foundation for colonial legislation. This colonial legislation, Girault explained, would structure France’s colonial empire by binding colonies to the nation in a manner that was consistent with republican political principles. In order to articulate this vision, Girault drew on a complex mixture of social Darwinist thought, a familial vision of society, and republican ideals.

Girault’s introduction began by defining the practice of colonization. Like many other colonial theorists, he contended that colonization was an act only undertaken by “civilized” peoples who moved to a territory “occupied by a savage… or half-savage population.” However, he argued, it was not enough for these civilized peoples to move there; they also needed to build new infrastructure, improve the territory they settled in, and civilize the indigenous peoples they

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124 This book was used by colonial administrators and helped define French colonial law. The last edition, published just before Girault’s death, was commissioned by the Vichy government. See Mechat, “Sur les *Principes de colonisation* d’Arthur Girault (1895),” 119.


encountered. He insisted, “it is this civilizing action, this double culture of the land and its inhabitants that constitutes… the work of colonization.” Colonization thus did not necessarily have to involve a large settler population; instead, it referred to the spread of civilization to lands that had previously remained barbarous or savage. All of the different types of colonies he identified – which included commercial colonies, colonies of exploitation, plantation colonies, settler colonies, military colonies, and penal colonies – fell into this model. He assumed that any kind of colony carried civilizing consequences.

Girault deployed several different reasons to justify colonial expansion. First, he argued that “superior men” had a “natural right” to procure as many goods and as much space for themselves as they could. Like Lanessan, he acknowledged that this expansion often had a devastating effect on indigenous peoples – at least at first. But he insisted that subsequent generations usually benefitted directly from European rule. Moreover, he contended, colonization would also directly benefit France by preventing internal conflicts, improving the moral character of the country’s citizens, and increasing its global influence. It would thus allow

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127 Girault, Principes de la colonisation, 12.
128 Girault thus subdivided France’s colonial holdings into more categories than Paul Leroy-Beaulieu and many other earlier thinkers. Leroy-Beaulieu had only differentiated between commercial colonies, settler colonies, and colonies of exploitation. Moreover, Girault noted, there were also colonies that occupied a space in between categories or changed over time. See ibid., 23-24.
129 Ibid., 29.
130 Girault contended that the law that gave the weak rights over the strong was “a general law that applies not only to the human species, but to all living creatures, that less gifted individuals disappear before the more gifted. The progressive extinction of inferior races before civilized races or… the crushing of the weak by the strong is the condition of progress itself. The law of natural selection that appears so cruel is usually, for the philosopher who can see the whole and the future, ‘the decree of an immense and clairvoyant benevolence,” following the expression of M. Herbert Spencer. Certainly, one must pity the savages destroyed by whites, but does not all progress bring suffering with it? But the suffering is temporary and the progress is definitive.” Girault thus acknowledged that brutalities had often been committed during colonization – especially in the past, but even in the present. On the whole, however, he insisted that colonization raised the quality of life for indigenous people. Perhaps even more importantly, it created “progress” for humanity as a whole. See ibid., 31, 32.
France to compete effectively against its European rivals.\textsuperscript{131} Finally, he argued, the act of colonization was a service to humanity at large: it spread commerce and industrialization across the world while preventing war between different European powers. It thus contributed directly to “human progress.”\textsuperscript{132} Girault therefore partly drew on the language of survival of the fittest in order to provide a “scientific” defense of colonization; he argued that France had a right to the territory of weaker peoples and implied that France itself would be weakened if it did not exercise that right. At the same time, he also made use of the language of the civilizing mission in order to describe colonization as a moral project in line with republican principles. These two lines of reasoning were not necessarily consistent with one another, but they worked together to detach colonization from any associations it might have with political tyranny or Bonapartist imperialism by rendering the practice first “scientific” or apolitical and secondarily republican.

Girault’s discussion of colonial legislation further bolstered this vision of a specifically republican colonization and a republican colonial empire. He contended that countries could invoke three colonial principles or models in order to structure the legal relationship between colony and metropole. These principles would not necessarily translate directly into legislation, and they would not be applied the same way in each colony.\textsuperscript{133} Instead, each would provide an ideological framework that would accommodate individual differences.

Girault argued that the first of these principles – subjugation – had been popular in the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries. This model understood colonies as a means to enrich the metropole; European nations exploited the territories that they conquered in order to recuperate the greatest

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{131} \textit{Ibid.}, 42.
\item \textsuperscript{132} \textit{Ibid.}, 40.
\item \textsuperscript{133} \textit{Ibid.}, 46.
\end{footnotes}
amount of wealth possible.\textsuperscript{134} During the Revolution, however, many people had come to see this model as tyrannical and unfair. Revolutionaries had insisted that all races were equal, and that “birth into a civilized race” did not confer superiority or legal rights over those born into less civilized ones.\textsuperscript{135} Revolutionaries’ condemnation of the exploitative practices that characterized “subjection,” he implied, spread across Europe. As a result, almost no contemporary European countries used subjugation to justify or structure the relationship between metropole and colony.

The second principle, according to Girault, was “autonomy.” Unlike “subjugation,” which he implied was morally and politically dubious, Girault described autonomy as a “virile” and “hardy” colonial model. Colonizing nations who embraced the principle of autonomy, he argued, intended to enable colonies to become independent. The government would “guide the first steps” of the new colony but then would progressively “abandon” their affairs to them. Ultimately, the diplomatic tie would “rupture” and the colony would become a new state. This model was “not entirely foreign” to France, Girault acknowledged, but it found its full fruition in England.\textsuperscript{136} Girault expressed a certain amount of admiration for England’s embrace of autonomy, although he did use the negative language of “abandonment” to describe it. Moreover, he noted, such a policy could not be effectively instituted in France.

Instead, Girault insisted, France should embrace the third and final principle of “assimilation” and use it to structure its colonial empire. This principle – which he argued belonged especially to the “Latin races” – sought to slowly transform France’s colonial

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 49.

\textsuperscript{135} He seems to be implying here that the Revolution condemned the practice of slavery. Elsewhere in his work, he does not assume that all peoples should be able to enjoy the same political and legal rights. In Girault’s view, the Revolution thus confirmed a universal right to a certain kind of liberty, but not necessarily to political participation or self-determination. See Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 53.
possessions through economic development and “civilizing” processes so that they could ultimately become an extension of the French nation overseas. “Assimilation,” Girault warned his readers, did not necessarily mean that all parts of the French empire would be treated identically. Nor did it indicate that France’s colonies would be immediately assimilated into the nation-state. In fact, it did not enable the colonies’ inhabitants to exercise any political rights. Instead, “assimilation” represented a goal that could only be achieved over time. Notably, in subsequent editions, he described colonial assimilation as increasingly further in the future.

As Samia El Mechat points out, Girault’s presentation of his principles of colonization created a vision of French colonial empire that fell in line with republican politics and values. By arguing both that the Old Regime had used the principle of “subjugation” to structure its relationship with its colonies and that revolutionary thinkers had objected to this model, Girault avoided engaging with the idea that colonization itself could contradict republican political principles. The problem was not with conquest or overseas expansion but instead with the principle of “subjugation” – a principle that the Third Republic had replaced with the much fairer “assimilation.” Indeed, Girault situated “assimilation” as central to republican politics; he argued that its influence in French colonial politics had always been tied to “the triumph of republican ideas.” Over the course of the nineteenth century, the French government had embraced “assimilation” when the republicans were in power – only to abandon the principle once they fell out of power. A colonial empire that used assimilation to structure its relationship with its colonies would thus by definition operate according to republican principles.

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137 Ibid., 58.
139 Ibid., 38.
140 Girault, Principes de la colonisation, 55.
How would this republican colonial empire operate? Girault addressed this question by invoking a familial metaphor in order to describe the empire and its evolving relationship to the French nation. Throughout his introduction, he compared France’s colonies to children who required parental guidance due to their uncivilized state. At first, they would not be able to exercise political or civil rights because they could not yet exercise them responsibly.\footnote{This period, Girault maintained, corresponded to the period of military rule in the colonies. Not all colonies would necessarily go through it if they were already inhabited by sufficiently civilized peoples. See Girault, *Principes de la colonisation*, 46.} As France provided them with guidance and resources, they would slowly become more self-sufficient and civilized. As a result, they would be ruled less strictly and allowed more freedoms.\footnote{This period, he implied, corresponded to the period of civil administration. See *ibid.*} Once they neared adulthood – a moment that would occur once “Europeans are numerous enough or the indigenous peoples are sufficiently civilized” – France would grant them a growing number of rights and responsibilities. Finally, once the colonies became fully adult, they would be invested with complete political rights. Notably, however, these rights did not include political independence – instead, the colonies would merge into the French nation-state and become overseas provinces.\footnote{*Ibid.*} Their inhabitants would become full French citizens, invested with the same rights enjoyed by their metropolitan counterparts. In this vision, France’s colonial empire was thus a family in which children would become equal partners upon assuming adulthood. Once this happened, the “empire” itself would disappear, only to be replaced by an expansive French nation-state that would spread across the globe.

Girault thus used a familial model for colonial empire that enabled him to articulate a commitment to the principle for assimilation while denying colonized people political rights and representation – at least for the immediate future. This vision of empire was “republican,” he
implied, because it promised to eventually incorporate colonized peoples into the French nation. They would only live beneath French control until they reached “maturity” and could join the ranks of their civilized brethren. France’s empire was thus republican primarily because it was ultimately destined to disappear; its authoritarian structures were temporary measures intended above all to enable colonies to eventually enjoy political rights and freedoms. In the meantime, imperial practices might contradict republican values – but as long as they ultimately led to assimilation, they were the legitimate expression of the French republican state.

Girault’s attempt to reclaim the term empire and align it with republican political principles by promising its future disappearance was not shared by all contemporary political theorists. Others envisioned empire as a more permanent part of the French state; still others did not necessarily seek to align it with republican political principles at all. In 1901, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu published a new edition of *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes* that envisioned a French colonial empire in both more permanent and less republican terms. This text built on older editions of Leroy-Beaulieu’s extensive account of the history of Europe’s colonies by doubling the text devoted to describing French, British, German, Belgian, and Russian colonization and extending the theoretical part of the work. At the same time, it also deployed the term “empire” in order to explain these countries’ respective relationships to their overseas territories. The term had not been absent from Leroy-Beaulieu’s 1874 edition, but in 1901, it played an increasingly central role as a conceptual category.

In the new preface, Leroy-Beaulieu began by describing France’s newly conquered overseas territories in congratulatory terms. He noted that the French colonial movement had expanded substantially over the past decade, and that popular enthusiasm for the colonies had

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The colonies, he implied, had prevented France from falling into decadence. He argued, “At the moment when public opinion seemed resigned to the situation in metropolitan France created by the sad events of 1870-1871, we had before us… immense spaces… the embryo of a colonial empire.” This “colonial empire,” he thus suggested, had compensated for the territory that the country had lost during the Franco-Prussian War. At the same time, it also provided France with a new project that would ensure its future. Without such an empire, France would be “sequestered” in a small part of the world; its economic and moral influence would become increasingly limited. According to this logic, France’s empire served as an auxiliary to the nation: it was critical to both national recovery and survival.

Leroy-Beaulieu did not define “colonial empire” in his work. And in many ways, his vision of the relationship between France and its colonies echoed his earlier arguments. There were important distinctions, however. In 1874, Leroy-Beaulieu had emphasized the importance of “settlement colonies,” which he insisted would spread France’s influence across “unpopulated territories” around the world. But in 1902, Leroy-Beaulieu placed more stress on “commercial” colonies and “colonies of exploitation.” To some extent, the shift reflected the changes in

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145 He also argued that colonial expansion was now almost complete, because the “great peoples” had gained control over almost all of the planet. See ibid., ii.

146 He continued to insist that the best part of this colonial empire was located in North Africa. See ibid., v.

147 Leroy-Beaulieu, La colonisation chez les peuples modernes, 5th ed., 2: 711.

148 Notably, in 1874, Leroy-Beaulieu had sought to convince his readers that the act or process of “colonization” was central to France’s national future. In 1902, he continued to stress that colonization was important. But he positioned the “empire” as the savior of the French nation in the years after the Franco-Prussian War. See Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, De la colonization chez les peuples modernes, 1st ed. (Paris: Guillamin, 1874), v.

149 Most of his work focused on describing the history of European colonization from the 16th century to the present. The second half classified different types of colonies and described how to administer them. Leroy-Beaulieu kept the same classification system that he had developed in the 1874 edition. He divided colonies into three categories: colonies of commerce, colonies of settlement, and colonies of exploitation. However, he focused less on colonies of settlement in this later edition. See Leroy-Beaulieu, La colonisation chez les peuples modernes, 5th ed., 2: 504.

150 Ibid., 565.
France’s colonial holdings over the course of the previous three decades. Most of the new territories that France had conquered did not attract French settlers. But this difference also had ideological consequences. In 1874, Leroy-Beaulieu had claimed that colonies were destined to become independent from France; they were temporary additions to the nation-state that would develop into allied countries over time. France would not colonize to create a permanent political union but to spread influence throughout the world. In 1902, on the other hand, he argued that many of France’s new “commercial” colonies would never gain independence. Without settler populations, he argued, advanced civilization was unlikely to remain in these places once Europeans left. European supervision alone could keep the indigenous peoples from lapsing back into barbarism. As a result, these territories would remain dependent on the French nation-state. In order to rule them effectively, France would have to develop a political and administrative infrastructure that would connect them to the nation in a beneficial way.

If Leroy-Beaulieu did not define “colonial empire,” his 1902 edition articulated a new model for French colonial holdings that envisioned them as a permanent and institutionalized part of France. He used the term “empire” to capture that permanence and institutionalization. This model hinged on a modified understanding of the “civilizing mission” that had long driven much of France’s colonial policy. Like Jules Ferry and Arthur Girault, Leroy-Beaulieu insisted

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151 Not all advocates of colonial expansion agreed with this emphasis on commercial colonies. During the 1890s, groups like the Union coloniale devoted attention to advocating for increased settlement. For examples of books advocating for emigration to the colonies, see Charles Combette, Guide du voyageur et de l’émigrant: géographie commerciale des colonies françaises (Paris: Augustin Challamel, 1890); Louis Vignon, L’expansion de la France (Paris: Librairie Guillaumin, 1891); Ernest Allard, L’immigration française à Madagascar (Paris: Challamel, 1895); Eugène Poiré, L’émigration aux colonies (Paris: Plon, Nourrit, 1897); Jean-Baptiste Piolet, La France hors de la France (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1900); Paul Bory, Le colon (Tours: Maison Alfred Mame et Fils, 1904).

152 Leroy-Beaulieu, La colonisation chez les peuples modernes, 1st ed., 606.


154 As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, French republican politicians and intellectuals drew on the idea of a “civilizing mission” in order to justify colonial expansion. They insisted that France’s overseas conquests did not contradict
that civilized peoples had a “right” to rule over peoples whose civilizations were either stagnating or barbaric and to spread their ideas and their culture across such territories. But while Ferry and Girault had argued that the civilizing presence of France would improve the peoples that they conquered, Leroy-Beaulieu promoted a vision of unchanging human inequality that could only be remedied by permanent political and cultural domination. Leroy-Beaulieu thus drew on biological and racial thinking in order to envision a political system that would enable France to exert political and institutional control over distant places and peoples without ever integrating them into the French nation or enabling them to develop into independent nations. Instead, they would remain under “tutelage” as territories loosely connected to France.

Leroy-Beaulieu’s vision of French empire had much in common with Arthur Girault’s. This commonality is perhaps unsurprising – not least because Girault had drawn on older editions of Leroy-Beaulieu’s work when drafting his book. Notably, both drew on the language of racial inequality and social Darwinism in order to create a vision of empire that was detached from metropolitan political questions. They positioned colonial conquest as part of an evolutionary competition to determine which species would be able to survive. Political and moral principles had little relevance in such a vision of human society. But while Girault combined this evolutionary thinking with republican ideas by articulating a commitment to the principle of assimilation, Leroy-Beaulieu left empire and colonization detached from political values because they improved the lives and societies of conquered peoples. At the same time, many advocates of the “civilizing mission” also drew on the growing body of racial and racist thought to insist that more civilized peoples had “rights” to the territory of the less civilized. See Dino Costantini, Mission civilisatrice: Le rôle de l’histoire coloniale dans la construction de l’identité politique française (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).

He noted, “it is neither natural or just that civilized westerners remain indefinitely and suffocate in enclosed spaces… as they accumulate accomplishments in sciences, arts, and civilization… and they leave the rest of the world to small groups of ignorant, weak men… or to decrepit populations without energy.” See Leroy-Beaulieu, La colonisation chez les peuples modernes, 5th ed., 2: 707.
questions. Unlike Girault’s, his vision of a French empire was a permanent one – at least partly because he envisioned human racial inequality in much more unchanging terms.

Girault and Leroy-Beaulieu thus articulated overlapping but distinct visions for France’s empire, its future, and its relationship to the French nation. However, both of them developed these visions indirectly: they did not actively define empire and its significance. Joseph Chailley-Bert, the secretary of the Union coloniale and the editor of its newspaper, sought to define the term more directly. In 1901, he published an article that distinguished between empire colonial, politique coloniale and mise en valeur. Many people, he warned, failed to differentiate between these different terms, which had unfortunate consequences for France’s inability to compete overseas.¹⁵⁶ Politique coloniale, he contended, described the conquest and pacification of colonies, while mise en valeur denoted the slow process of development that would enable the colonies to become profitable. He used empire colonial, on the other hand, to refer geographically to France’s overseas holdings instead of to imply a set of politics or policies.¹⁵⁷

If Chailley-Bert thus used “empire” as a geographic term, he also employed it to articulate a particular vision of France’s overseas territories and their relationship to the French nation. In fact, he deployed the term in part to avoid using the word “colonies,” which he felt was widely misused. Unlike Girault and Leroy-Beaulieu, who used “colony” to refer to all of France’s overseas territories, Chailley-Bert argued that the term should only refer to territories dominated by French settlers. Almost none of France’s new conquests fit this description

¹⁵⁶ As Alice Conklin has shown, mise-en-valeur became an important part of colonial discourse in the late 1890s and early 1900s. In brief, mise-en-valeur pushed for the economic development of the colonies’ natural resources with the aim that they would be able to pay for themselves. The discourse rose in importance as part of a move away from conquest towards more sustained exploitation. See Conklin, A Mission to Civilize, 41-42.

because indigenous peoples made up the majority of their respective populations. Indochina, Madagascar, and even Algeria were thus not colonies but French possessions. Referring to them erroneously as “colonies” had unfortunate consequences, because it led the French public and politicians to treat these territories identically to settler colonies like Reunion and the Antilles. Instead of grouping France’s overseas territories together as colonies, he thus united them under the term “empire,” which he saw as less bound up in problematic practices.

One of the main problems with treating French possessions as colonies, Chailley-Bert insisted, was that it led colonial administrators to ignore the indigenous populations of each colony. He contended that French policy needed to “recognize the differences in race, genius, aspirations, and needs between indigenous inhabitants and their European masters” and provide each group with a distinct set of institutions. The Third Republic had not recognized this need; its colonial policies continued to follow those developed under the Old Regime and during the Revolution, which had been aimed first at settlers and later at freed slaves. These policies had sought to integrate these inhabitants into the French metropole. In territories occupied by French settlers and Africans without any culture of their own, he argued, these methods were relatively effective. Territories like Algeria and Indochina, however, were inhabited by “whites” and “yellows” who were “too intelligent and anchored in their civilizations” in order to be integrated into France. For the most part, he argued, colonial administrators had either treated this

159 In both this article and the book that expanded on its ideas, Chailley-Bert argued against what he saw as the French tendency to treat its overseas territories identically. He insisted that there could be no one *politique coloniale* or *mise en valeur* because each territory had distinct needs. He thus contended that France’s colonies could not have a uniform administration and legislation. He criticized the government for sending functionaries around the empire without allowing them to obtain local expertise. See Chailley-Bert, “Un tournant de la politique coloniale,” 417.
160 Chailley-Bert, *Dix années de politique coloniale*, 45.
161 Ibid., 49, 50.
problem with “indifference” or foolishly attempted to assimilate populations that could not be assimilated. Only under the Second Empire had the government sought to deal with it directly by establishing *Bureaux arabes* that provided indigenous peoples with their own administration. Chailley-Bert noted that there were problems with the *Bureaux arabes* but suggested that the republican government should follow this model in order to create a true “indigenous policy.”¹⁶²

Chailley-Bert’s critique of “assimilationist” policy was not unique; in many ways, Girault’s commitment to the idea was more unusual in an era where most colonial thinkers and policy makers were turning away from “assimilation” and back towards “association.”¹⁶³ His nostalgia for certain institutions from the Second Empire – like the *Bureaux arabes* – is less than surprising in this light. Notably, though, Chailley-Bert’s vision of a French empire based on “association” and his belief that indigenous peoples, rather than French colonial settlers, would be critical to France’s overseas territories had much in common with Napoleon III.¹⁶⁴ Chailley-Bert did not envision France’s empire as multinational, but he described it as a differentiated space that would enable conquered peoples to live according to their respective “civilizations” while remaining subjugated in a field of French power. In other words, even as he implied that the term “empire” was politically neutral and not associated with particular practices, his vision of empire expressed certain Bonapartist qualities.

Girault, Leroy-Beaulieu, and Chailley-Bert all played important roles in French colonial politics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, all began to use the term “empire” to describe France’s relationship with its overseas territories. At the same

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¹⁶² He insisted that these institutions should be enshrined in constitutions for each territory. See *Ibid.*, 54, 158.


¹⁶⁴ Notably, *La Quinzaine Coloniale*, Chailley-Bert’s journal, published a defense of Napoleon III’s *royaume arabe* in 1902 and claimed that the decision to reject that model and replace it with assimilation had been deeply mistaken. See “La réparation d’une erreur coloniale,” *La Quinzaine Coloniale* (25 July 1902), 417.
time, their respective understandings of this empire remained distinct. This was in part because their respective visions of colonization and the “civilizing mission” diverged. All agreed that the practice of colonization would spread civilization to uncivilized places. Arthur Girault’s belief in the power of colonization and civilizing practices was perhaps strongest: he insisted that France would be able to institute reforms that would improve uncivilized races and integrate them into France itself. Leroy-Beaulieu, on the other hand, implied that colonization might be able to permanently spread civilization to some uncivilized peoples. But others – especially in Africa – were too racially inferior to maintain their hold on civilization without French oversight. The purpose of colonization was thus not to civilize inferior peoples permanently but instead to spread civilization to new parts of the globe. Chailley-Bert agreed that it was difficult to spread civilization to conquered peoples – especially to those peoples who already had some form of “civilization” of their own. But he nevertheless indicated that over time, conquered peoples were likely to slowly adopt the civilization of their conquerors if they were not forced into it.

These different visions of colonization and the civilizing mission were grounded in distinct understandings of race. Girault, for example, argued that non-Europeans were both uncivilized and racially inferior. The most inferior, he implied, would likely disappear. But others, like European children, would learn to adapt European cultural practices and integrate into the French nation-state. Leroy-Beaulieu, on the other hand, implied that “civilization” could not address racial inequality so easily; some peoples were too biologically inferior to internalize its practices.165 For Chailley-Bert, the problem was not some peoples were too inferior to adopt “civilization” – in fact, quite the reverse. He argued that the most uncivilized people the French

165 It is worth noting that Leroy-Beaulieu also thought that the climate might play a role here; he implied that civilization might not be able to survive unaided in tropical climates. See Leroy-Beaulieu, *La colonisation chez les peuples modernes*, 5th ed., 2: iv.
had conquered – which he identified as slaves from Africa – had successfully integrated into French society. The problem arose when France sought to deal instead with more sophisticated societies that already had more advanced cultures, because they were more likely to resist French ideas and practices. In his work, Chailley-Bert did not ignore the subject of race – in fact, he usually mapped “race” and “civilization” directly on top of one another. But he did not make use of social Darwinist or evolutionary theories in the way that Girault and Leroy-Beaulieu did. As a result, he was more skeptical than both Girault and Leroy-Beaulieu that France’s conquered populations would recede before or merge into France’s superior culture. In some ways, he thus had even less faith in colonization’s ability to spread French civilization than Leroy-Beaulieu.

These different understandings of colonization, the civilizing mission, and race led each of these thinkers to articulate distinct visions for colonial empire, how it should operate, and how it should relate to the French nation. Girault defined colonial empire as an explicitly republican set of legal measures and institutions that bound colonies to the metropole and would increasingly fold that empire into the French nation. Leroy-Beaulieu, on the other hand, defined colonial empire as an apolitical and permanent institutional and administrative structure that would enable France to ensure the continual presence of civilization in the territories that it had conquered. Chailley-Bert also defined colonial empire as apolitical; for him, the term referred generally to all of France’s overseas possessions without implying that they could all be treated as settler colonies. At the same time, however, Chailley-Bert also used the term to articulate a vision of an open political structure that would effectively incorporate many peoples and places into it. If Chailley-Bert thus sought to distance “empire,” from metropolitan politics, he nevertheless used the term in ways that were reminiscent of Napoleon III. This echo does not
represent a return to Bonapartist politics, however; if anything, it demonstrates the degree to which Bonapartism and the memory of the Second Empire had faded by the twentieth century.

III. Narrating the History of “Empire” in France

If some key colonial theorists sought to define the term “colonial empire” with particular references to political theory and republicanism, others delineated the term by narrating its history. This mobilization of historical narratives to describe and justify colonization was not new – indeed, some of the earliest histories of France’s colonies dated back to the 1860s. But in the 1890s, these histories became more numerous; they also narrated the history of France’s colonial empire instead of its colonizing efforts.\footnote{Dulucq and Zytnicki claim that these histories can be divided into three categories. First, there were histories written by army officers and colonial administrators. Second, there were histories written by propagandists with “political and economic interests in colonization.” This category overlapped with the first. And finally, there were histories written by scholars associated with the universities. However, for most of the nineteenth century, colonial history was often viewed with skepticism by professional historians. See Sophie Dulucq and Colette Zytnicki, “Une histoire en marge: L’histoire coloniale en France (années 1880-années 1930,” \textit{Genèses} 51 (2003), 117.} Together, they worked to detach the idea of colonial empire from continental empire by describing its history as unique. But even though members of similar republican colonial advocacy groups produced these histories, their accounts often framed the history of colonial empire in distinct ways. While some authors positioned “colonial empire” as an enterprise with prehistoric roots, others focused on the phenomenon of “modern” colonization, which they implied was distinct from its earlier counterparts. Some tried to demonstrate that colonial empire was in line with republican ideals, while others insisted that it transcended metropolitan political questions. Writers also disagreed about the permanence of the empire and the ultimate fate of the colonies within it. The shape of the resulting historical narratives and visions of colonial empire reflected these divergences in perspective.
Léon Deschamps, a historian who wrote his dissertation on the French Revolution’s colonial policy, was one of the most prolific contributors to this attempt to chart colonial empire’s history. Over the course of the 1890s, he published multiple books on the history of France’s colonies, which were aimed at both specialized and popular audiences. In 1894, he published one of his most successful, *Histoire sommaire de la colonisation française*, which he hoped might be used in commercial schools to spread knowledge of France’s colonial empire to a public that he feared remained largely uninterested. In this text, Deschamps provided an overview of France’s colonizing efforts that described French conquests, highlighted shifts in administrative policy, and emphasized the national, commercial, military, financial, and political benefits of colonial expansion. Over the course of his narrative, he sought simultaneously to promote a vision of a specifically republican colonial empire and to convince his readers that such a colonial empire was central to France’s future prosperity and security.

Deschamps’ account began with early accounts of French exploration in the sixteenth century and continued into the 1890s. He argued that throughout this period, France’s colonial empire had centered on two alternative models, which were respectively associated with the Old Regime and the Revolution. The Old Regime’s model – which had also been embraced by both Napoleonic Empires and the Restoration government – had treated the colonial empire as a way to “enrich the metropole.” This model relied on a combination of privileged colonial companies, direct and centralized administration, and the *pacte coloniale* in order to extract

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167 Deschamps was also affiliated with the *Union Coloniale*. He was one of the few historians of French colonialism from this era directly affiliated with the academy. See Dulucq and Zytnicki, “Une histoire en marge,” 118.


169 Notably, he focused less on the reasons behind the failures of what many authors referred to as France’s “first colonial empire” than many others did. This narrative largely attributed France’s losses to its rivalries with England, but did not dwell on those losses or what they might say about France’s colonizing capabilities. See *Ibid.*, 5, 34.

wealth from conquered territories.\textsuperscript{171} The revolutionary or republican model, on the other hand, replaced the Old Regime’s “brutal” exploitation of its colonial empire with a commitment to assimilate the colonies politically and economically while providing them with “administrative autonomy.” It promoted liberty in its colonies and granted citizenship rights to their inhabitants.\textsuperscript{172} However, this newfound liberty was short-lived; as soon as Bonaparte declared himself emperor, he reinstated “slavery, the \textit{pacte coloniale}, administrative tyranny, and an arbitrary legal system.” This return to the Old Regime model remained intact until 1870.\textsuperscript{173}

According to this narrative of France’s colonial history, the colonial empire had served as a battleground between authoritarian governments that refused to let go of the Old Regime’s despotic practices and republican governments that promoted liberty, political assimilation, and administrative autonomy in the same territories. Much like Girault – who had drawn on Deschamps’ work – Deschamps thus presented a vision of France’s colonial history that positioned colonial expansion as an apolitical endeavor embraced by a variety of regimes. At the same time, he claimed a republican heritage for France’s current colonial empire by tying the principles that governed it directly to the Revolution. France’s administration of this empire was not perfect, Deschamps admitted: in some territories, the government had continued to enforce authoritarian principles. However, he implied, once the government embraced its republican heritage, the injustices that had at times characterized its empire would be swept away.\textsuperscript{174}

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\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Ibid.}, 41.
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\textsuperscript{172} As he explained, the Revolutionary government gave white colonists voting rights and established democratic colonial assemblies. It also recognized them as full French citizens. It then freed the slaves and recognized their citizenship rights. Finally, it replaced the Old Regime’s \textit{pacte coloniale} with free trade. See \textit{ibid.}, 45.
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\textsuperscript{173} He noted that the Republic of 1848 briefly sought to return the colonies to the Revolution, but did not have time to succeed. The republican representatives did succeed in permanently abolishing slavery, but the colonies were not politically assimilated nor given the right to administrative autonomy. The Second Empire largely abolished the \textit{pacte coloniale}, but the basic legal and administrative system of the Old Regime remained intact. See \textit{ibid.}, 56.
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\textsuperscript{174} He noted that some territories continued to be governed “by decree” instead of “by law.” See \textit{ibid.}, 77.
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Deschamps’ account of colonial administration was brief and did not account for complications. Notably, while he highlighted the fact that the Revolutionary government had freed the slaves and endowed them with the rights of citizenship, he did not discuss the rights of the indigenous peoples who made up the bulk of the population in the Third Republic’s new colonial empire. His contention that the Third Republic had embraced the principles of the Revolution and applied them to the colonies was instead based on the rights granted to the colonies’ settlers, the independence of their administrators, the establishment of French law, and the propagation of economic liberalism. Deschamps’ obfuscation of some of the differences between the First and Third Republic’s respective colonial empires was productive, however. By drawing out the ideological connections between them, he was able to describe colonial empire as central to republican politics. He further bolstered this celebration of colonial republicanism with a more exhaustive account of the ways in which France’s colonies contributed to its industrial, commercial, military, and political influence around the world.175

Deschamps promoted a more developed vision of republican colonial empire in his specialized work. In *Histoire de la question coloniale en France*, he insisted that the model of colonial empire embraced by the Third Republic was not only the most principled, but also the most effective. He claimed that the Old Regime’s colonial empire was failing by the late 18th century; the British had picked off most territories and those remaining had structural flaws.176 He contended, moreover, that the Revolutionary government alone was “capable of saving the

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176 He insisted that the problems with the Old Regime’s colonial empire did not just date from Louis XV, who had lost much of the territory to the British. Instead, they stemmed from the authoritarian, centralized, and despotic regime that they were kept under and from the poorly conceived and exploitative economic policies applied to them. See Léon Deschamps, *Histoire de la question coloniale en France* (Paris: E. Plon et Nourri, 1891), 369.
colonial oeuvre of the Old Regime” and implied that its efforts might have been successful if it had not been overthrown.177

The problems with the Napoleonic government, Deschamps maintained, did not simply stem from the fact that it undid the Revolution’s reforms and restored the Old Regime’s administrative system. In fact, Napoleon was not only responsible for “losing the colonial empire;” he had also made France “lose the taste for colonization.”178 His unquenchable military ambitions and unending wars convinced both French politicians and the French people that they had to choose between the continent and the colonies. The urgency of his continental engagements – especially after he provoked most of the nations of Europe into attacking France – convinced even those who remained committed to France’s colonies to believe that they had no choice but to focus on defending France’s continental borders.179 This turn towards the continent had consequences that continued for more than fifty years; in the wake of Napoleon’s defeat, no government until the Third Republic turned away from the excessive – and ultimately futile focus – on France’s continental ambitions. As a result, he insisted, the politique de l’empire was responsible for not only destroying France’s old colonial empire – it had also prevented France from acquiring a new one to replace it for nearly fifty years.180 Moreover, even in the Third Republic, the continued reluctance among much of France’s population to commit to overseas endeavors had made France’s colonial expansion less successful than it might have been.181

177 Ibid., 370.
178 Ibid., 350. This argument also appeared in other texts. See, for example, “Discours de M. Mercet,” La Quinzaine Coloniale (10 July 1901), 410.
179 Deschamps, Histoire de la question coloniale en France, 354.
180 He acknowledged that these governments had conquered Algeria, but described it as an aberration. See Ibid., 371.
181 Ibid., xii.
Despite the persistence of Napoleon’s imperial legacy, Deschamps argued, the Third Republic had experienced remarkable success overseas: unlike all of France’s previous governments, it had “dared to deliberately engage in colonial enterprise.”\(^{182}\) This success, he argued, reflected the fact that the Republic had turned away both from the Old Regime’s model for administering colonies and from the Empire’s counterproductive commitment to continental politics. It had recognized the need to protect colonists’ civil and political liberties, promote commercial equality between colony and metropole, and establish administrative autonomy. At the same time, it recognized that France’s future lay overseas and not in European conflict.

Deschamps’ tripartite opposition between Old Regime despotism, imperial continental politics, and Republican colonial empire further secured his contention that colonization was a republican enterprise. His narration of France’s colonial history demonstrated that the Old Regime’s colonial enterprise was doomed to fail and that Bonapartist imperialism contradicted the demands of colonial expansion. In fact, he contended, a successful and prosperous colonial empire was only possible if the metropolitan government embraced liberal institutions. The Republic’s colonial politics were thus not only distinct from their autocratic monarchical and Bonapartist predecessors; they represented the only viable form of colonial empire.\(^{183}\)

Tellingly, even Deschamps’ specialized account of France’s relationship with its colonial empire did not pay much attention to explaining how the empire’s indigenous population fit into this republican model. He praised the Republic’s commitment to “assimilating” indigenous people and noted that the Republic had endowed those who had adopted France’s civilization

\(^{182}\) This act, he explained, had not only helped France establish an expansive colonial empire; it had also helped increase its international prestige. Countries across Europe had witnessed France’s colonial prowess with envy and decided to copy its policies. See Ibid., x.

\(^{183}\) Here, too, Deschamps contended that the current problems with the republic’s colonial empire stemmed from the fact that it had not entirely thrown off its autocratic heritage of “centralizing despotism.” See Ibid., 373.
with citizenship and political rights.\textsuperscript{184} However, the political and legal position of these different populations remained absent from his historical narrative of France’s colonial history and from his vision of republican colonial empire. He also left the question of the empire’s permanence – and the ultimate fate of colonized peoples - unsettled.

Deschamps was not the only writer who situated the history of French colonization in the center of a longstanding debate over whether France should commit to extending its continental or colonial influence. Louis Vignon, a professor at the fledgling École Coloniale, similarly contended that the problems that had complicated France’s relationship with its colonies stemmed from the fact that the country had long been divided between \textit{politique coloniale} and \textit{politique continentale}.\textsuperscript{185} In some ways, Louis Vignon’s description of these two political orientations was similar to Deschamps’. He argued that historically, France had embraced both \textit{politique continentale} and \textit{politique coloniale}. This dual orientation, he insisted, reflected France’s geographic position and national character; it had also secured the nation’s military strength, economic wealth, and cultural prestige.\textsuperscript{186} In his work, he proposed to trace the relationship between “France’s \textit{politique continentale} and \textit{coloniale} from the 16\textsuperscript{th} century to the present” while showing “the expansion of our country in Europe and outside of Europe.”\textsuperscript{187} By linking \textit{politique coloniale} to \textit{politique continentale} and framing both as strategies for increasing

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 378.
\item \textsuperscript{185} The École Coloniale was founded in 1885 under the name “Maison Cambodgienne.” It was intended to educate students from the colonies. The school was officially taken over by the state in 1887 and renamed “École Coloniale.” After 1889, its mission changed focus, and it became the training ground for colonial officers. Vignon was one of its first professors. He had also served as the Undersecretary of State of the Navy and Colonies and was the son-in-law of the Opportunist Prime Minister Rouvier. See William Cohen, \textit{Rulers of Empire: The French Colonial Service in Africa} (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1971), 41.
\item \textsuperscript{186} He insisted that many people in contemporary France mistakenly assumed that ‘\textit{politique coloniale}’ was a new phenomenon. However, he argued, it was “just as old as our ‘\textit{politique européenne};’ the history of ‘\textit{France coloniale}’ is intermingled with the history of ‘\textit{France continentale}.’” See Vignon, \textit{L’expansion de la France}, ix, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 15.
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France’s national influence and prestige, Vignon detached colonial policy from internal political debates and described it as an integral part of French history. But even as Vignon contended that *politique coloniale* had nothing to do with any particular French political party, he also narrated the history of France’s colonial empire in politicized terms.¹⁸⁸

Vignon’s description of France’s colonial history contended that most of France’s rulers had respected France’s “natural” dual continental and colonial orientation. However, three rulers had put both France’s continental and colonial security at risk: Louis XV, Napoleon I, and Napoleon III. Together, these men had destroyed France’s first colonial empire and weakened its continental position. Louis XV had begun the pattern of sacrificing France’s colonial holdings for the sake of its continental influence. Like Deschamps, Vignon argued that the Revolutionary government had attempted to reform the remainder of that colonial empire. However, Napoleon I had undone these reforms and focused even more exclusively on the continent. At the same time, he had unsettled the “equilibrium” in Europe – an act that would ultimately cause France to lose both its new continental borders and most of the remainder of its colonial empire.¹⁸⁹ Napoleon III had made the situation even worse by sacrificing both France’s continental and colonial interests to fantastical dreams that could never be realized.¹⁹⁰ This destructive obsession with continental expansion and the turn to flights of fancy had weakened France. It was not until the Third

¹⁹⁰ Vignon did not argue that all of Napoleon III’s wars were useless; in fact, he noted that the Crimean and Italian wars had been “glorious for France.” However, Napoleon III’s decision to launch the expedition to Mexico had undone the colonial and continental progress made under his rule. According to Vignon, Napoleon III had “dreamed of establishing a Latin Empire between the two Americas,” but had ignored Prussia and the British. See *ibid.*, 147. Not all writers classified Napoleon III this way. Jean-Baptiste Piolet and Charles Noufflard, for example, claimed that Napoleon III’s problem was that like Napoleon I, “he only looked at the continent.” See Jean-Baptiste Piolet and Charles Noufflard, *L’Empire coloniale de la France.* (Paris: Librairie de Paris – Firmin Didot, 1900), xiv.
Republic that the government turned definitively away from France’s misconceived dreams of continental domination and towards the more rewarding field of colonial empire.\textsuperscript{191}

If Vignon argued that France should focus on expanding its influence overseas, he did not contend that France should surrender its continental ambitions. Instead of “opting” for \textit{politique coloniale} over \textit{politique continentale}, he averred, France should instead “orient” itself towards colonial empire. In the colonies, France would find “certain success, the future, and riches.” As long as the Third Republic avoided “adventures” like Napoleon I’s, Vignon implied, France would be able to maintain and extend its expansive overseas territories and perhaps even its borders within Europe itself.\textsuperscript{192} Vignon thus promised his readers that this new republican colonial empire would not only enrich France, but also help the nation to compete within Europe.

If Vignon thus tied successful colonial expansion and France’s colonial empire directly to its republican government, he did not necessarily link France’s republican ideology to its colonial policies in the same way as Deschamps and Girault had. While he praised the Republic for turning away from the obsessive focus on continental power struggles, he claimed that its colonial policies left something to be desired.\textsuperscript{193} Moreover, instead of suggesting that republican politicians turn back towards the Revolution for solutions to contemporary colonial problems, he argued instead that colonial administrators and legislators should look towards England, which had a much more populous and prosperous overseas colonial empire. By examining England’s policies and applying them to France’s colonies, he proposed, France would find the key to

\textsuperscript{191} \textit{Ibid.}, 340.

\textsuperscript{192} \textit{Ibid.}, 362, 367.

\textsuperscript{193} He objected to the Republic’s policy of assimilation. See \textit{ibid.}, 369.
improving its overseas possessions. Vignon’s history of colonization thus linked colonial empire to the Republic but not to republican political ideas or policies.

Joseph Chailley-Bert, the secretary of the Union coloniale who had sought to define colonial empire by appealing to republican theory, also wrote historical narratives to secure the term. His deployment of *politique continentale* and *politique coloniale* was even less tied up in republican ideology. Unlike Deschamps and Vignon, who both associated *politique continentale* with Bonapartism and *politique coloniale* with republicanism, Chailley-Bert did not define the terms politically or ascribe them to particular regimes. Instead, he suggested that both were tactical strategies aimed at increasing France’s influence. France’s contemporary problems, in his view, stemmed from the fact that most of its rulers and governments had privileged *politique continentale* over *politique coloniale*. This imbalance had weakened France within Europe and overseas. According to Chailley-Bert, the Third Republic’s decision to devote more attention to *politique coloniale* had thus rectified a mistake – but even the Third Republic’s commitment to its colonial empire was more tenuous than it should be. If Deschamps and Vignon had both used an opposition between *politique coloniale* and *politique continentale* to bolster their respective visions of a republican colonial empire, Chailley-Bert thus used the same opposition to define colonial empire as an apolitical, national enterprise.

Other writers objected directly to the contention that Napoleon had abandoned *politique coloniale* for *politique continentale*. Henri Prentout, a professor of history at the University of Caen, argued in *Île de France sous Decaen* that Napoleon I practiced a distinct and unified

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politique coloniale. As a result, Prentout insisted, Napoleon’s policies overseas deserved independent attention. However, his narrative of Napoleonic colonial history demonstrated that Napoleon’s colonial policies and ambitions were both similar to and intertwined with their European counterparts. In both Europe and the colonies, Prentout maintained, Napoleon aimed to extend the territory under his authority. Moreover, his expansionist goals in Europe and overseas were often interrelated. For example, Prentout explained, Napoleon hoped to use the Île de France (modern-day Mauritius) as a launching point to conquer India. Conquering India would have enabled Napoleon to establish a wealthy and powerful overseas colonial empire. But at the same time, he noted, it would have also served to weaken England in Europe. The failure of Napoleon’s colonial ambitions in the East Indies – which, as Prentout pointed out, also marked the end of France’s “first colonial empire” – was also bound up with Napoleon’s failures in Europe. Both stemmed, Prentout claimed, from an excess of ambition and a dearth of resources. Moreover, as Napoleon encountered setback after setback in Europe itself, he became unable to devote attention to France’s overseas territories. Failure in Europe thus led to failure in the colonies as well.

According to Prentout, Napoleon’s administrative and political strategies also resembled their European counterparts; they were centralizing, “reactionary,” and focused on creating order.

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197 Henri Prentout argued that this politique coloniale had often been overlooked by historians of the Napoleonic Empire who often focused too much on Europe. See Henri Prentout, *Ile de France sous Decaen: Essai sur la politique coloniale du Premier Empire et la rivalité de la France et de l’Angleterre dans les Indes Orientales* (Paris: Libraire Hachette, 1901), xiii, 301. The question of whether or not Napoleon was committed to colonial politics was at the center of these works. Many accounts of France’s colonial history held Napoleon responsible for abandoning the colonies. At the same time, other theorists insisted that he felt strongly about the necessity of colonial expansion, even if he had not always executed his strategies well. See, for example, Bory, *Le colon*, 20.

198 He also hoped to use it to launch an invasion of Madagascar. See Prentout, *Ile de France sous Decaen*, 5.


while incorporating some revolutionary reforms. Napoleon’s goal in the colonies, Prentout contended, was to “restore [Old Regime] institutions while adapting revolutionary legislation.” This ideological framework, he noted, was similar to the one that had also structured his policies in France itself. The differences between the Napoleonic European and colonial regimes were thus a matter of degree: the colonies were less centralized, more independent, and more unequal than Napoleon’s European territories. But they remained part of the same imperial structure.

Prentout’s narrative of Napoleon’s politque coloniale was in some sense contradictory. On the one hand, he structurally treated Napoleon’s overseas colonial empire as distinct from Napoleon’s European empire. But at the same time, he continually highlighted the similarities between them for his readers. This pattern implies that he saw “continental” and “colonial” empire as inherently distinct models that could share commonalities. Neither, moreover, belonged to a particular political system; both could be associated with a variety of political regimes. Like Chailley-Bert, Prentout thus implied that colonial empire was an enterprise embraced by all of France’s governments – even if they practiced it differently.

Pierre Legendre’s Notre épopée coloniale similarly described France’s relationship to its colonial empire in national and at times racial terms. Legendre – the secretary of the Alliance française and a member of the Société de géographie de Paris - argued that the French race had shown its “colonial genius” beginning in ancient Gaul. The country’s first major colony was established in the 11th century, when the Normans conquered England. Even if England had not remained loyal to France, Legendre contended, the English nevertheless remained “the sons of

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201 Ibid., 623.
202 He argued that Marseille was the first colonial power in ancient Gaul. However, all of the different “races” that made up the French nation had shown themselves apt at colonisation. See Pierre Legendre, Notre épopée coloniale (Paris: Librairie Charles Tallandier, 1901), 4.
the first French colonists." A few centuries later, the French embarked on an even more ambitious colonial endeavor: the Crusades. After this successful military expedition, France had maintained a colonial empire in the center of the Middle East for more than a century. When it fell, France turned its colonizing efforts overseas towards the New World. And even after England annexed this North American empire, France remained undaunted and created its contemporary colonial empire – its largest yet. This history, Legendre insisted, demonstrated that the French people were “tenaciously attached to the colonial idea” and had been committed to colonial enterprises throughout their ancient and modern history. France’s interest in establishing a colonial empire was thus not an expression of party politics. Instead, it stemmed from the national and natural character of the French people. In fact, he maintained, the “negligence, weakness, [and] cowardice” of France’s governments was responsible for all of France’s colonial challenges and disasters. Politics and political ideologies thus had not shaped France’s colonial practices; they had simply interfered with the French people’s natural instincts and endangered the country’s colonial empire.

In addition to describing colonization and colonial empire as the simple expression of France’s national character, Legendre also situated his narrative of France’s colonial history within a discourse of evolutionary biology. He argued that colonization was central to “human evolution”: it had created modern European civilization and in the future, it would allow humanity to make further progress. Colonies were thus not simply a reflection of Darwinian

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203 Notably, throughout the work, Legendre warned his readers that France’s colonies had not and would not always stay loyal to France. However, he insisted, this was the nature of “children;” they often did not appreciate the efforts of their parents. Failing to establish colonies, however, was to consign the nation to irrelevance; in order to secure its place in history, a country needed to “procreate.” Ibid., 9, 597.

204 Ibid., 11.

205 Ibid., 598.
competition; they also were demanded by “humanitarian law,” which required civilized people to “create men” out of the uncivilized peoples that they encountered. Like Girault, Legendre deployed family metaphors in order to describe colonization’s evolutionary effects. He argued, “Just as the individual must create children, civilized peoples must create colonies.” Any nation that refused to colonize would find itself doomed to irrelevance and ultimately “the tomb.” Much like individuals who failed to have children, the nation’s legacy would disappear. By establishing a colonial empire, France was preserving its “soul and its spirit” and creating a place for itself in “eternal history.” The empire itself would not be permanent, however; in fact, each of its composite colonies would ultimately become independent. But the nation’s ideas and culture would be preserved in territories around the world even after the empire dissolved. For Legendre, then, France’s colonial empire reflected a national effort to contribute to human evolution and create a place for itself in human history.  

Marcel Dubois and Auguste Terrier’s *Les colonies françaises: un siècle d’expansion coloniale*, published to accompany the Universal Exposition of 1900, echoed many of the themes published in these independent works. Dubois and Terrier, associated respectively with the *Annales de géographie* and the *Comité de l’Afrique française*, described colonial expansion and colonial empire as a “national strategy” that had little to do with internal French politics – much like Vignon, Chailley-Bert, and Legendre. In fact, in the preface, the authors posited colonialism as a phenomenon that had characterized all of France’s governments during the nineteenth century by noting that they intended to describe the “colonial history of the Directory,  

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206 Legendre did discuss colonial administration and colonial laws, but it was not the focus of his work. Instead, he argued that France must adopt policies that would make colonized people love and respect it. See ibid., 597-599.

207 Both of these groups had moderate republican orientations, but they were concerned above all with promoting colonial expansion. See Martin Staum, *Labeling People: French Scholars on Society, Race, and Empire, 1815-1848* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 173.
of the Consulate, [and] of the First Empire” in addition to the colonial history of later regimes. Each of these governments, the authors insisted, had concerned themselves with France’s colonial empire – even if some had found themselves unable to defend it.

Like Deschamps and Vignon, Dubois and Terrier assumed that the French Revolution and republican ideology had shaped France’s colonial empire to some extent. However, their enthusiasm for the Revolution’s effects on French territories was restrained. Like Deschamps, they contended that the Old Regime’s colonial empire had been on the brink of collapse in the years before the Revolution – in part because its wealthiest depended on slavery, an economic practice that was quickly becoming outdated. Despite the fact that the revolutionary government was under constant military threat, the authors argued, it nevertheless devoted remarkable attention to the colonies. The deputies abolished many of the inconsistencies and unnecessary injustices that had characterized the Old Regime’s colonial policy and thereby won the loyalty of their colonial subjects. At the same time, the authors noted with approval, the revolutionary government had applied new principles to the colonies with caution; deputies were, the authors insisted, more committed to maintaining “the French colonial tradition” than in remaining entirely wedded to revolutionary ideology. This narrative thus suggested that while moderate republican reforms could increase the health of the colonies, applying radical republican ideas to France’s overseas empire would undermine the nation’s hold over it.


209 Ibid., 14.

210 Dubois and Terrier’s account of the Revolution’s politics drew heavily on Deschamps’. See ibid., 28.

211 They noted, “Certainly, there were politicians who… yielded at times to the generous and chimeric desire to abolish, without any transition, all traces of the old colonial regime. But it would be ungrateful to not recognize that they knew, on occasion, to temper their attachment to absolute principles…” See ibid., 37.
Dubois and Terrier paired this tempered assessment of the revolutionary government’s effects on France’s colonial holdings with a more sympathetic account of Napoleon I’s relationship to colonial empire. They noted that Napoleon had lost the colonial empire largely due to the machinations of England; he had hoped to defend France’s overseas territories by both attacking England directly and by invading India. Neither of these plans came to fruition, and as a result, he left France with a colonial empire largely in tatters. If Dubois and Terrier thus faulted Napoleon’s policies for failing to produce results, they did not claim, like Deschamps and other writers, that Bonapartism itself was incompatible with colonial empire. Even the Second Empire, they contended, had maintained an active colonial strategy – but Napoleon III’s other commitments in Italy, Crimea, and Mexico had prevented him from acting on it.212

Dubois and Terrier thus positioned France’s colonial expansion in the late nineteenth century as a return to “the French tradition.” It was not a new doctrine or theory, but “analogous” to the politique coloniale embraced under Colbert – even if it had a new “democratic essence.” Although it had been influenced by France’s different governmental regimes, it was not beholden to any of them. Like politique continentale, the authors contended, politique coloniale was simply an expression of “national interests.” In fact, Dubois and Terrier warned, for France’s colonial empire to become prosperous and stable, politique coloniale “must not have any more party politics.” Such politicking was destructive and inappropriate, as politique coloniale was an expression of France’s history and national identity – not its political debates.213 Dubois and Terrier thus tried to highlight the ways in which France’s new colonial empire lined up with

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212 They noted “the politique coloniale of the Second Empire was not, in sum, advantageous for our expansion. Certainly, it would be unjust to deny that our colonies received certain benefits from that intense commercial circulation that the treaties of 1860 began.” The authors argued that the Second Empire had hindered colonization in Algeria and focused too much on economics. Notably, they were skeptical of economic liberalism and argued that colonial economies needed to be managed to avoid “competition” between metropole and colony. See ibid., 276.

213 Ibid., 380, 383.
certain republican principles, while simultaneously describing empire as a uniting force that would connect the modern nation with its long history and transcend political divisions.

During the 1890s and early twentieth century, a range of scholars and advocates for colonial expansion thus came together to write positive accounts of France’s colonial history. They acknowledged that France’s governments had sometimes made mistakes – although they did not identify or describe them in the same way – but they all argued that on the whole, France’s colonial history was impressive and inspiring.\textsuperscript{214} If all agreed that colonial empire was a positive attribute that had long distinguished the French state, however, they narrated its history in distinct ways. Some writers, like Deschamps and Vignon, differentiated sharply between modern colonization and its earlier antecedents. Both maintained that the Republic had reconstructed the colonial empire from earlier forms of administration. Chailley-Bert, Prentout, Legendre, and Dubois and Terrier, on the other hand, located France’s contemporary empire in an unbroken tradition of French colonization. Legendre and Dubois and Terrier in particular remained skeptical of the Revolution’s effects on France’s colonies and argued that the colonial empire should be understood in national terms instead of political ones. Deschamps and Vignon, conversely, positioned the Revolution’s effects as salutatory and were more critical of France’s longer traditions, although for different reasons. While Deschamps saw France’s non-republican colonizing practices as unjust, Vignon described them as ineffective, and in fact suggested that France should look towards Britain for more a successful colonial model.

\textsuperscript{214} Not all writers agreed with this description, of course. In 1906, Gabriel Marfond, a nationalist poet and intellectual who admired Déroulède, published a history of France’s colonies, which argued that France’s colonial disasters proved that the French were “a people of women.” Their colonial policies demonstrated their “weakness” and “emasculated spirit.” See Gabriel Marfond, \textit{Politique extérieure et coloniale de la France de Louis XIV à Napoléon et ses consequences jusqu’à nos jours} (Paris: Pivoteau et Fils, 1906), 104.
Some of these works also reflect a growing interest in the history of the Napoleonic Empire and an effort to integrate it into a narrative of French colonial expansion – a move that seems to indicate that many republican authors were no longer afraid of associations with Napoleon I and Napoleon III.\(^{215}\) This change seems partly to reflect the Second Empire’s fading stigma in French political and historical discourse. But it also resulted from a widespread belief that continental and colonial empire were distinct enterprises, which meant that France could be republican at home and imperial abroad. Of course, these authors did not interpret Napoleonic Empire and its relationship with republican empire in the same way. While some writers described France’s contemporary colonial empire as a republican enterprise that had broken from its Napoleonic antecedents, others linked the new empire to Napoleonic predecessors.

These authors’ varying stances on the colonies’ relationship to republicanism reflect the diversity that characterized republican visions of empire in the 1890s. While some described the republic and its empire as deeply interconnected, others worked instead to depoliticize the question of colonial expansion – and at times even remobilized Bonapartist strategies to give

\(^{215}\) In fact, this period saw a growing interest in even Napoleon III’s political strategies. Notably, however, the new historical narratives after 1890 did not agree on the nature of Napoleon III’s relationship to France’s colonial history. While some writers contended that Napoleon III had made important contributions to France’s overseas empire, others said that he was an indifferent or incompetent colonial administrator. They also continued to disagree about whether Bonapartism itself contradicted the principles of colonial empire. Piolet and Noufflard, for example, insisted that Napoleon III was uninterested in colonization. Meyniard, Dubois, and Terrier on the other hand, described Napoleon III’s policies in Indochina as “colonial” but incompetent. They even struggled over how to classify Napoleon III’s policies in Indochina as “colonial” but incompetent. They even struggled over how to classify Napoleon III’s colonial endeavors. Although some writers described the Mexican invasion as a “foreign policy,” for example, others saw it as a colonial expedition. To some extent, how these advocates of colonial expansion classified it reflected how they thought of it. Jean-Baptiste Piolet, for example, insisted that it was a colonial expedition. But he also argued that the invasion was at its heart a “grande pensée,” despite all of the bad press to the contrary. Dubois and Terrier, on the other hand, classified it as a “distraction” from colonial expansion - along with Italy and Crimea. Maurice Wahl similarly treated it as separate from Napoleon III’s colonial expeditions. Louis Vignon argued that Napoleon III had sought to build an empire latin instead of an empire coloniale in Mexico – and implied that this “dream” had contributed to France’s defeat. These debates over how to classify Napoleon III’s foreign and colonial policies both demonstrate the degree to which writers continued to find the Napoleonic empire difficult to classify and the growing willingness to engage with possible connections between France’s contemporary colonies and the discredited imperial regime. See See Piolet and Noufflard, *L’Empire coloniale de la France*, xiv, 187; Charles Meyniard, *Le Second Empire en Indo-Chine* (Paris: Société d’Éditions Scientifiques, 1891), 477; Dubois and Terrier, *Les colonies françaises*, 255, 260; Maurice Wahl, *La France aux colonies* (Paris: Ancienne Maison Quantin, 1896), 70; Vignon, *L’expansion de la France*, 147.
shape to the empire they hoped to build. The variation between these understandings shows that the political implications of “empire” remained highly unstable during this period.

These authors’ histories dealt less directly with the question of the ultimate fate of France’s colonial empire than some of the more theoretical works on the subject. However, by describing colonization as a strategy with deep roots in France’s history and demonstrating that the French nation had always maintained a colonial empire in some form, each of these authors positioned “empire” to some extent as a natural annex to France itself. Legendre in particular warned that France’s dominance over any particular colony would always be fleeting; he contended that all colonies were destined to become independent nations. But his narrative nevertheless implied that France would replace independent colonies with new ones in order to engage perpetually in the project of spreading its influence across the globe. In other words, even if these writers described colonial empire’s relationship to the republic in different ways, they nevertheless all positioned colonialism as a key historical characteristic of the French nation.

IV. Conclusion: Popularizing Colonial Empire

Most theoretical and historical definitions of colonial empire addressed a relatively narrow audience of specialists, scholars, and politicians. But during the 1890s, a growing body of popular literature on colonialism also emerged that worked – albeit less directly – to define and defend “colonial empire” in wider public circles. Like their political and theoretical counterparts, these works did not define “colonial empire” in the same way. But they nevertheless popularized the term and highlighted its benefits for the French nation.

These popular representations of colonial empire took a number of different forms, including popular novels, histories aimed at schoolchildren, colonial exhibitions, and
encyclopedias and atlases. In 1896, for example, Maurice Wahl published “an illustrated history” of France’s colonial empire for schools that chronicled its establishment, described its expansiveness, and highlighted its benefits. France had largely established this empire, he acknowledged, randomly and through force. However, he insisted, the government had no time for reflection on strategy: all European powers were seeking to establish colonial empires in the contemporary world. France’s current task was to give shape to this conquered territory by educating administrators, implementing colonial institutions, encouraging emigration, and constituting a colonial army. Such measures, he claimed, would enable France to create a colonial empire that would enrich and strengthen the French nation. Wahl did not explain what shape this empire would take but described it as a permanent annex to the state that would enable France to spread its ideas and values across the world. Wahl’s vision of colonial empire thus reflected the views of colonial theorists and historians who treated empire as an expression of national interests that transcended questions of specific political values and ideologies.

Les colonies françaises: petite encyclopédie coloniale, which was published in multiple editions during the early twentieth century, similarly aimed to popularize theoretical understandings of empire coloniale while acquainting its readers with the scope of France’s

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216 Not all of these representations were produced by republicans. Some were also produced by Catholics and missionary groups. In 1892, the brothers of Christian schools published an illustrated account of France’s colonial empire that described both the purpose and the extent of the empire. It drew heavily on the language employed by republican advocates of empire. It celebrated the fact that France had the second largest colonial empire in Europe and contended, “The French colonies are so important that it is the duty of every French citizen, no matter his age or social position, to have an exact, reasoned, and considered position [on them], based on serious study.” They proceeded to define colonization by appealing to Leroy-Beaulieu’s categorization, and noted that France’s colonial empire was beneficial primarily because it “developed the commerce, the navy, and the political influence of the metropole.” Moreover, the colonies enabled the metropole to “bring its name, its language, its ideas, its civilization, its religion, and its political influence to distance places.” See Les frères des écoles chrétiennes, Les colonies françaises illustrées, 2nd ed. (Tours: Alfred Mame et Fils & Paris: Ch. Poussielgue, 1892), 5, 8.

217 Wahl, La France aux colonies, 297.

218 Ibid., 299.
colonial possessions. The goal was to help the general public understand the value of the colonies and thus support pro-colonial political leaders. In the introduction, François Bernard argued that colonial empire was a necessary political structure that contained the process of colonization. Colonization, he contended, was a “natural” human impulse that had defined human history. However, it was also oppressive and violent. States thus needed to oversee colonization in order to “regulate the relationship” between colonists and indigenous people.219 By asserting sovereign authority over colonized territories and integrating them into an overarching imperial structure, France was thus protecting indigenous peoples while spreading its civilizing influence around the globe. After all, Bernard warned, if France did not conquer territories, England would continue to do so instead – and England was less adept at integrating and civilizing indigenous peoples than France.220 Ultimately, each of France’s colonies would gain an increasing degree of administrative autonomy – even as the indigenous peoples who lived there integrated progressively into French society.221

Like other contemporary French colonial theorists, the contributors to Les colonies françaises thus drew on the language of Darwinian competition in order to describe colonization as a process that defined human nature. At the same time, they posited the state’s involvement in that process – and the institution of empire itself – as a way of integrating morality, “civilizing” force, and liberal principles into encounters that otherwise would be destructive for indigenous

220 Ibid., xi.
221 Ibid., xv.
peoples. In this vision, “empire” organized colonized territories in ways that aligned with the republican discourse of universal rights and justice – even as it also strengthened the nation.

Wahl’s and Petite’s accounts of France’s colonial empire certainly do not represent the scope of popular work published about colonial expansion at the turn of the century. But they show how debates over the relationship between colonialism, empire, republicanism, and the nation could creep into texts aimed at nonspecialist audiences. At the same time, they also demonstrate how the terminology of “colonial empire” structured France’s relationship with its colonies – even if writers and politicians often failed to agree on its meaning.

For much of the 1870s and 1880s, colonial expansion and colonial empire had remained a subject of political controversy: French politicians, writers, and intellectuals disagreed over its meaning, benefits, and consequences for France and many linked empire to the discredited regime of Napoleon III. Even in the 1890s, many of these debates remained unsettled. Writers, politicians, and intellectuals continued to argue about some of the same questions that had defined French discourse about colonization since the 1860s. Should the government assimilate colonies into the metropole? Should it subject them to the law of free trade? How should colonies be administered? Should the state promote settler colonization? How should France treat the indigenous peoples who fell beneath French rule? The range of responses to these questions continued to have consequences for those who lived beneath imperial rule and for the


223 Notably, the authors insisted that colonizing countries could not expropriate land from the peoples that they conquered. Marcel Moye noted, “Certain publicists have sought to return to the same contempt for the rights of indigenous peoples by priding themselves on the pretended right of civilization, in the name of which modern peoples have the faculty, if not the duty, to bring the light of science and progress… this pretended right of civilization hides the reality of abuse of force. Each people could pretend to be more civilized than their neighbors… What has not been said about the value of Anglo-Saxon races vis-à-vis the decadence of Latin peoples! As a result, a people, like an individual cannot lose its rights, even if they are barbaric and uncivilized… We do not hesitate to declare that savage or barbaric peoples have a right to their territory, and it cannot be occupied as if it belongs to no one. See Marcel Moye, “Droit coloniale internationale,” in Les colonies françaises, 153.
structure of the imperial system. But the argument about colonial empire’s benefits for France and relationship to the legacy of Napoleon III seemed settled.\textsuperscript{224} Most writers had come to agree that colonial empire was necessary to the French nation, though France remained a Republic.

By the end of the 1890s, France’s writers and thinkers had thus begun to popularize the term “colonial empire” and highlight its importance to the French nation. But they had not necessarily defined it coherently. Indeed, they failed to agree on some basic points. They argued about whether the colonial empire would remain permanently annexed to France, eventually fold into the French nation, or ultimately break apart into new, independent nations. They also debated about whether the empire was in line with republican ideals or whether republican ideals were irrelevant to colonial politics. And they continued to disagree about the significance and legacy of earlier imperial models. Ironically, at the same time that thinkers articulated visions of colonial empire that escaped the charges of Bonapartism, despotism, incompetence, and decadence lobbied against it in the 1880s, some began to look sympathetically towards the Second Empire’s imperial system in order to describe the structure of its empire and its relationship to France. In other words, at the moment when most republican French politicians and intellectuals agreed that continental and colonial empire were unrelated, republican colonial theorists began to look again at continental imperial models and to find some value in the policies of Napoleon III.

The growing number of republican colonial theorists and writers who turned away from trying to align France’s colonial empire with republican ideals and instead highlighted its

\textsuperscript{224} This is not to say that all French people or all French intellectuals and politicians accepted colonial empire. A number of publications in the 1890s continued to criticize the idea; socialists especially continued to oppose it. But colonial empire did not operate as a locus for debate in the 1890s as it had in previous decades. For examples of work opposed to colonial empire, see Armand Corre, \textit{Comment se fondent les colonies} (Paris: Éditions de la Société Nouvelle, 1894), 347-360; Isidore Chessé, \textit{Vérités coloniales: le désordre, les abus, le danger} (Paris: Chamuel, 1895); Chaudory, \textit{Considérations de la politique extérieure de la France} (Paris: Plon, Nourrit, 1897).
relationship with older colonial empires does not necessarily reflect the strength of the Napoleonic legacy in the early twentieth century. If anything, it seems to reflect a feeling among many of these writers that republican ideals interfered with and undermined the pursuit of colonial expansion. By trying to remove colonial empire from the center of political debate, they were thus not only trying to appeal to French people from across the political spectrum; they were also trying to remove it from republican discourse. This pattern suggests that despite all of the efforts to separate “republican colonialism” from earlier imperial regimes, the new advocates of colonial empire could never quite escape the contradictions of universal human rights and colonial conquests. Race theories, social Darwinism, and new nationalist themes all contributed to the justifications for colonialism and secured the popularity of colonial empire. But the theoretical and historical tensions never disappeared.
CONCLUSION: THE IMPERIAL PARADOXES OF FRENCH REPUBLICANISM

Over the course of the late nineteenth century, French understandings of “empire,” its relationship to metropolitan political questions, and its consequences for the nation steadily evolved. In the 1860s, Napoleon III had promoted a vision of empire that described the term simultaneously as a particular political system within France and as a way of organizing territory overseas. This vision positioned the French nation itself within an overarching imperial structure that also included other nations. Even during the Second Empire, this understanding of empire was both extremely unpopular and far from stable – in fact, Napoleon III himself backed away from it after 1865.1 Ironically, however, the controversy that engulfed Napoleon III’s use of the term and his proposed reforms in Algeria also secured its place in French political discourse. The angry settlers in Algeria who forged links with republicans in metropolitan France in order to thwart Napoleon III’s attempts to transform the territory simultaneously fixed the legacy of Napoleon III’s vision of empire in republican political thought. Over the next two decades, a variety of republican politicians, writers, and intellectuals – increasingly invested in building an empire of their own – would struggle to untangle Napoleon III’s “continental” empire from his “colonial” empire in order to promote a new vision of colonialism in line with republican

1 As chapter 1 demonstrates, in the second half of the 1860s, Napoleon III increasingly argued that indigenous Algerians would slowly assimilate into French society instead of forming their own nation. After 1865, he began to describe indigenous peoples as “French nationals” who only eventually would be able to exercise the rights of French citizenship – thereby simultaneously abandoning the idea that Algeria would become an “Arab nation” and consigning indigenous peoples to an inferior legal status. Some scholars have in fact argued that this shift represents the moment when French law began to distinguish between “subjects” and “citizens” – a distinction that continued into the Third Republic and was used to deny colonized people access to political rights. See Frederick Cooper, “Alternatives to Empire: France and Africa after World War II,” in The State of Sovereignty: Territories, Laws, Populations, ed. Douglas Howland and Luise White (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 94-123.
principles and free from the troubling memory of Napoleon III. The Empire would become a Republic after 1871, but the Republic would also become a new Empire.

Republicans’ relationship with the term empire became more complex in the wake of the collapse of the Second Empire and France’s embarrassing defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. On the one hand, republican politicians, propagandists, and popular writers promoted a vision of empire that defined it as a corrupt, despotic, decadent, and illegitimate form of political organization that contradicted France’s ideals of human rights and its national identity. They posited empire in direct opposition to the new Third Republic, which they argued could alone represent the French nation and enable it to recover from defeat. This opposition distanced the Third Republic from both the Second Empire and the Franco-Prussian War and helped shore up popular support for republican politics. At the same time, however, this line of argumentation complicated the new republic’s relationship with its overseas territories, partly because a number of writers and thinkers continued to associate “colonies” with “Empire.” The relationship between these terms was especially fraught in Algeria, because Napoleon III had treated the territory as the centerpiece for his vision of an empire that would rest on Bonapartist political principles and bind multiple nations together beneath one imperial structure at home and abroad.

In the years following the Second Empire’s collapse, republicans sought to resolve this problem by recasting France’s colonies – and especially Algeria – in republican terms. In Algeria itself, most French republicans denied that Algeria was a “colony” at all. Instead, they insisted that Algeria was simply an extension of the French nation across the Mediterranean. In this case

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2 As chapter 2 demonstrates, the Third Republic was itself compromised by the events of the war and the Commune that followed it. See Lehning, To Be a Citizen, 6.

3 Settlers did not necessarily share this opinion. As chapter 3 shows, some called for greater colonial autonomy and a federalized state – in part because they felt that the government in France would not respond to their demands.
formulation, republican Algeria had no relationship to “empire”; it was a constitutive part of the national body. But if this formulation of Algeria’s relationship to France thus enabled republicans to distance the territory from Napoleon III’s vision of a multinational Mediterranean Empire, it also introduced new tensions – at least in part because of the large indigenous population in this newly assimilated Algeria. Even as republican thinkers promoted “assimilation” as a democratic solution in line with republican principles, most also made it clear that Algeria’s indigenous population would not have access to political rights or citizenship. This tension may have posed a problem for republican thinkers, but it was also useful for a new conception of “republican empire” in which different groups held different legal and political rights. It enabled the Third Republic to claim that administration in Algeria was compatible with the republican ideals of equality and liberty while simultaneously denying most of the population access to both.4 The weakness of this model thus lay not in its contradictory definitions of rights, but in the fact that it did not apply to most of France’s other overseas territories.

Even during the 1870s, some settlers and colonial theorists thus sought to articulate a broader model for describing France’s relationship with its overseas territories by developing theories of “colonization” that detached the term from Bonapartist politics. They avoided using the term “empire” and instead described “colonization” as an apolitical endeavor practiced by all civilized peoples throughout human history. At the same time, they promised that if managed the right way, the colonies would strengthen the French nation and align colonial institutions with republican principles. However, republicans continued to struggle to describe the nature of both the theoretical and institutional relationship between the nation, the republic, and the colonies.

During the 1880s, this conversation about colonization and its relationship to empire and republican politics came to the forefront in the form of an argument about France’s conquest of Indochina. During this period, republican proponents of colonial expansion defended this conquest by describing it as part of *politique coloniale*, a practice, they promised, which would strengthen France’s economy, international influence, and national character. At the same time, opponents of expansion on both the left and the right mobilized the memory of Napoleon III and the Second Empire to criticize *politique coloniale* and associate it with French defeat and imperial despotism.\(^5\) The strength of this opposition to colonialism pushed supporters of *politique coloniale* to construct a more robust defense of the practice, which they defined for the most part in explicitly republican terms. On the one hand, they differentiated between conquest in Europe and conquest in Asia and Africa by drawing on the language of racial or cultural inequality and appealing to the idea of the “civilizing mission.”\(^6\) At the same time, they argued that republican colonial conquest was distinct from its historical predecessors because it did not aim to exploit and destroy the peoples it conquered; instead, it would spread French culture and values and introduced conquered peoples to the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. They promoted these ideas not only in political pamphlets and theoretical texts but increasingly in popular publications as well.

Due both to the efforts of colonial propagandists and to the changing political climate in post-Napoleonic France, by the 1890s, the conflict and ambivalence surrounding colonial expansion – and even “empire” itself – seems to have largely dissipated. Indeed, republican

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\(^5\) This was partly because Napoleon III was associated with Indochina. See Jean-Pierre Pecquer, *Indochine-France: Conquête et rupture, 1620-1954* (Paris: Alan Sutton, 2009), 41.

\(^6\) As chapter 4 shows, republican politicians in particular used the language of racial inequality somewhat cautiously in 1885 – especially after it caused an uproar after the Chamber of Deputies, they often substituted “culture” for it. See Manceron, *1885: le tournant coloniale*, 14.
politicians, colonial theorists, journalists, and writers increasingly used the term “colonial empire” to refer to France’s overseas colonies. The growing popularity of the term “colonial empire” partly reflected the degree to which the problematic memory of Napoleon III had faded. As a result, republicans were less concerned about possible associations between the republic’s overseas empire and Napoleon III’s Second Empire. But the emergence of the term also reflects the ways in which new scientific ideas and patterns of racialized thinking had drawn clear lines between conquest and empire in Europe and conquest and empire overseas. Even in the 1880s, some republican thinkers had associated the German Empire’s annexation of Alsace-Lorraine with the French Republic’s conquest of Indochina. But by the 1890s, such comparisons seemed increasingly remote. Race theory seemed to have solved the political conflicts over “empire” and its meanings.

If the term “colonial empire” had thus become ubiquitous by the end of the nineteenth century, the project of republican colonial empire nevertheless retained its contradictions. Even in the 1890s, colonial theorists and politicians continued to fail to agree on what exactly “colonial empire” meant, the nature of its relationship to republican politics, and its connections to the French nation. While some writers – like their predecessors in the 1880s – described France’s colonial empire in explicitly republican terms, others insisted that it was an apolitical national strategy that did not need to be reconciled with republican political principles. At the same time, they continued to disagree about whether the empire would fold into the French nation, remain permanently annexed to it, or eventually break off into independent nations. If “colonial empire” was thus for the most part no longer seen as problematic, the continuing debates about how to define it demonstrate the degree to which writers continued to struggle to

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7 Ibid., 117.
reconcile the republic’s theoretical commitment to democratic practices and national sovereignty with its commitment to dominating territory overseas.

The slow evolution in French understandings of empire and its relationship to republicanism and the nation did not take place in a vacuum. A range of ideological movements—including romantic nationalism, Saint-Simonianism, liberalism, race theories, and social Darwinism— influenced its development. The conversation was further shaped by the memory of the Franco-Prussian War, the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, and the demands and actions of settlers and colonized peoples. The growing European-wide interest in colonial conquest and expansion also played a role in French understandings of empire: it helped drive and legitimize the practice while disconnecting it from internal French political debates.

At the same time, this conversation about empire and its meanings was not simply shaped by other intellectual and political movements and specific historic events: it also had its own consequences. First, the conversation affected the conquered peoples living beneath French rule— in part because discourses of empire helped legitimize colonial conquest and economic exploitation in the first place. Moreover, because the debates about empire intersected with arguments about the policies of “association” and “assimilation,” the conversation also had implications for colonized people’s rights and identities. Indigenous groups occupied a very different place in Napoleon III’s multinational empire, the early Third Republic’s assimilated Algeria, and the later Third Republic’s expansive colonial empire. These distinct visions of

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8 Of course, these intellectual movements were not all equally influential, and they played different roles at different historical moments. But taken together, they provided a working vocabulary for many of the writers, politicians, and intellectuals who sought to define empire.

9 In fact, the term “colonial empire” was probably borrowed from the British—both “empire” and “imperialism” were used to describe British colonies and the British empire before they were used to define their French counterparts. French colonial theorists also drew heavily on work by British thinkers. See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery (New York: Picador, 2001), 213.
empire also promised colonized peoples very different futures. But if these alternative imperial models had important theoretical consequences for colonial administration, their actual policy effects remained more limited because of the complicated and fraught relationship between colonial theory, colonial policy, and colonial practice. Large gaps remained between the republic’s theoretical framework for treating the colonies as part of a civilizing mission and its actual practices on the ground. ¹⁰

The conversation about “empire” had more direct effects on the development of republican practice and thought over the course of the late nineteenth century. On the most basic level, republican writers, thinkers, and politicians were able to mobilize particular understandings of “empire” to secure republicanism’s political ascendancy. In the 1860s and 1870s, they promoted a negative vision of empire in order to discredit Bonapartism and promote republicanism as a more legitimate political model. “Empire” thus served as the foil against which they defended republican principles and politics. At the same time, especially in the 1880s and 1890s, republicans’ ability to articulate a new vision of “colonial empire,” associate that vision with republican ideals, and enact that vision by conquering large swaths of overseas territory helped them demonstrate the success and strength of republican policies in the court of French public opinion.

“Empire” did not simply help republicans promote republicanism in late nineteenth-century France, however. It also at times challenged the boundaries and content of republican

¹⁰ As Alice Conklin, Emanuelle Saada, David Prochaska, and other scholars have made clear, colonial realities often had little to do with metropolitan theories. Moreover, practices on the ground – negotiated between colonized peoples, settlers, and colonial officials - often played a larger role in shaping administrative policies than theoretical reflections on colonial expansion published in the metropole. See Alice Conklin, A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); David Prochaska, Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Emmanuelle Saada, Empire’s Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012)
ideology. This was in part because empire could be associated both with Bonapartism and with overseas conquest for much of the nineteenth century. As a result, especially in the first decades of the Third Republic, critics of colonial expansion were able to discredit the republic’s colonial expeditions by associating them with the Second Empire and contending that they contradicted republican principles. Some went so far as to claim that advocates of colonial expansion were not republicans at all and instead simply represented a continuation of older autocratic traditions.\(^{11}\) In response to these accusations, republican supporters of colonial expansion had to demonstrate that colonial empire and republicanism were compatible – which they managed largely by incorporating the scientific language of racial inequality into political discourse. But if the charge that colonial empire was “not republican” temporarily subsided, the political instability of “empire” as a conceptual category persisted. This was problematic because “republican ideology” itself was far from coherent in the late nineteenth century: republicans argued about the promises and dangers of democratic practices, the meaning and application of republican citizenship, and the republic’s relationship with war and conquest.\(^{12}\) These debates about empire and its relationship to France continued to illuminate and at times accentuate these tensions.

Finally, debates about “empire” also had important consequences for French understandings of the nation and national identity. Throughout his reign, Napoleon III had embraced and promoted “the politics of nationality” and argued that each “people” should have its own nation-state.\(^{13}\) He reconciled his commitment to the “politics of nationality” with his

\(^{11}\) Manceron, *1885*, 68, 70, 81.


\(^{13}\) Napoleon III was arguably drawing on a “cultural” vision of national identity here instead of a “political” or “civic” one. He supported Italian and to some extent German unification because he felt that the peoples who would constitute those two nation-states had historical, linguistic, and cultural ties that bound them together. The republicans who came to power in 1870 rejected this model in part because they felt that it had strengthened the
desire to build an expansive empire by describing that empire as an entity that would incorporate multiple nations within it. After the Franco-Prussian War, republicans identified Napoleon III’s commitment to “the politics of nationality” as one of the causes of French defeat. Instead of treating France’s overseas territories as semi-independent nations, they turned to the revolutionary republican universalizing vision of the French nation that envisioned it as an open political structure, which could incorporate territories and peoples located all over the world. From the beginning, however, this expansive vision of the French nation had its limitations: even as republicans described the nation as universal, they insisted that indigenous peoples had to adopt cultural markers of Frenchness in order to join it. As a result, even in Algeria, most republicans never seriously considered incorporating indigenous peoples into the nation itself.

In light of these contradictions – which became increasingly obvious as the republic conquered a growing number of overseas territories – numerous writers, politicians, and theorists began describing France’s colonies as separate from the French nation. Instead of joining the national body, these colonies would exist beneath a separate imperial structure that would help other races “grow up.” This vision of the relationship between empire and nation had something

Germans unnecessarily. At the same time, however, as recent scholars of nationalism have made clear, the republican model of nationalism was not simply based on a political project: instead, republicans continued to argue about the relationship between the importance of culture, ethnicity, and law in determining national identity. For a description of the traditional opposition between German and French nationalism, see Rogers Brubaker, Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). For scholarship that calls these categories into question, see Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., Becoming National: A Reader (London: Oxford University Press, 1996); Patrick Weil, How to Be French: Nationality in the Making since 1789, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

14 See, for example, C. Cambier, République, empire ou royauté (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1871), 19, 20; A. Neptune, Le Temps (16 July 1870), 1.


16 They were perceived as “not French enough” – reflecting the tension between the republican vision of the French nation as universal and the republican vision of the French nation as a specific cultural and ethnic entity. See, for example, René de Semallé, Projet d’organisation de l’Algérie (April 1871); Auguste Pomel, Les races indigènes de l’Algérie: Arabes, Kabyles, Maures et Juifs. Du rôle que leur réservent leurs aptitudes (Oran: Ve Daquier, 1871); Henri de Senhaux, La France et l’Algérie (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1871).
in common with Napoleon III’s. But while Napoleon III had envisioned France as a part of his empire – he positioned it as the central nation-state among others – most republicans envisioned the French nation as outside of the empire that they were constructing. They treated the empire above all as a political, economic, and cultural asset of the French nation; it was a sign of national strength, an opportunity for national commerce, and the symbol of France’s international prestige. By the late nineteenth century, empire had thus become a critical component of French national identity while remaining outside the boundary of the nation itself.

This conversation about empire and its relationship to republicanism and national identity continued into the twentieth century. Especially in the decades after World War I, a new wave of criticism – originating both from the Communist party and from the colonies themselves – would highlight the contradictions between republican promises and imperial institutions. These voices remained relatively marginalized in the interwar years, but they would become much stronger after 1945, as colonized peoples increasingly demanded access to full citizenship rights. In response to this criticism, republicans would again seek to redefine the meaning of empire and rearticulate its relationship to the French nation – partly by turning away from the term “empire” itself and towards the alternative constructions of “France Overseas,” the “French Union,” and the “French Community.” In doing so, they would again renegotiate the complex relationship between the republic, the nation, and overseas territory. But because they failed to

18 As Frederick Cooper has made clear, between 1944 and 1960, a number of Africans proposed to restructure the empire in order to allow for political and social equality and cultural difference. See Cooper, “Alternatives to Empire,” 94-123.
establish a political system that would effectively grant equal political rights to its diverse members, “empire” would once again become a problem for republicans instead of a source of political and national strength. The nineteenth-century conquests of Algeria, Indochina, and other distant peoples would lead finally to the collapse of the Republic’s *politique coloniale* in the 1950’s and 1960’s.

Over the course of the past twenty years, historians have argued about whether French republicanism itself is inherently imperialistic and oppressive. While some scholars have treated colonialism as a failure to apply republican universalist principles to overseas territories, others have claimed that the origin of republican colonialism lies in those universalist principles themselves and in the republic’s inherent inability to accommodate cultural difference.\(^{20}\) As this dissertation has shown, republican thinkers in the late nineteenth century did create a colonial model that was couched in universalist language specifically designed to prevent colonized peoples from exercising political rights. However, this model did not proceed simply from the internal contradictions of republican ideology. It was informed not only by republicans’ interpretation of universalist principles but also by conflicts with other political groups and an ongoing concern that republican ideals and “empire” were in fact incompatible. Republicans thus turned to a very particular reading of revolutionary thought in order to reclaim “empire” in republican terms. This reading of revolutionary ideas remained unstable, however – as the rise of alternative readings in twentieth-century anti-colonial movements makes clear.

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