STUDIES IN IMPERIALISM

THE FRENCH EMPIRE BETWEEN THE WARS

Imperialism, Politics and Society

MARTIN THOMAS

STUDIES IN IMPERIALISM

general editor John M. MacKenzie

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The French empire between the wars

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The French empire between the wars

Imperialism, Politics and Society

Martin Thomas

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CONTENTS

List of maps and tables — vii
General editor's introduction — viii
Preface and acknowledgements — x
List of abbreviations — xiii
Glossary of terms — xv

Introduction: France's inter-war empire: a framework for analysis 1

Part I *The setting: politics and colonial administration after the First World War*

1 Consolidation and expansion: the French empire after the First World War 17
2 Colonial planning and administrative practice 54

Part II *An empire for the masses? Economy, colonial society and popular imperialism*

3 The empire and the French economy: complementarity or divorce? 93
4 Colonial economic demands and urban development in North Africa 125
5 Women and colonialism and colonial education 151
6 'Thinking imperially'? Popular imperialism in France 185

Part III *An empire in trouble: opposition, revolt and war*

7 An empire in revolt? The Rif war, the Syrian rebellion, Yen Bay and the Kongo Wara 211
8 Anti-colonial nationalism: the examples of Algeria and Tunisia 245
9 Reform frustrated: the Popular Front experiment and the French empire 277
10 Approaching war: the empire and international crisis in the 1930s 312

Conclusion: Prelude to decolonisation? The inter-war empire revisited 347
Bibliography 356
Index 395

LIST OF MAPS AND TABLES

Maps

1 French North Africa *page* xviii

2 Afrique Occidentale Française (French West Africa, AOF) xix

3 Afrique Equatoriale Française (French Equatorial Africa, AEF), Madagascar, Réunion and Mauritius xx

4 French Indochina xxi

5 Syria and Lebanon xxii

Tables

2.1 Registered European population in AEF, 1923. 76

3.1 French Indochina population figures, 1930 96

3.2 French commerce and the colonies, 1928–32 102

3.3 Federal budget of Afrique Occidentale Française, 1928–33 107

3.4 Principal holders of French capital in Lebanon 115

9.1 Distribution of North African immigrants in France, March 1937 280

10.1 Tirailleur Sénégalais recruitment for overseas service, 1923 329

GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that in the present state of the historiography of imperialism there is a crying need for parallel and comparative studies. In the anglophone world there has been excessive concentration on the British empire, as has been reflected not only in the older and newer Cambridge and Oxford histories, but also in publishers' lists. Although there are of course major works on the French, Dutch, German and Italian empires in their native European languages, the sources available to the English-speaking student are much less rich. If this is true in general terms for these European empires, how much more is it true of the inter-war period, which has until recently tended to be a 'cinderella' era in imperial scholarship. So far as the French empire is concerned, there has been a notable quickening of interest, not least in the fields of popular culture, propaganda and administrative concerns.

This book constitutes a very welcome addition to the literature in English on French imperialism, especially valuable because it deals with the period between the two world wars of the twentieth century. It is also striking that the work picks up on so many valuable themes in the period. It has sometimes been argued that this period constitutes, against all the odds, something of a classic era in imperial rule. It was the time when the most strenuous efforts were made to integrate metropolitan and colonial economies. It was a period when administrative practice was most highly developed. And these were the years when empires, buffeted by world economic depression, apprehension at political and military developments in Europe and the Far East, as well as assaulted by revolt and intellectual disillusion at home and in the colonies, became most active in issuing propaganda and asserting the centrality of the imperial relationship through popular culture. In the French case, this was reflected in the extraordinary colonial exhibitions that took place in Marseilles in 1922 and in Paris in 1931 and 1937, among the grandest and most eclectic of their type.

Martin Thomas deals here with the multiple aspects of what he calls the period of 'consolidation and expansion', the emergence of colonial planning policies, the attempted integration of economies, the roles of urban growth and development, education and women's activities, as well as the quickening of both nationalist resistance and fears of international crisis. All these themes are illustrated by examples from North and West Africa, the Middle East and Indochina, and all contribute to the sense of the major paradox of the inter-war years. On the one hand, here was a sort of Golden Age, if regularly tarnished. On the other, here was the prelude to

the major disruptions of the Second World War, with an empire divided in allegiance to Vichy or the Free French, and consequently to the acts of decolonisation forced upon the French state after the Second World War.

Obviously, the experience of the French empire stands alone, but the parallels with developments in the British, and perhaps other, empires (not least the American and the Japanese, as well as the European) are striking. The need for major studies of comparative imperialism can be fully realised only when histories of individual empires, particularly of the quality of this one, have been researched and published.

John M. MacKenzie

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Historians like to classify. But modern colonialism defies taxonomy. The 'French empire between the wars' is so gargantuan a subject – or rather, such an agglomeration of so many subjects – that it eludes codification. The history of empire is social history, economic history, international relations, military history, gender history, to name but a few of our discipline's favourite classifications. I have tried to embrace such eclecticism in this book. More than anything else, it is a study of the mechanics of empire governance: the administrations, coalitions, interest groups, committees and governments that shaped policy; the political movements, street demonstrators and anti-colonialists that opposed them. No phase of French colonialism, not least in the inter-war period, is reducible to a combination of high policy, local initiative and the clash of administrators and their, often resentful, colonial subjects. The complexion of the French empire was as much the product of impersonal forces, of accident and error, as it was of design. To convey this requires examining the social ramifications of colonial control: what the French presence actually meant to colonial populations compelled to pay unfamiliar taxes, to perform labour service, to fight France's wars and to adopt at least some of the trappings of French language and culture. Here, I confess, the conclusions are limited by the sources used. The chapters that follow are based on a combination of archival research and recent secondary literature. Many of these secondary sources draw on field study, colonial archives and oral testimony in former territories of the French empire. My own research has, however, been overwhelmingly concentrated in the ministries, archives and papers of France – the former colonial ruler.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge facing the historian of French colonialism is to bring those most directly touched by it out of the shadows. Few colonial people left paper records, wrote letters or passed through a formal educational system. Colonial subjects traverse the archival record in tax returns, police surveillance reports, court records, medical data and civil registers of births, marriages and deaths. Relatively few were given personal opportunity or public space to voice their true feelings about colonial rule, whether through open debate, political representation or oppositional activity. Freedom of expression was strictly limited; rights of association were often nugatory. The reader must decide whether a balance has been struck between the written sources of the colonisers and the more disparate and elusive histories of the indigenous peoples living under the French tricolour between 1918 and 1940. Any shortcomings in this respect are entirely my own.

By contrast, I owe a huge amount to grant-giving agencies, archivists and librarians that have facilitated my research. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Leverhulme Trust, the British Academy, the Nuffield Foundation and the University of the West of England. In Paris, the personnel of the Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre at Vincennes, particularly Sébastian Laurent, Claire Sibille and the archive directors, facilitated access to private paper collections and reserved files. Their colleagues in the Service Historique de l'Armée de l'Air were equally supportive. The staff of the Archives Nationales, the Paris Prefecture of Police archives, the Foreign Ministry archive, and its near cousin in Nantes, provided much needed help on numerous occasions. Work at the colonial archives in Aix-en-Provence was made easier by the encyclopaedic knowledge of the archive staff and the good humour of the issue desk team. Madame Sylvie Caucanas and her colleagues at the Archives Départementales de l'Aude guided me through the Albert Sarraut papers. I am grateful to the Public Record Office (now National Archives), London, for the map reproductions. The Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer kindly granted permission to reproduce the jacket poster, and the Archives Départementales de l'Aude provided reserved material from the Albert Sarraut papers. The archive and library staff of Stanford University's Hoover Institution helped me track down private papers and colonial press sources. Closer to home, the staff of the UWE St Matthias Library and Exeter University Library have been generous with their time and advice. The hospitality of Christine and André Frézal in Nantes, my sister Helen and her family in Carcassonne, Simon Kitson, Peter Jackson and Andrew Webster in Paris, and the Suzuki family in Los Altos, California, was very much appreciated.

A number of other friends and colleagues have made the research and writing of this book a real pleasure. Several among them read draft chapters, providing invaluable advice and sharp criticism along the way. Robert Aldrich kindly brought his unparalleled knowledge of French colonialism to bear, and brought several crucial sources to my attention. Bill Hoisington supported the project from its inception, and refined my views about the inter-war politics of French North Africa. Martin Alexander, Peter Jackson, William Keylor and Talbot Imlay navigated me through the difficult waters of inter-war international relations. Ruth Ginio and June Hannam helped me clarify ideas about women's lives under French colonial rule. Eric Jennings and Cliff Rosenberg generously shared their ideas and forthcoming work with me. The support of my former colleagues in Bristol, among them Kent Fedorowich, Glyn Stone and Philip Ollerenshaw, as well as my current colleagues in Exeter, enabled me to bring the book to fruition. Alison Welsby and Jonathan Bevan at Manchester University Press have been thoughtful and indulgent editors.

To Suzy, as usual, go my very greatest thanks – this one's for you.

A note on transliteration

The transliteration of local language terms in common parlance among French colonial officials presents considerable problems, compounded by the variations in spellings and pronunciations of a single language between differing overseas territories. French transliterations were themselves often based on the spoken or colloquial language of a particular colony or territory, Arabic in particular. I have tried to use the simplest, most readily understandable English transliterations of these terms, the meanings of which are outlined in the glossary.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Territories, parties and organisations

AEF	Afrique Equatoriale Française, the federation of French Equatorial Africa, comprised of French Congo, Oubangui-Chari, Gabon and Chad. The federal authorities in Brazzaville also administered the French Cameroon mandate after 1919.
AOF	Afrique Occidentale Française, the federation of French West Africa, comprised of Senegal, Mauritania, French Sudan, Niger, Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire), Guinea, Dahomey and, between 1919 and 1932, Upper Volta (Haute-Volta). The federal authorities in Dakar also administered France's Togoland mandate after 1919.
CFAO	Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Occidentale, one of AOF's two main trading companies, along with the SCOA.
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail, French trade union confederation, founded in 1895.
CGTA	Compagnie Générale des Transports en Afrique, the main private transport company in AEF.
CPDN	Comité Permanent de la Défense Nationale, Standing National Defence Committee, established 1936.
CSDN	Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale, Supreme Council for National Defence.
ENA	Etoile Nord-Africaine, the North African Star, first Algerian nationalist party, led by Messali Hadj, founded in 1926.
HBMs	*Habitations à bon marché*, cheap multi-storey worker housing blocks.
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party, formed in 1930.
PCF	Parti Communiste Français, French Communist Party, established in 1920.
PPA	Parti Populaire Algérien, Algerian Popular Party: Messalist Algerian nationalist party, founded in 1937.
PPF	Parti Populaire Français, French Popular Party, fascistic party led by Jacques Doriot, established in 1937.
PSF	Parti Social Français, French Social Party, ultra-rightist party, heir to the Croix de Feu, established in 1937.
SCOA	Société Commerciale de l'Ouest Africain, the second of France's major trading companies in black Africa, along with the CFAO.

SFIO	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière, unified French Socialist Party, founded in 1905.
VNQDD	Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dong, Vietnam National Party, founded in 1927.

Archives

ADA	Archives Départementales de l'Aude, Carcassonne.
AN	Archives Nationales, Paris.
APP	Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.
CADN	Centre des Archives Diplomatiques, Nantes.
CAOM	Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence.
MAE	Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris.
PRO	Public Record Office (National Archives), London.
SHA	Service Historique de l'Armée, Vincennes.
SHAA	Service Historique de l'Armée de l'Air, Vincennes.
SHM	Service Historique de la Marine, Vincennes.

Shorthand terms for ministries

Cabinet	An ambiguous term when used interchangeably in English and French. I have used 'Cabinet' in the English sense to mean all ministerial members of the Council of Ministers. In French, the term denotes the private office – or senior advisory team – of a Minister or colonial governor.
Grand Sarail	Beirut location of the Levant High Commission.
Hôtel Matignon	Prime Minister's residence.
Quai d'Orsay	French Foreign Ministry.
rue Oudinot	French Ministry of Colonies.
rue Saint Dominique	French War Ministry.

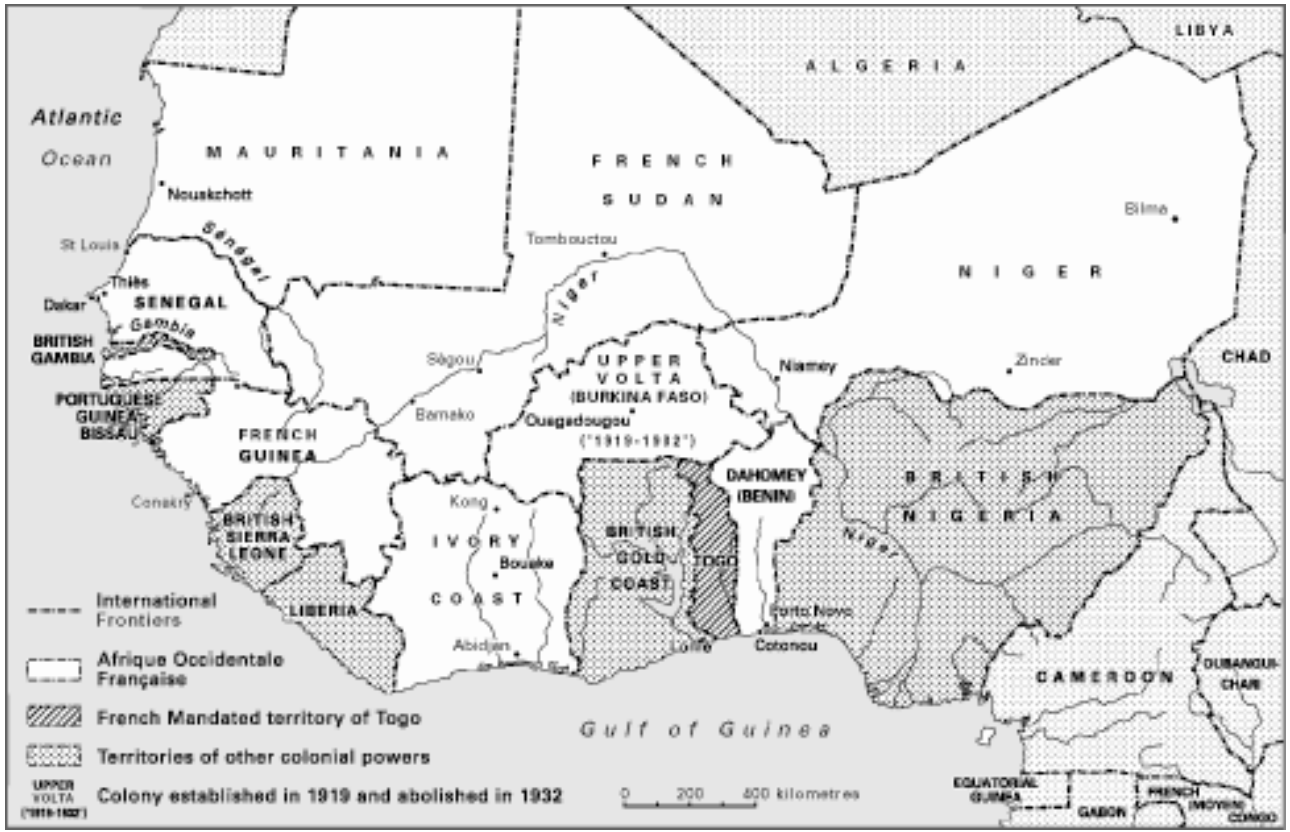
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Armée d'Afrique	the army of French North Africa, including French cavalry units (*chasseurs d'Afrique*), North African cavalry units (*Spahis*), French infantry units (*Zouaves*), North African infantry (*tirailleurs*), units of Moroccan irregulars (*Goums*), and Foreign Legion regiments.
bey	reigning prince of the Husaynid dynasty in Tunisia, formerly subordinate to the Ottoman Sultan.
beylical	pertaining to the administration of Tunisia's monarch, or *bey*.
cadi (*qadi*)	a magistrate or judge of Shar'ia Law.
caïd	tribal representative or administrator.
Caliph	usually refers to the Moroccan or Ottoman Sultan as successor to the Prophet Mohammed.
caza	administrative districts in Lebanon and Syria.
cercle	colonial administrative district, headed by a French district officer.
la Coloniale	the French colonial army after 1900, apart from forces raised in French North Africa. Largely made up of professional metropolitan regiments (Coloniale Blanche) and colonial infantry regiments (*tirailleurs*).
colony	I have tried to limit use of the word 'colony' to those territories that were directly administered as colonies, as opposed to as protectorates or mandates. On occasion, however, I have used the term more generically to denote any of France's overseas dependencies, and to indicate that all were colonially subjugated.
commandant de cercle	French colonial district officer.
dahir	decree legislation passed by the Moroccan Sultanate.
dar al-Islam	the Islamic world.
Destour	the Arabic term for 'constitution', and the title adopted by the Tunisian Constitutionalist Party.
djemâa	village assembly in colonial Algeria.
effendiyya	educated urban middle class in Arab cities, often junior officials.
évolué	a colonial subject that had received a European-style

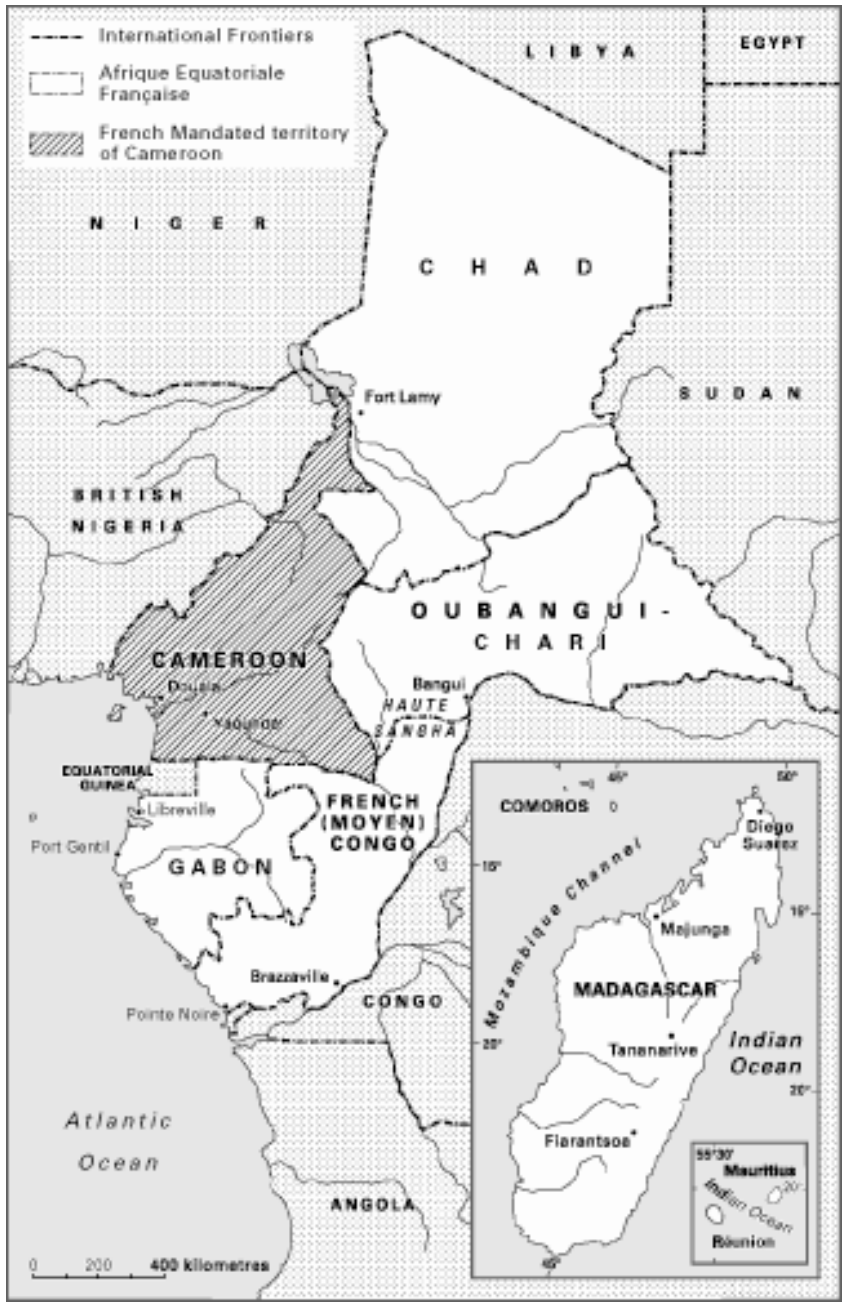
	education, often employed as a government clerk or junior official. *Évolués* were in the forefront of demands for citizenship.
fellah	peasant farmer.
goum	a small force of Moroccan irregular infantry, typically numbering 150–75 men.
habous	property or land bequeathed for a religious or charitable purpose.
harka	an organised military force.
Hijaz	the western region of the Arabian peninsula.
indigénat	colonial legislative code that empowered French regional officials to punish colonial subjects with fines or a short prison sentence without recourse to trial.
Istiqlal	Arabic for independence. A title adopted by nationalist parties in Syria and Morocco.
khalifa	a *caïd's* representative.
khammès	In French North Africa the term denotes a sharecropper, nominally allocated twenty per cent of the produce farmed in return for his labour.
khodja	a clerk. Typically refers to junior clerical staff in the French North African administration.
Ky	appellation for the Vietnamese territories of Tonkin (Bac Ky), Annam (Trung Ky) and Cochin-China (Nam Ky).
lang do	refers to the so-called 'red villages' loyal to the ICP during the Nghê Tinh revolt in 1930.
lazaretto	isolation hostel for bubonic plague victims.
Maghreb	collective term for the countries and region of North West Africa; used here to denote Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.
makhzen	the collective term for the Moroccan government and its administrative services.
marabout	Muslim holy man, typically the local leader of a religious sanctuary, or *zawiya*.
medersa (*madrasa*)	a religious school of advanced Muslim learning, often linked to a mosque.
métis(*se*)	offspring of mixed-race parents.
métissage	miscegenation, or the interbreeding of people classified as members of different racial groups.
mukhtar	Muslim village headman.
natalité	the birth rate. Hence in post-First World War France

	pro-natalism denoted active political support for measures to increase the population.
navétanes	seasonal economic migrants from the French West African interior working in the Senegal peanut basin.
originaires	French African citizens born, or with parents born, in one of Senegal's 'original' Four Communes of Saint-Louis, Rufisque, Dakar and Gorée.
pasha	urban administrator of the Moroccan Sultanate.
prestation	a defined period (typically eight to ten days) of forced labour on designated colonial public works projects, usually road construction.
Sahel	In Arabic, literally 'shore': denotes the regions immediately south of the Sahara.
sanjak	Ottoman administrative sub-district of a *vilayet*, hence 'the sanjak of Alexandretta' in French Syria.
Sharif	a leader directly descended from the Prophet Mohammed.
sheikh	the leader of a tribal fraction, a recognised elder, or the head of a religious institution such as a *zawiya*.
spahi	French North African cavalry of the Armée d'Afrique.
Sufism	Islamic mysticism, often associated with a revered saint.
tariqa	a Muslim religious brotherhood.
tirailleurs	literally, riflemen. Usually applied to Coloniale infantry, hence *tirailleurs sénégalais*, referring to West African infantry units.
ulama	a recognised Koranic teacher.
vilayet (in Turkish, *wilayet*)	Ottoman province.
zawiya	a Sufi Muslim religious institution, based around the tomb of a saint and sometimes including a school and/or hospice.

1 French North Africa

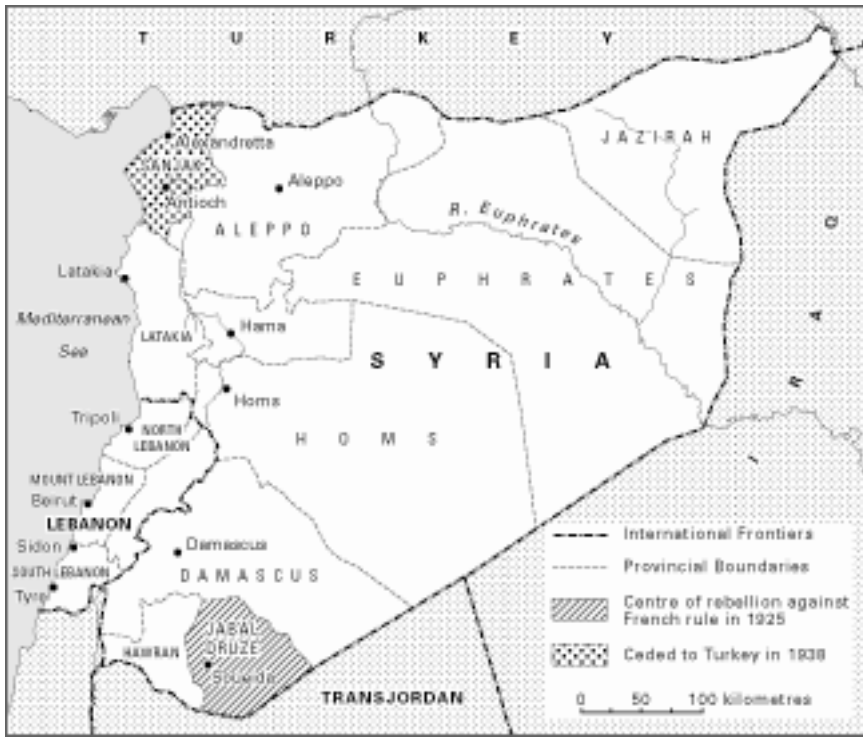


2 Affrique Occidentale Française (French West Africa, AOF)



3 Afrique Equatoriale Française (French Equatorial Africa, AEF), Madagascar, Réunion and Mauritius

4 French Indochina



5 Syria and Lebanon

INTRODUCTION

France's inter-war empire: a framework for analysis

An empire at peace?

In the twenty years between the end of the First World War and the start of the Second, the French overseas empire reached its greatest physical extent. By July 1920 France and its colonial empire comprised 12,540,000 km^2: nine per cent of the earth's landmass. Even after war losses were taken into account, the addition of new mandate territories formerly governed by Ottoman Turkey and Germany to France's overseas empire increased the global population living under French rule. By 1936, the year in which a left-liberal Popular Front government conceded the principle of national independence to the Syria and Lebanon mandates, the French tricolour flew over four per cent of the world's population – an estimated 86,110,000 people.[1] Geographically, the inter-war period marked the zenith of France's colonial power. Yet few contemporaries considered the 1920s and 1930s an age of 'high imperialism'. Scratch the surface, and one finds an altogether different picture. If anything, France's 'imperial trajectory' was downward. The French imperial system was more diffuse and unmanageable than ever.

Imperial decline became more widely anticipated as the material costs of colonial control surged ahead in the 1920s. The grand-sounding imperial federations – French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française, AOF), French Equatorial Africa (Afrique Equatoriale Française, AEF) and French Indochina (Indochine Française) – had limited bureaucratic and economic tangibility, still less basis in indigenous culture. The group of three French-controlled territories in the North West African Maghreb – Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia – were neither federated nor commonly administered. The older island territories, former slave colonies, penal settlements and trading stations had proportionately higher populations of French-speakers and imperial citizens. But they were not welded into a coherent administrative or cultural whole. Algeria, the main French territory of settlement, stood out precisely because it was the sole colony to which French emigrants had flocked in their hundreds of thousands. The 'Frenchness' of other colonial

communities was measured less in terms of a settler presence than through visible signs of social change. Linguistic transformation, Catholic observance, urban design and the reordering of public space, the adoption of French property law, and mixed-race coupling, or *métissage*, were more frequently cited as indicators of the imperial presence than the growth of settler societies. Indeed, the culture wars between competing metropolitan and indigenous ways of life, language usage and religious practice were just as critical in the social history of colonised peoples as their armed resistance against the imperial power.

The French empire that emerged from the First World War is often portrayed as essentially consolidated. The messy work of colonial conquest was over. Subjugation of frontier populations continued at the imperial margins, but rarely drew headlines in the Paris press. France, like other victor powers, professed no interest in further territorial expansion. But it would hold what it had. After 1920 more complex, if less spectacular, problems of administrative practice, fiscal policy, commercial integration, urban planning and social provision were the stuff of colonial governance. These posed more testing challenges than military occupation. Yet the inter-war empire was neither pacified nor secure. Colonial domination faced unprecedented challenges from within and without – from marginalised and exploited colonial peoples, from critics of imperial practice across the French political spectrum, and from hostile nation states opposed to a French colonial presence in Africa and Asia.

The majority of the French nation were as indifferent to the manifest cruelties of colonial exploitation as to the professed benefits of an empire. Reflecting on his experiences in Madagascar and Indochina before the outbreak of the First World War, the writer and journalist Pierre Mille noted that a month in the colonies was sufficient to undermine any French person's interest in the rights of man. But, as Alec Hargreaves points out, Mille did not reject French colonialism. Rather he considered it an economic and political imperative to which metropolitan rules of behaviour and restraint simply could not apply. The business of empire imposed an authoritarian system of rule.[2] This was a price worth paying, owing to the benefits that accrued to France. Mille's brutal honesty was unusual, but French politicians without personal connections with imperial expansion shared his order of priorities. During the 1920s even the Socialist Party's critique of harsh colonial administration did not imply the progressive equalisation of rights between colonisers and colonised. The hierarchy of imperial rule necessarily meant that political offices were reserved to the colonial authorities and only gradually opened up to an educated indigenous elite, if at all.

The central contention of this book is that French colonial rule was in severe decline between the wars. Public taste for the exoticism of empire was not matched by any greater willingness to settle in the colonies,

to spend on imperial products or to fight in defence of colonial territory. Public interest in empire was, at best spasmodic, despite repeated information campaigns, commercial initiatives and exhibitions of empire co-ordinated by members of the Ligue maritime et coloniale, post-First World War successor to the Parti colonial.[3] Arguments raged among the political elite in metropolitan France and inside colonial administrations over the nature, purpose and value of colonial possessions. But most governments of the inter-war years stifled, abandoned or ignored ambitious colonial projects to develop the empire's economic potential, to improve the living standards of subject populations or to concede political freedoms in dependent territories.

The sense of isolation and embattlement expressed by French settlers (*colons*) in Tonkin (northern Vietnam) for years after the formal creation of the Indochinese Union in 1887 reveals the disjuncture between metropolitan imperialists, local officials and agricultural settlers at the forefront of colonial consolidation.[4] The *Indochine française* described in official policy statements was an artificial construct, a concept with little basis in fact. Its supposed marriage of French administration and local tradition bore no correlation to the economic and cultural gulf separating French settlers from their Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian subordinates.[5] Disputes between imperial lobbyists, colonial bureaucrats and settlers took place beneath the horizon of government. Ministers rarely argued about imperial problems, except when major funding issues were at stake. 'The official mind of French imperialism, non-existent at the cabinet level, was weak and fragmented even at the ministerial level'.[6]

The armed services, where one might expect imperial pride to burn strongest, never concurred over their strategic responsibilities in the colonies. An integrated system of colonial defence planning was put in place only in 1938, following the disintegration of the French alliance system in Eastern Europe.[7] Prior to this, recurrent disputes over colonial garrisons, defensive works, stockpiles of equipment and military priorities concealed a deeper unresolved tension in French imperial defence. This boiled down to a single question: should the colonies contribute to France's continental security in Europe or should metropolitan France ensure the protection of all overseas possessions against any external threat? The general staff viewed this problem in Eurocentric terms, an understandable position after the experience of the Great War. But a more fundamental problem remained. Imperial defence was widely read as an unacceptable dissipation of resources rather than the management of a global security system.[8] Again, one confronts the underlying fact that empire was marginal to official minds, specifically, in this case, the planning establishment of the general staff and the metropolitan army. Admiral Raoul Castex, the first head of the Advanced Military Staff College in Paris, added discussion of the colonies'

role in global strategy to officer training courses in the 1930s. But in the 1936–37 academic session, imperial strategy featured in only six per cent of the College curriculum.[9]

Whatever the arguments among senior military planners in France, political instability at the imperial periphery generated by indigenous resistance remained a constant preoccupation for the colonial authorities *in situ*. Some territories were never wholly 'pacified' in the inter-war period. Others that were supposedly brought under French political control were never entirely subjected to French legal regulation, social organisation or cultural norms. Colonial rule, always an incremental process, was never static. French domination might be consolidated in one region while it simultaneously disintegrated in another. The processes of imperial consolidation and colonial disintegration were not strictly sequential, but often went hand in hand. The French authorities faced Communist-led uprisings in the Vietnamese territories of Annam and Tonkin in 1930–31 at the very moment that France's largest-ever celebration of empire – the Vincennes colonial exhibition of 1931 – opened to the public. The Vincennes *exposition coloniale* became a marker for popular imperialism in inter-war France. But the Nghê Tinh Soviet movement of 1930–31 that marked the emergence of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) as the major anti-colonial force in Vietnamese politics suggests that celebrations of imperial achievement were premature.[10] The colonial presence was by no means uniform. Flying the imperial flag meant different things in different places. An isolated cantonal administrator in landlocked Oubangui-Chari in Afrique Equatoriale Française could spend weeks, even months, without meeting a French compatriot. His experience (such officials were invariably male) bore no comparison with regional administration in Algeria, where prefects of the colony's three departments presided over local bureaucracies several hundred strong by the late 1920s.[11]

Variations in administrators' experience were probably sharpest in French West Africa. In Senegal, the administrative and economic hub of AOF, the instruments of colonial authority were most firmly entrenched in the four coastal communes that were the sites of the first French mercantile ventures into sub-Saharan Africa. But a posting to the West African interior could put an official on the outer margins of the colonial frontier. Some inland territories defied French conquest. To the immediate north of Senegal, the desert expanses of southern Mauritania were 'conquered' by General Henri Gouraud in 1908, but the country's northern limits remained beyond French administrative reach for a further twenty years. It seems doubtful that Mauritania's largely nomadic population was ever bureaucratically, let alone culturally, integrated into the AOF federation.[12] There, and in numerous other overseas territories, indigenous tradition and customary law still regulated colonial subjects' daily lives. Elsewhere,

economic obligations to the colonial state were ignored, mediated or subverted by wily local auxiliaries selected to spread the word of the colonial presence.[13] France's 'civilising mission' was exposed as vacuous hypocrisy by the indigenous peoples that were its alleged beneficiaries. Put simply, in much of the inter-war empire, French colonialism was barely tolerated. Authority was generally imposed through coercion, whether actual or implied, and yet it rested on indigenous intermediaries prepared to co-operate with French officialdom to consolidate their wealth and status within their own communities.

Colonial peoples participated in complex civil societies that antedated French conquest. Within tribal, communal or urban locales many still found space to regulate their own affairs, and thereby resist the encroachment of colonial authority. At the macro-level of empire, however, French economic policies, fiscal systems, labour service, military recruitment and legal penalties imposed new constraints.[14] Administrators typically judged the colonial system to be working well if taxes were collected, labour service was performed and military conscription passed off without incident.[15] When these obligations were challenged from below, the colonial authorities deployed additional police or troops from nearby territories to quell dissent. State repression was at once a sign of strength and an admission that the colonial state was failing.[16]

For the most part, reluctant acquiescence rather than obedient compliance signified the power relationship between indigenous subjects and French rulers. The entire system could survive only as long as organised mass opposition could be prevented. The impact of the global depression in the early 1930s added to these stresses as French economic exploitation of colonial populations intensified. By this point, new forms of organised opposition to rule from Paris had emerged, from the French Caribbean to North Africa, Syria, Madagascar and the territories of the Indochina federation. The colonial state was never monolithic nor an exclusively French affair. Imperial rule was upheld by a series of complex power relationships between officials, propertied elites, tribal leaders and differing ethnic communities. Distribution of authority was in constant flux, blurring the distinction between rulers and ruled. The bipolar paradigm of colonisers and colonised is unsatisfactory because it ignores the changing boundaries of power between colonial governments and indigenous populations. But the first principle of such collaboration was submission to French authority. At its core, colonialism was a system of racial oppression.

French debates over empire

The framework for analysis of French imperialism adopted here is based on a model of a French 'imperial community': the network of politicians,

bureaucrats, colonial administrators, manufacturers, traders, media commentators, educators, missionaries, lobbyists and settlers that dominated the political discourse of empire after the First World War. By the 1920s this community was disunited and fractious. In broad terms, one may identify five long-term debates among this French imperial elite about the role and purpose of the colonial system they claimed to control.

These five debates – disputes might be a more accurate term – may be summarised as follows. First, the bureaucracy of colonial government was split between proponents of assimilation and advocates of associationism. In other words, divided between those who believed in the acculturation of colonial populations to French republican rights and values and those who favoured a less ambitious style of indirect rule that minimised change in the prevailing social order while denying political inclusion to most colonial subjects. Neither policy was adopted throughout the empire. Nor was either alternative consistently applied in individual colonies. But the interwar period is generally considered to have marked the ascendancy of associationist pragmatism in imperial administration. We should be wary of viewing these doctrinal arguments too rigidly. As Alice Conklin has argued, French imperial practice in the late Third Republic was the product of several paradoxes. These, in turn, arose from the nuances in colonial administrative and judicial methods born of adaptation to local conditions. A republican democracy withheld basic rights and freedoms from its overseas subjects, amplifying the exclusion of French women from the metropolitan electoral process by insisting that colonial peoples of both sexes were generally incapable of making informed political choices. A republican state founded on hostility to hereditary privilege relied on tribal chiefs and colonial monarchs to maintain order in vast swathes of the empire. Anticlerical republicans committed to secular education defended France's continued reliance on missionary educators in rudimentary colonial school systems. French liberals attached to individual freedom and equal access to justice accepted the use of forced labour and a separate legal code – the *indigénat* – for the vast majority of colonial subjects. These contradictions were the stuff of argument between supporters of associationism and their opponents. Yet, for all that, this political community of republican imperialists concurred that French colonialism could be a constructive force for progress.[17]

A second dispute hinged on the economics of colonial policy. The scale, viability and costs of colonial development schemes, and the expansion of colonial export markets, provoked bitter political arguments that cut across party lines. Political elites were reluctant to pay for the modern empire that they claimed France deserved. Much of the growth in colonial economies still depended on mercantilist intervention by trading companies, investment banks and settler co-operatives. Colonial administrations

regulated these bodies at local level, just as central government shaped the macroeconomic environment in which they operated through tariffs, monetary policy and fiscal incentives. But the colonial state none the less relied on private enterprise to produce the wealth necessary to sustain the machinery of government. Corporations, banking houses and settler producers achieved profitability by the utmost exploitation of cheap colonial manpower rather than by the pursuit of long-term infrastructure development or market diversification. The short-termism characteristic of these economic policies drew frequent criticism in colonial capitals and in Paris, but at no stage was a state-led programme of colonial development implemented for the empire as whole.

The empire's contribution to French international power was a third problem that engaged colonial administrators, politicians, and the police and military agencies responsible for the apparatus of imperial security. The argument here resolved itself into one of net contributions. Should France contribute to the defence of its empire? Or should the colonies be responsible for funding their own defence? Politicians, generals and imperial lobbyists conceptualised the empire as a reservoir of men, women, raw materials and strategic assets that would add to French strength in a European war. But what about in peacetime? Should French resources be used to maximise the potential economic and military contribution that the empire could make to France? Or were French resources better expended in France itself? Here again, matters of grand strategy and imperial defence often boiled down to more prosaic problems of budgetary finance. In the longer term, the neglect of imperial defences was as significant as the neglect of indigenous pressure for reform. Indeed, the two would coalesce once the empire began to disintegrate into competing blocs during the Second World War.

The fourth dispute among the French imperial community was closely related to the third. It turned on what intelligence analysts term threat assessments. Before 1940 there was no consensus among the rulers of empire about the principal threat to colonial control. To an extent, this reflected the differing academic backgrounds of the French imperial community. For racial theorists, the social scientists of the Musée Social, and the Durkheimian sociologists that proliferated in the ranks of colonial bureaucracy between the wars, colonial peoples themselves were the 'enemy' of imperial stability. This enemy was variously constructed as a colonial proletariat, Islamic anti-Westernists, pro-Communist nationalists or quite simply the colonial 'crowd'. At a more emotive level, it was but a short step from the portrayal of colonial cultures as inferior to their presentation as an undifferentiated and inherently threatening 'Other'. There was no colonial social contract between rulers and ruled, just an unequal relationship in which the latter submitted to French domination. Inherently

unstable, the colonial system placed enormous weight on the early identification of potential sources of disorder. It is hardly surprising, then, that arguments over internal sedition were so prevalent. The emergence of more pressing international threats to empire in the 1930s meshed with existing worries about revolutionaries within the colonies themselves. French diplomats, intelligence services, police agencies and the plethora of informants on which they relied, amassed evidence of global networks of Soviet, fascist and pan-Arab subversives united in their resolve to destroy the empire. By 1939 those sceptics in government inclined to dismiss such intelligence as far-fetched were drowned out by the clamour for heightened colonial surveillance and repression.

A more straightforward left–right split marked political discussion in France about the type of empire that France should construct. Year after year this fifth source of dispute hardly amounted to any debate at all. Party political priorities generally lay elsewhere. One may easily point to recurrent parliamentary, electoral and media treatment of colonial issues. It must be remembered, however, that only in times of acute imperial crisis, in 1924–25, in 1930–31, in 1936–37, and again in 1939, did these debates figure large in metropolitan political culture.

On one such occasion, during 1925–26, the conjunction of the Rif war in northern Morocco and a major rebellion in French Syria put colonial counter-insurgency on the front pages of the Paris press for the first time since the end of the First World War. The resultant political furore and media coverage only amplified the prevalent ignorance of colonial conditions. A spate of articles on the Rif war held a mirror to the party allegiance of press bosses, already sharpening their editorial knives after the election of a reformist centre-left coalition, the Cartel des Gauches. Copious newspaper coverage revealed little grasp of events on the ground, still less about the objectives of Riffian leader Abd el-Krim or the scale of the French military repression under way by October 1925. Instead, right-wing journalists exploited the opportunity presented to attack 'the Cartel's war'. Hostility to the government precluded an objective reading of the political situation and social conditions in Morocco and Syria. Readers were fed a diet of racial stereotypes and chauvinistic readings of recent history to explain inevitable French victory.[18] The pro-Cartel press and Communist publications were no better. The pro-government line of newspapers such as *L'Ere nouvelle* and *L'Oeuvre* precluded a balanced assessment of Abd el-Krim's demands. Even the Communist *L'Humanité* and *Corréspondance internationale* reduced the Riffians to two-dimensional heroes, bit players in an abstract revolutionary struggle against capitalist imperialism.[19]

The imperialism of the non-Communist left in France has been misleadingly termed 'humanist' in motivation, if not in practice. Drawing on a Jacobin tradition of republican statism, the liberal left was temperamentally inclined

to favour assimilationist policies that would gradually integrate colonial populations with metropolitan France. The Socialist leadership was increasingly uncomfortable with the drift towards associationism in the 1920s. It did not, however, offer a clear alternative strategy before the Popular Front coalition began to take shape in 1935.[20] During a Party Congress in 1920 the formerly unified, and nominally Marxist, Socialist Party (Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière, SFIO) split between parliamentary socialists and their communist rivals. Henceforth, the executive committees of the rump Socialist Party shied away from detailed scrutiny of colonial policy at annual party conferences. Colonial issues did not figure large in the party press, or in the deliberations of Socialist Deputies in the Chamber of Deputies.

The French Communist Party (Parti Communiste Français, PCF) echoed the Socialists' inconsistency. Communist leaders never sustained a coherent anti-colonial position before the party was banned following the outbreak of war in September 1939. In the decade from 1924, the one acknowledged colonial 'expert' in the PCF leadership was Jacques Doriot, head of the PCF executive's Colonial Section and, from February 1931, Mayor of Saint-Denis – the Parisian citadel of proletarian militancy.[21] A capable polemicist, Doriot cut a lonely figure in his Leninist condemnation of French imperialism in parliament and the press. Having for years advocated co-operation with the Socialists against the growing fascist menace, the maverick Doriot was expelled from the PCF in June 1934, ironically just as Comintern opposition to collaboration with the non-Marxist left receded. The poles of his ideological gyroscope then reversed. After the election of the Popular Front, in July 1936 this former critic of imperialist exploitation reinvented himself as the ultra-rightist leader of a new grouping, the Parti Populaire Français, dedicated to the overthrow of the Republic and the eradication of Communism. Doriot's career path was unusual, but it reveals one constant: the rigidity of Communist Party loyalty to instruction from the Moscow Comintern. And throughout the Stalinist period the Soviet regime subordinated criticism of Western colonialism to the pursuit of Soviet interests in Europe. As a result, the Comintern's anti-colonialism was half-hearted at best. The French Communists were themselves divided across several fault-lines: between an internationalist hostility to colonialism and a residual republican universalism used to justify imperial control, and between willingness to foment worker militancy in colonial cities and fear that colonial unrest would privilege indigenous nationalists above their Communist rivals.

The left from time to time turned up the ideological heat of colonial debate in inter-war France, but it was generally those on the right who cooked up colonial policies. With the brief exception of the Popular Front interlude of centre-left government in 1936–37, the three main parliamentary parties

of the centre and right in France, the Radical-Socialists, the Democratic Alliance and the Republican Federation, filled the ministerial posts directly concerned with empire: Finance, Foreign Affairs, War, Navy, Interior, and, of course, Colonies. Here, too, there was less engagement with imperial questions than one might expect from governing parties with a stake in the world's second largest overseas empire. When it came to colonies, money mattered more than anything else. The French right was ostensibly imperialist, almost by instinct. But it was less so when it came to budgetary allocation, strategic policy formulation, and questions of colonial immigration.[22] The bourgeois male voters who sustained the centre-right in power for most of the inter-war period were not a constituency fired by imperial enthusiasm. Politicians of every stripe could count on minimal domestic pressure to reform the colonial system.

Ardent imperialism remained a minority concern, tacitly endorsed by the parliamentary right rather than loudly supported by it. If anything, the most thoroughly imperialist right-wing groups were the extraparliamentary, anti-republican leagues, above all the Croix de Feu (reinvented as the Parti Social Français in 1937.)[23] Ultra-rightist organisations drew thousands of colonial settlers into their ranks during the 1930s, especially in French North Africa. The Croix de Feu leader, Colonel François de La Rocque, even volunteered for service in Morocco in 1925, and was assigned a key role in gathering intelligence against Abd el-Krim's Riffian forces.[24] But the leagues were fundamentally hostile to any concept of a republican imperialism or a colonial system to which republican values were transmitted. As a result, the ultra-right, and the French right more generally, were increasingly out of step with a colonial system that required some measure of liberalisation if it was to survive.

None of these arguments was resolved before 1940. Instead, dispute over the complexion and purpose of colonies persisted. This helps account for the more bitter divisions that split the French empire during the Vichy years, and explains why the last French attempt to construct a 'colonial consensus' after 1945 was doomed to fail. The roots of decolonisation should be traced back much further than the fall of France in 1940. The widespread assumption that the Second World War marked a decisive watershed is convenient historical shorthand but a distortion of conditions in the pre-war empire. By 1920 the colonial system bore the seeds of its own destruction. The picture that emerges of the inter-war empire is a gaudy, violent affair – a garish scene of disparate skirmishes, recurrent uprisings, economic polarisation, urban segregation and nationalist dissent, rather than a soothing impressionist tableau of imperial unity. The watchwords of imperial policy making in France and its colonial capitals were economy, profit and control. Ironically, public indifference to empire allowed the ardent republican imperialists at the heart of the colonial system

to delude the French nation into believing the myth of 'la plus grande France'.

A final question thus presents itself. Where does the inter-war empire fit into the long-running debates over the state of the French nation that went to war in 1939? In recent years, two distinct groups of historians have analysed the condition of France on the eve of war. On the one hand, historians of anti-republicanism, and more particularly of the ultra-rightist leagues, have refined the concept of a uniquely French fascism emerging in the context of worsening social division and widespread popular disenchantment with the institutions of republicanism.[25] On the other hand, historians of foreign policy and military strategy are divided between those who set France's preparations for war within a framework of national decline and those whose assessment of French international policy is more forgiving. For this latter group, France pursued a viable defensive strategy but could not ultimately withstand the onslaught of German power without a major land ally.[26]

These historians have, on occasion, incorporated empire within their arguments. For scholars of the ultra-right, Charles Maurras, the ideological demigod of Action Française, and Colonel de La Rocque garner most attention. Maurras praised imperial settler communities as the embodiment of a lost patriotic virtue based on powerful masculinity, ardent Catholicism, and attachment to the soil. La Rocque found a receptive audience among the *petits commerçants* of Algiers and, above all, Oran. Croix de Feu organisers in Algeria and their local ultra-rightist rivals in Doriot's PPF even tapped into the residual antisemitism of the settler community and some elements of the wider Muslim population in a bid to mobilise mass support against the Popular Front.[27] Studies of these individuals, their followers and their ideas therefore acknowledge an imperial dimension to rightist anti-republicanism. Equally, scholars of French strategic planning admit that colonial possessions added a global aspect and a reservoir of resources to French foreign and military policy.

One issue that unites analysts of French ultra-rightism and France's preparations for war as well as scholars of antisemitism in France is the need to explain the apparent ease with which French society acquiesced in the transition from republican democracy to the authoritarianism of the Vichy state.[28] A parallel problem in French colonial history is to explain why in the early twentieth century republicans committed to universalist values of equality, liberty and inclusive citizenship became increasingly determined to cling on to empire, and to exclude colonial subjects from membership of the French *cité* – a term denoting the republican state.[29] Historians of French fascism and pre-war strategy also intersect over the problem of national power. The capacity of a nation state to dominate another society through colonial control marked the clearest expression of

national dominance in the international system of the early twentieth century. As a result, imperial cohesion was a barometer of metropolitan power. That said, empire has remained tangential within most studies of France as an international actor. Is it useful to conceptualise reactionary settler conservatism as part of a broader anti-republicanism increasingly identifiable with the ultra-right? Should we interpret the divisions among the French imperial community as another facet of decadence in the Third Republic? Was the gradual erosion of colonial control indicative of French national decline?

Some of the chapters that follow revisit these questions. Certain chapters discuss the colonial empire as a whole, for instance examining the application of associationist colonial policy, the economic relationship between France and its colonies, the effects of Popular Front reforms in the late 1930s, and the empire contribution to French international strategy. Others use case studies – of the treatment of women in the colonies, of colonial education policy, of popular imperialism in France, of colonial disorder, and of anti-colonial nationalist groups in North Africa – to highlight changes in the French relationship with empire during the inter-war years. The composite picture that emerges shows the widening fissures in the French colonial edifice between 1919 and 1940. The imperialistic vision of an empire reborn after the shattering experience of the First World War was at odds with the impoverishment of colonial populations, the growth of organised anti-colonial nationalism, the failure of reform projects, and the stubborn refusal of the French population to view colonial issues as central to their lives.

Notes

1 ADA, Sarraut Papers, 12J162: Politique coloniale, 1920–35, 'Le problème colonial et la paix du monde', étude pour Albert Sarraut, Président du Conseil, sans date, 1936. The British empire comprised twenty-seven per cent of the world's surface in 1936.
2 Alec G. Hargreaves, *The Colonial Experience in French Fiction. A Study of Pierre Loti, Ernest Psichari and Pierre Mille* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 121–2.
3 Charles-Robert Ageron, 'Les colonies devant l'opinion publique française (1919–1939)', *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, 77:286 (1990), 31–73.
4 John F. Laffey, 'Imperialists divided. The views of Tonkin's colons before 1914', *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 92 (1977), 92–113.
5 Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina. Colonial Encounters* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 2–3; the concept of *Indochine française* in the French colonial imagination is explored in Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmaic Indochina. French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film and Literature* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1996).
6 Quote from Christopher M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, 'France, Africa, and the First World War', *Journal of African History*, 19:1 (1978), 11.
7 SHM, 1BB2, C182/D1A/14, 'Défense des Colonies – instructions interministérielles', n.d. February 1938.
8 Martin Thomas, 'At the heart of things? French imperial defense planning in the late 1930s', *French Historical Studies*, 21:2 (1998), 325–61.
9 Marc Michel, 'La puissance par l'empire. Note sur la perception du facteur imperial dans

l'élaboration de la défense nationale (1936–1938)', *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, 69:254 (1982), 37.

10 Hunyh Kim Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925–1945* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 151–71; R. B. Smith, 'The foundation of the Indochinese Communist Party, 1929–1930', *Modern Asian Studies*, 32:4 (1998), 769–805.

11 Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer (CAOM), Archives du Gouvernement Général d'Algérie (GGA), sous-série 9H: Surveillance des indigènes, 9H32, no. 18388, Constantine prefecture report to Algiers governor-general, 21 November 1928.

12 David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation. Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880–1920* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), 58–9, 259 n. 4.

13 Emily Lynn Osborn, ' "Circle of iron". African colonial employees and the interpretation of colonial rule in French West Africa', *Journal of African History*, 44:1 (2003), 29–50.

14 Elizabeth Thompson discusses civil society in Syria and Lebanon, societies where the full impact of French colonialism was mitigated by the nature of the mandate system. See her *Colonial Citizens. Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

15 This point was made explicitly by the Dakar government-general in its annual report for 1924, the most prosperous year since the end of the First World War: CAOM, Archives de la Direction des Affaires Politiques (affpol), affpol/536, 'Rapport politique, année 1924', 28 September 1924.

16 See, for example, the instances of repression that followed the demobilisation of African troops after the First World War, recounted in chapter one.

17 Alice L. Conklin, 'Colonialism and human rights: a contradiction in terms? The case of France and West Africa, 1895–1914', *American Historical Review*, 103:2 (1998), 419–42.

18 Charles-Robert Ageron, 'La presse parisienne devant la guerre du Rif (avril 1925–mai 1926)', *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 24 (1977), 7–13.

19 Ageron, 'La presse parisienne', 13–22.

20 Michel Dreyfus, 'Pacifistes, socialistes et humanistes dans les années trente', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 35 (1988), 452–69; Manuela Semidei, 'Les Socialistes Français et le problème colonial entre les deux guerres (1919–1939)', *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 18:6 (1968), 1115–53.

21 Regarding Doriot, see Philippe Burrin, *La dérive fasciste : Doriot, Déat, Bergery 1933–1945* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986); J-P. Brunet, *Jacques Doriot. Du communisme au fascisme* (Paris: Balland, 1986). Regarding Saint-Denis, see Tyler Stovall, *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1990).

22 Aviel Roshwald, 'Colonial dreams of the French right wing, 1881–1914', *Historian*, 57:1 (1994), 59–74; Michael J. Heffernan, 'The French right and the overseas empire', in Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett (eds), *The Right in France, 1789–1997* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 89–113.

23 Robert Soucy, *French Fascism. The Second Wave, 1933–1939* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 83–4, 117, 255–6.

24 *Ibid.*, 106.

25 See, for example, Eugen Weber, *Action Française. Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth Century France* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1962); Jacques Prévotat, *Les Catholiques et l'Action Française 1988–1939* (Paris: Fayard, 2001); Zeev Sternhell, *Ni droite, ni gauche. L'idéologie fasciste en France* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983); William D. Irvine, 'Fascism in France and the strange case of the Croix de Feu', *Journal of Modern History* 63:2 (1991), 271–95; Soucy, *French Fascism. The Second Wave, 1933–1939*; Kevin Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism. The Right in a French Province, 1928–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For excellent summaries of current debates about French fascism see Robert Paxton, 'The five stages of fascism', *Journal of Modern History*, 70:1 (1998), 1–23; Robert D. Zaretsky, 'Neither left, nor right, nor straight ahead. Recent books on fascism in France', *Journal of Modern History*, 73:1 (2001), 118–32.

26 The classic critique of French strategy is Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La Décadence. Politique étrangère de la France 1922–39* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1979). Anthony

Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War* (London: Frank Cass, 1977) was similarly critical. More sympathetic treatments include Robert J. Young, *In Command of France. French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933–1939* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Robert Frankenstein, *Le Prix du réarmement français 1935–1939* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982); Martin S. Alexander, *The Republic in Danger. General Maurice Gamelin and the Politics of French Defence, 1933–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Michael Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France, 1936–1940* (London: Macmillan, 1999), Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace. Intelligence and Policy Making, 1933–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Talbot Imlay, *Facing the Second World War. Strategy, Politics, and Economics in Britain and France, 1938–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

27 Soucy, *French Fascism. The Second Wave*, 133, 152–6; Irvine, 'Fascism in France', 292–3, also cited in Soucy, p. 156.

28 A key work that links antisemitism in the late Third Republic to events under Vichy is Vicki Caron's *Uneasy Asylum. France and the Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933–1942* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). Another important book that connects tighter restriction on colonial immigrants and more restrictive citizenship rights in the late Third Republic with the subsequent policies of the Vichy state is Gérard Noiriel, *Les Origines républicaines de Vichy* (Paris: Hachette, 1999).

29 Siân Reynolds has addressed this issue in the context of gender and women's rights in inter-war France. See her *France between the Wars. Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 222–6.

PART I

The setting: politics and colonial administration after the First World War

CHAPTER ONE

Consolidation and expansion: the French empire after the First World War

The war and the peace: la plus grande France?

At the end of the First World War those in the French political community who thought about empire at all were sure it was a vital asset in a total war of mass armies, industrial mobilisation, civilian engagement, and global competition for strategic resources. The priority was to consolidate it, not to loosen the ties of French dominion.[1] In 1919 the French colonial project was incomplete. Territories such as Mauritania and Oubangui-Chari, nominally incorporated into the French African federations, remained unpacified.[2] The very meaning of that most misleading of terms, 'pacification', varied from place to place. In Morocco pacification denoted protracted military operations characterised by violent skirmishes, seizure of tribal pasturage, destruction of rural property, and mass killing of livestock prior to complex negotiations for the submission of a clan group.[3] In the Equatorial African interior the term sometimes connoted the insertion of a lone French official and a handful of locally recruited armed auxiliaries to administer a vast tract of territory otherwise untouched by the colonial presence.[4]

Further French expansion into African and Middle Eastern territory took place in conditions of profound societal dislocation. In 1918 famine gripped the cities of Syria and Lebanon. Senegal was ravaged by bubonic plague. The wartime collapse of grain distribution and poor harvests in 1919–20 compounded the impact of the Spanish influenza epidemic in French North Africa.[5] Colonial soldiers saw trench warfare.[6] Immigrant workers confronted racial violence on French city streets, employment discrimination, and casual racism on the factory floor.[7] Colonial conscripts aside, labourers from the colonies formed the second largest immigrant group in wartime France, outnumbered only by Spanish agricultural workers.[8] Official figures recorded the entry of 222,793 colonial labourers during the First World War, of which 78,556 Algerians, and 48,995 Indochinese made up the largest national groups.[9] War Ministry planners organised this civilian labour force on military lines. Rigid segregation of colonial munitions workers, labour battalions, mineworkers and farm labourers was defended

as a means to protect an immigrant workforce unfamiliar with metropolitan life. If that were the case, it was singularly ineffective. During 1917–18 especially, incidents of assault against colonial labourers by French co-workers reached new heights. Few enjoyed any kind of union protection.[10] As Tyler Stovall puts it, 'This wartime experiment in multiculturalism was undertaken reluctantly, and essentially revoked within a year after the end of the conflict'. Government hostility to mixed-race relationships mirrored the anxiety expressed by colonial officials that immigrant workers' exposure to more equitable interracial contacts in France inverted the racial and gender hierarchies of colonial rule.[11] Between 1919 and 1921 most colonial war workers sent to serve in France in infantry regiments, labour service battalions, munitions factories and farms were abruptly dismissed and sent home, deeply affected by their wartime experiences. The colonies to which they returned were economically undeveloped and, for the most part, chronically poor.[12]

At one extreme were the colonies of French Equatorial Africa (AEF) – French (or Moyen/Middle) Congo, Gabon, Oubangui-Chari and Chad. The original network of military administration imposed during the French conquest persisted across much of this vast region. Rivers and waterways were the principal entry to the colonial interior in the absence of an integrated road network. The federal administration in Brazzaville still knew little about the subject populations it claimed to rule. The last pre-colonial census conducted in AEF during 1911 proved utterly unreliable, underestimating indigenous population levels by up to sixty per cent. In 1919 Gabon and Oubangui-Chari were linked with the outside world by a solitary telegraph station in their respective capitals, Libreville and Bangui. Malaria and sunstroke took a heavy toll of local administrators. Ecole coloniale graduates dreaded AEF as a last-ditch posting. Their lack of enthusiasm was understandable. In a staggering distortion of fact, a 1919 Foreign Ministry instruction booklet for new French arrivals warned that cannibalism was commonplace among tribal populations.[13]

At the other extreme, even the well established colonies of the overseas empire retained their 'new frontier' aspect after the First World War. During the 1920s, with the centenary of the 1830 Algerian conquest fast approaching, the imperialist lobby in Paris still represented French North Africa as a 'new world'. French Algeria was a great work still under construction, not a completed imperial project.[14] France itself was also rebuilt and extended after the war. In the newly recovered 'lost province' of Alsace, the process of demographic reintegration to France after almost fifty years of German administration was assisted by imperialist society lectures and exhibitions designed to foster local pride in the continuing colonial enterprise.[15] The French hexagon and the overseas empire were to be welded together as a new, more powerful polity.

Renewed emphasis on consolidation of control emerged before the guns fell silent in November 1918. Six months earlier, with the war on the western front far from over, a Ministry of Colonies study commission established to 'investigate issues raised by the war' published its findings on 'native policy' in a seventy-two-page report. The commission chair, Albert Duchêne, absolved the government of any need to extend additional rights to colonial subjects beyond the educated elite. French imperialism had served the interests of colonised peoples before the war, and would continue to do so after it.[16] The priority for many administrators was less to justify French rule to local populations than to convince the French people of the value of empire – a task that required even greater missionary zeal. Here, too, hopes were high. On 25 August 1918 Albert Sarraut, the long-serving federal governor-general of Indochina, soon to emerge as the strongest, most eloquent voice of French imperialism in the inter-war period, wrote to Minister of Colonies Louis Henry Simon in these terms:

> Each day my strong faith in the brilliant destiny of Indochina and its practical contribution to the economic and political needs of the mother country increases. As we wait for the whole of France to share this sentiment, developing a more passionate interest in the destiny of its most beautiful colony as it learns about Asia, I devote myself to inspiring the same great expectations in my colleagues.[17]

Official ebullience of this sort dominated colonial pronouncements in the National Assembly, in parliamentary commissions, in annual reports submitted by colonial governments, and in the metropolitan press. Little noticed at the time, a Supreme Allied Council commission at the Paris Peace Conference produced an aerial navigation convention on 13 October 1919 that regulated access to colonial air space. Signatory powers anticipated the development of commercial air traffic, colonial tourism, and enhanced communications between the imperial powers and their dependent territories. A colonial 'global village' was emerging.[18] But the day-to-day reportage of colonial administration immediately after the First World War was altogether less confident.

After the armistice there were more disquieting parallels with the situation in 1914 than ardent French imperialists cared to admit. The socio-political consequences of colonial conscription, little considered when the measure was introduced in 1912, were still poorly understood at war's end.[19] As Indochina's governor-general Sarraut strove to extend native representation in Cochin-China's Colonial Council to accommodate the growing urban bourgeoisie. The measure aroused fierce opposition among the settler community. But by 1918 a greater threat was the prospect that returning soldiers and war workers would demand equivalent political rights, thus expanding the indigenous electorate far beyond what Sarraut judged a

tolerable level.[20] It seems unlikely that the Vietnamese recruited for service in labour battalions and infantry regiments, and their compatriots compelled to buy French war bonds and produce more rice for export, swallowed Sarraut's pronouncements as governor depicting the war effort as a fraternal Franco-Vietnamese partnership.[21] In April 1920 Indochina's federal authorities reported that colonial servicemen's families were exasperated with the meagre fifteen-franc monthly allowance they received from the army. Additional colonial levies could be raised to cover the shortage of metropolitan troops after the 1919 demobilisation only if servicemen's families received sufficient income to live on.[22] Yet the economic changes wrought in the Franco-colonial relationship by the war effort were subsumed by the government's more urgent priorities of domestic reconstruction. And the slaughter of the war left psychological scars that precluded enthusiastic popular engagement with imperial development. At least 1.3 million Frenchmen were killed during the war. In the first five months of the conflict, French losses averaged 2,000 per day. This grim daily statistic never fell below 400 throughout the war. The circles of mourning that embraced immediate family, more distant relatives, friends, neighbours, and local communities left no one untouched by the sense of loss, the reality of ambiguous victory.[23] Everyone in France who survived the war was changed by it. How did what Annette Becker terms the 'long-lasting and persistent state of shock' in post-war French society affect public attitudes to empire?[24] The question defies a simple answer. But the rediscovery of religious observance among some, the questioning of faith among others, the wave of commemorative ceremonies and public mourning to memorialise the war dead, the social and political alienation common among war veterans, and the governmental preoccupation with domestic economic recovery and European security all militated against stronger commitment to colonies. This was hardly surprising. France in 1919 was a nation transformed. In another sense, however, public and state neglect of colonial matters in the immediate aftermath of the war was part of the return to political normality.

Over the course of 1914–18 the upper tiers of colonial bureaucracy fell into line with Paris. Central government imposed its authority over recalcitrant imperial governors as colonial administration was harnessed to the primordial needs of France at war. In May 1914 Resident-general Louis Hubert Lyautey celebrated the military occupation of Taza, gateway to Morocco's eastern Rif. Control of Taza opened up overland communications with Algeria.[25] Weeks after the outbreak of war in Europe, he was instructed to evacuate French forces to the coast prior to their shipment back to France. Initially he did the reverse, keeping a limited reserve inland to protect pacified territory.[26] Lyautey's show of defiance was short-lived. Large-scale transfers of troops to the western front did occur. Between them

the two North African protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia supplied some 84,000 soldiers and 64,000 war workers to France.[27] Withdrawal of military manpower threatened to undermine French authority, and compelled Lyautey to rely more heavily on tribal *caïds* to contain local dissent.[28] In December 1917 French governmental demands for additional Moroccan troops reached a new peak. Premier Georges Clemenceau instructed Lyautey to transfer six new battalions to the western front, and warned him against further expansion of French influence in the Moroccan interior. Nothing was to be done to inflame tribal opposition.[29] Deaf to Lyautey's complaints that the use of so many Moroccan soldiers would provoke public outcry, Clemenceau's repeated calls for more men confirmed a shift in the balance of power between French governments and their colonial proconsuls. The old days of frontier imperialism – unauthorised seizures of territory and creeping extension of colonial control – were gone.[30] In future, colonial officials would answer to Paris when imperial expansion provoked unrest. Yet the fact that such rebellion became more and not less likely after 1918 stemmed in part from the colonial expansion, settler violence, and aggressive land annexations of the pre-1914 period.

Loyalty proven? The recruitment of colonial troops

The satisfaction with which French ministers and colonial officials recalled the empire war effort in 1918–19 ignored the pervasive unease among French officialdom about colonial loyalty during the war, and the near panic among colonial governments about the demobilisation of conscripts after the conflict. After the desperate defence of the Marne, it became clear by October 1914 that France would impose heavy demands for military manpower on French North and West African territories rather than giving priority to civilian labour requirements as originally assumed in August.[31] Colonial conscription could be read two ways: as an empowerment of subjects afforded a lever to extract concessions from the metropolitan power, or as the ultimate proof of colonial subjugation. The treatment of colonial troops in France mirrored this tension. Throughout the war, West African infantrymen, the tirailleurs sénégalais,[32] were depicted in popular imagery from trench journalism to mass-produced postcards and advertising as physically powerful, sexually predatory, and inherently savage. Although white Coloniale officers were expected to channel their soldiers' aggression against the common enemy, 'uncivilised' behaviour – and particularly assaults on women – by colonial troops remained a constant topic of conversation in southern garrison towns and north-eastern *départements* bordering the western front.[33] The ferocious reputation of West and North African soldiers cemented this racialised stereotyping. So, too, did the vituperative German government propaganda during and