



Liberals and the Empire

Responses to French Expansionism
under Napoleon III in Algeria, Cochinchina
and Mexico (c. 1858–70)

Miquel de la Rosa Lorente

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining
the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization
of the European University Institute

Florence, 5 June 2017

European University Institute
Department of History and Civilization

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Abstract

This thesis investigates liberal responses to French expansionism during Napoleon III's Second Empire, focusing on three of its main imperialist ventures in the late 1850s and the 1860s: Algeria, a colony inherited from the times of Charles X, whose colonisation received a great boost in the 1860s; Cochinchina, the main step of France's imperialism towards Asia; and Mexico, Napoleon III's personal dream for France in America, started as the alleged greatest project of the Empire which, however, ended in great failure. The focus of this study is not on individuals generally acknowledged as main liberal thinkers, politicians or philosophers but on a group of less-celebrated individuals who developed their professional activity both in parliament (the *Corps législatif*) and the press. The aim is to highlight how liberal languages and discourses in their specific context contributed to the development and the shaping of liberal thinking and political culture in the 1860s with regard to imperial expansionism. This dissertation seeks to tie in with the historiographical trend which sees intellectual and political history not as distinct fields, but as two inseparable sides of the same coin.

In a period in which the Second Empire was experiencing a process of increasing internal liberalisation in a number of political, social and economic fields, the Empire's means of repression and social control were still active. Censorship was commonplace in 1860s France, making it very difficult for those opposing the regime to express their ideas and concerns. However, thanks to several steps made towards opening up the regime politically from 1860 onwards, opposition deputies—including especially the liberals—were able to express in parliament their claims and objections. Whereas some social issues remained difficult to tackle, I argue that liberals found in the Empire's imperialist endeavours an appropriate space to channel their dissatisfaction with the Bonapartists' way of conceiving, ruling and managing the country. The Second Empire's colonial project on all continents fostered an intense ideological debate that transcended the borders of a simple partisan confrontation. It rather revealed the existence of two political cultures in quest of social legitimation: liberal and Bonapartist.

This thesis aims to bring together a history of nineteenth-century French imperialist ventures and a history of modern liberal political culture. No scholarly works have focused on the way in which French liberal thinkers, politicians or publicists imagined their empire in the 1860s, how they responded to Napoleon III's will to expand France's power and influence across oceans and continents with an intensity never seen before. This dissertation contributes to filling in this gap by tackling the liberal response to French expansionism with regard to three thematic areas: the role of France in the world; trade and finances; and religion.

European politics aside, overseas ventures marked France's foreign policy in the 1860s. The Second Empire's project to expand France's influence in the world through various systems of domination and control over peoples on virtually all continents became an issue of political debate that all forces of opposition, namely liberals, could not escape. Imperialist ventures became an important issue of political debate under the Second Empire and acted as a sort of 'hegemony' that liberals needed to confront, either opposing or supporting it. In this thesis, I argue that they did so, taking the opportunity to use the debates on expansionism in their own favour. Through discussing a wide range of social, economic and political topics related to France's imperialism in Africa, Asia and America during the 1860s, liberals succeeded in presenting to the public an alternative model of government to the one represented by the Bonapartists in power.

Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>xvi</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>xviii</i>

Introduction

LIBERALS AND THE EMPIRE IN 1860S FRANCE.....	1
Premise and frameworks	
Liberalism in the nineteenth century	4
Empires and the imperial imaginary	7
The interplay liberalism-imperialism	8
A case study: why France?	11
Methodological approach and sources	14
Intellectual history as political history	15
Chapter outline	21

PART I. RETHINKING THE FRENCH SECOND EMPIRE

Chapter 1

NEW BONAPARTISM, LIBERAL VOICES AND FRENCH EXPANSIONISM IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF THE 1860S.....	29
1.1. Introduction	
1.2. Napoleon III, the Empire and the nation	33
The emperor and new Bonapartism	35
Empire and nation	44
1.3. Liberal voices in an ‘illiberal democracy’	48
The Group of Five	51
Other liberal voices	59
Censorship and freedom of the press	62
1.4. French expansionism in the global context of the 1860s	68
Technology and the arms race	73
The press and political imaginary	76
1.5. Conclusion	79

Chapter 2

OVERSEAS VENTURES AND IMPERIAL LANGUAGES.....	85
2.1. Introduction	

2.2.	Imperial languages: civilisation, glory and greatness	86
	Civilisation	87
	Glory and greatness	90
2.3.	Algeria: the colony, the province, the kingdom	96
2.4.	An insight into Cochinchina	104
2.5.	Mexico: 'la grande pensée du règne'?	111
	The expedition	114
	Chevalier	119
	Favre and Quinet	122
2.6.	Conclusion	125

PART II. LIBERALS FACE THE EMPIRE

Chapter 3

LIBERALS AND THE ROLE OF FRANCE IN THE WORLD.....	131	
3.1	Introduction	
3.2	The nation abroad: Algeria, politics of assimilation and rights of representation	134
3.3	'Base du génie rayonnant de la France': Cochinchina and fascination with the empire	148
3.4	Mexico, the principle of non-intervention and the 'right of nations'	159
	International law and non-intervention	
	On Mexico	164
	A central issue	174
	The United States and the 'Latin race'	186
	Towards failure	192
3.5	Conclusion	194

Chapter 4

LIBERALS ON COLONIAL INDUSTRY, TRADE AND FINANCES.....	199	
4.1.	Introduction	
	The Commercial Treaty	204
	Public finances	206
4.2.	Algeria, industrial production and economic strength	210
	Algeria's economic appeal	213
	Industrial production	214
	Investments and labour	219
4.3.	Cochinchina: a golden opportunity for trade	223
4.4.	'Arrêtez-vous !': Mexico and France's financial stability	236
4.5.	Conclusion	243

Chapter 5

LIBERALS, RELIGION AND EMPIRE..... 247

5.1. Introduction	
5.2. Algeria: the crescent under the sign of the cross	255
Further evangelisation	258
Girardin and the link between ‘two worlds’	263
Citizenship	267
5.3. Cochinchina and the protection of Christian missionaries	269
5.4. Mexico	274
5.5. Conclusion	279

Conclusion

LIBERALS AND THE EMPIRE: A RELATION OF MUTUAL INFLUENCE, THE BUILDING OF A POLITICAL BRAND..... 283

At home with the empire	
Competing political ideologies and mutual influences	286
Imperialist ventures	289
Liberals and the Empire	293

<i>Sources and bibliography</i>	297
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List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Paris in the 1860s, the Empire's capital in full swing	41
Figure 2. French possessions in Algeria in the 1860	98
Figure 3. Lower Cochinchina in the 1860s	108
Figure 4. Map of Mexico	119
Figure 5. Pacification of Cochinchina	154

Abbreviations

Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif	ASCL
Archives de l'Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques	AASMP
Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères	AMAE
Archives Nationales, Paris	AN
Bibliothèque Nationale de France	BNF
Compte-rendu des seances du Corps législatif	CRCL
Département de Manuscrits	DM
Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises	NAF
Service Historique de la Défense	SHD

Introduction

Liberals and the Empire in 1860s France

*Le temps des monarchies paternelles est passé ;
il est passé aussi le temps des conquêtes et des aventures.*

— Édouard Laboulaye, 1863¹

During the 1860s, French thinker Édouard Laboulaye, committed liberal theorist and admirer of the American liberal state-building process, made huge efforts to denounce the lack of freedom, and the existence of civil liberties violations, under Napoleon III's rule. By the time he was running for deputy in parliament in the 1863 elections, he translated his political claims into a well-known publication that can be considered as the 'bible' of liberal thinking in the times of the Second Empire.² In his *Le parti libéral. Son programme et son avenir*, Laboulaye expresses his profound desire to promote the establishment of a new political system, much more committed to the defence of civil and individual liberties than Napoleon III's regime. His concerns and ideas seek to discern how the situation could be improved with regard to domestic politics, though he neglects, or avoids, any reference to the Empire's imperialist expansion, as if these two dimensions, national and imperial, were totally disconnected. Only a sentence in the book's preface—the one that opens this introduction—can be read from the perspective of an expansionist policy, for it suggests that the liberal thinker might be reluctant to promote further 'conquests' and 'adventures'. His position about

¹ Édouard Laboulaye, *Le parti libéral. Son programme et son avenir*, 6 ed., (Paris: Charpentier, 1863), p. x.

² There is a quite substantial scholarly literature on the figure of this celebrated liberal thinker, who, as a matter of fact, organised the gift of the Statue of Liberty to the United States, and his political standpoints on a wide range of issues. A good summary of these references can be found in Stephen W. Sawyer, 'An American Model for French Liberalism: The State of Exception in Édouard Laboulaye's Constitutional Thought', *The Journal of Modern History*, 85/4 (2013), p. 740.

colonialism, expansionism and imperialism, like that of the alleged new ‘liberal party’, remains unclear. If the attitudes towards the empire of such a celebrated liberal have gone unnoticed by historians of the Second Empire and mid-nineteenth-century specialists in general, so too must those of many lesser-known French liberal politicians, intellectuals and publicists of the 1860s have been overlooked.

Departing from the insufficient scholarly attention paid to the liberal response to French imperialism throughout the nineteenth century, this thesis seeks to explore the interplay between imperialism and liberalism in a concrete political context and time: the French Second Empire in the 1860s—specifically from 1858 (when French expansionism found a renewed impetus with the expedition to Cochinchina) until the fall of the Empire after the Franco-Prussian War in 1870—, a period which has been described as being of great political uncertainty and intellectual transformation in modern France.³ This thesis explores the liberals’ rhetorical strategies of political branding and their translation into a specific language with regard to imperialist expansion. It also investigates the various actors and perspectives involved in the liberal political discourse on imperialism in the 1860s, mainly expressed in parliament and the press. The aim is to assess whether the domestic ideological battle between liberals and Bonapartists affected their visions on France’s expansionist policies or whether, on the contrary, there was a political and social consensus regarding foreign affairs, over and above ideological divides. The thesis also aims to explore the foundations of the liberal position(s) regarding the French imperial project in the late 1850s and the 1860s by assessing which intellectual outlooks and belief systems informed these positions and how and by which means they were expressed.

Answering these questions implies taking into account three main conceptual domains: the realm of liberal *ideas*; the liberal social and political *networks*; and liberal *practices* in the domain of both public opinion and politics. These three domains are somewhat inseparable and define the French liberal political culture of the 1860s, revealing how important contextualisation is for the study of intellectual and political history. With this in mind, this thesis seeks to explain how ideas about the Second Empire’s

³ See Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), foreword.

INTRODUCTION

expansionism shaped a particular liberal political culture, in continuous dialogue with Bonapartism. Secondly, it aims to clarify the extent to which mid-nineteenth-century liberals sustained, or not, French imperialist expansion. In doing so, finally, one of the thesis' purposes is to shed light on the nature and long-term significance of the Second Empire, not only for France but also for Europe and the wider world, adding a new global perspective to the nineteenth-century French historical narrative. As Chapter 1 will show, the 1860s were a period of great importance from a political and ideological point of view. With different degrees of depth and intensity, the struggle between liberal and conservative—or new conservative—forces was characteristic across Europe. The first decisive steps towards real democracies started to be made and a harsh fight for achieving all sort of liberties became a central issue in many political and parliamentary discussions. Furthermore, the 1860s was a decade in which the dramatic expansion of the press and the blossoming of hundreds of cheap publications and pamphlets enriched and shaped a new conception of public opinion and power relations in Western European societies.

This dissertation focuses on three imperialist ventures: the renewed drive to colonise Algeria in the late 1850s and the 1860s; the expedition to and later colonisation of Cochinchina from 1858 onwards; and the intervention in Mexico from 1861 to 1867. As Chapter 2 will explain, these cases are representative of different types of imperialism, in terms of both their conception and their motivation. Algeria was the 'crown jewel' of French imperialism in the 1860s, a project inherited from earlier times (the first French troops arrived in Algiers in 1830 under Charles X's reign), but with which the French Second Empire engaged with renewed vigour. In Cochinchina, Napoleon III's Empire sought to dominate the territory in order to create a fundamental economic and commercial place in order to counteract British power in the region, implementing a rather classical form of formal imperialism. In Mexico, the Second Empire aimed instead to establish a client government that would facilitate the implementation of its economic and geopolitical interests in the region, related to the promotion of Catholic values and the counteraction of US power in Latin America—a form of 'informal' imperialism. The three imperial projects were in the spotlight of contemporary parliamentary and media debates. The participation of liberals and Bonapartists in these debates are at the centre of my interest. Therefore, the focus is

more on the debate around these ventures than on acts of decision-making. Liberal responses to French expansionism in the 1860s were made in a context, and through specific parliamentary and journalistic means, that would be difficult to understand without a general overview of the fields they cover and the methodological framework through which this thesis approaches them.

The analysis of the liberal responses to Second Empire's expansionism requires a clarification of the concepts that will guide the thesis throughout its thematically-structured chapters, including in particular the concepts of 'liberalism', 'imperialism' and the interplay between them in the context of the nineteenth century. These concepts will be tackled in this chapter's following sections, whereas an in-depth analysis of the Bonapartist and liberal competing political ideologies (the specific feature of French politics in the 1860s) will be made in Chapter 1. The thematic outline of the rest of the chapters is provided in the introduction's last section.

Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century

Liberalism has been a driving force of Europe's (and the world's) modern history. The world we know today would be unthinkable without the active involvement in politics of a powerful, influential assembly of individuals that considered themselves as 'liberals'. Their deepest beliefs in the defence of individual freedom and a representative government, rooted in enlightenment values, came to be mainstream after the French Revolution. State-building processes, nationalism, democracy and the conquest of a wide range of social and political freedoms and rights are but a few remarkable examples of their political contribution. However, scholars agree on neither dating the origins nor providing a satisfactory definition of such a fundamental current of thought, which traditionally has been defined by its contradictions and heterogeneity.⁴

⁴ The difficulties in using the term were already highlighted in James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Important contributions to the conceptualisation of liberalism in the nineteenth century are, for example, Alan S. Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and Richard Bellamy, *Victorian Liberalism: Nineteenth-Century Political Thought and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1990). A recent account on the concept of liberalism, presenting it 'as the sum of the arguments that have been classified as liberal, and recognised as such by other self-proclaimed liberals' is Duncan Bell, 'What is Liberalism?', *Political Theory*, 42/6 (2014), pp. 682-715 (pp. 689-90 for the quote).

Despite the fact that liberal theoretical claims were aimed at being universal, namely, addressed to all humankind, as Uday Mehta has observed, historical evidence shows that liberalism tended to adapt to its national context and to modify its theoretical postulates according to specific events.⁵ In this sense, Jon Parry has pointed out that, the defence of classical values of free trade and non-intervention aside, ‘the driving force of nineteenth-century liberalism was the desire to build an effective national political community and to develop the right virtues in the nation, rather than a particular attitude to the state’.⁶ This demonstrates the extent to which the force of nationalism was significant for the shaping of ideologies in general, and of liberalism in particular.

In France, the new imperial regime inaugurated after Louis-Napoleon’s 1851 coup d’état, so harshly contested by the opponents to authoritarian rule, began in the 1860s a timid process of internal liberalisation with the adoption of some measures providing the French people with more individual liberties. The reasons for this change are still unclear, although historians seem to agree that it was not produced because Napoleon III abandoned his own principles, pressured by the forces of opposition. Rather, the change took place as a natural evolution of the regime, given that the initial authoritarian government was difficult to justify as the revolutionary threat diminished.⁷ The regime evolved towards a combination of the force of a personal Caesarist power based on an historical imperial legitimacy and the increasing social demand to place France at the same level as other consolidated liberal states. The interplay between liberalism and Bonapartist imperialism was an issue of great importance in 1860s French politics, which indeed had great repercussions for the conceptualisation of French expansionist ventures at the time. In order to tackle this interplay in a better fashion, it is first necessary to reflect on what the liberal galaxy in 1860s France was. Indeed, the liberal movement during the Second Empire deserves closer attention

⁵ Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 51.

⁶ Jon Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 73.

⁷ Roger Price, *Documents on the Second French Empire, 1852-1870* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 144–59.

because, as Pierre Rosanvallon has noted, it was the immediate precursor of the Third Republic.⁸

Broadly speaking, the word ‘liberal’ did not come into usage in France as a political term until the early nineteenth century. Liberalism in the period 1830–70 can be separated from socialism, on the one hand, and conservatism, on the other. The words ‘liberal ideas’ and ‘liberalism’ began to be used pragmatically from 1815 onwards to describe the parliamentary opposition to reactionary powers.⁹ With regard to republicanism in the period 1830–1880, Hazareesingh has pointed out that being an intellectual republican was ‘an act of allegiance to a community with a strong sense of community and collective purpose, and a well-defined set of core values and rituals’.¹⁰ Such a definition proves more problematic referring to the liberal movement. Liberalism was a powerful ‘political tradition’ which operated in a less-organised way and whose ideological borders were more blurred at first sight.¹¹ Yet it existed, with its contradictions, its incoherencies and constant interplay with other intellectual constellations, namely republicans and Bonapartists.

Liberals were always in between two fronts, struggling to position themselves in the political centre. As Alan Kahan has pointed out, ‘politicians concerned with only one enemy, whether above or below, were not liberals’.¹² An example of this is the fact that nineteenth-century liberals preferred a limited suffrage, as they considered that the people were not yet prepared to exercise power. The aim was to avoid both chaos and authoritarianism.¹³ All in all, liberalism in 1860s France was mainly an ideology of opposition, far from a single and coherent political movement.

⁸ Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Sacre du citoyen: histoire du suffrage universel en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. 376–9.

⁹ Jean-Claude Michéa, *L’empire du moindre mal. Essai sur la civilisation libérale* (Paris: Climats, 2007), p. 19.

¹⁰ Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic*, p. 12.

¹¹ On this issue, see Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹² Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, p. 3.

¹³ Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, p. 9.

Empires and the Imperial Imaginary

The literature on imperialism has considerably grown since the study of empires became the central focus of recent historiographical trends, such as global and world history. Empires have not only been seen as tools for political and economic domination, but also as complex structures for cultural, political and economic exchange. In fact, they have acquired great importance for analysing connections between different human communities. The study of empires and imperialism has become the first great milestone from which traditional historiography based on nation-state-centred and Marxist-structural approaches has begun to be overcome.¹⁴ Recent research has shown how the imperial powers exercised their influence in the colonial context, not always under military or political dominance, but sometimes through more sibylline ways, by imposing all sorts of economic and cultural influences.¹⁵

Yet, beyond the vast field of study focused on imperial practices, the history of modern empires remains inevitably connected to the way in which contemporaries saw, imagined and conceptualised them. Empires thus must be tackled as something more than intangible machines of expansion and domination of overseas territories, to a certain extent disconnected to the everyday political, social and economic functioning of the metropolis. The force of empires in the nineteenth century not only lay in their practical power of coercion, but also in their ideological strength, built over different values and belief systems depending on context. Historians have shown great interest in merging the tools and perspectives provided by intellectual and political history in order to understand the extent to which the ideological, discursive dimension of modern empires really mattered to strengthen their power. Within this narrative, liberalism has come to play an important part. Probably because it is widely considered as a major defining feature of European modern societies, the interplay between liberalism and

¹⁴ Two key contributions in this sense are Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987) and Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004).

¹⁵ In relation to nineteenth-century European liberal projects, Matthew P. Fitzpatrick has defined imperialism as ‘the set of political, economic, social, and cultural practices undertaken by those establishing and maintaining a hierarchically ordered system of control in order to consolidate their hold on exchange networks and domestic power’. Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, *Liberalism and Imperialism in Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 10.

imperialism in the nineteenth century has been at the centre of a wide range of scholarly works in recent times. These accounts have found in the British Empire an appealing, impressively fruitful case study, but have tended to neglect other—in my opinion equally important—areas and contexts such as France. This thesis aims to show what it meant to ‘speak liberal’ in 1860s France and what the different ‘accents’ of this liberal language were, always in relation to contemporary French imperialist projects at the time.

A difference needs to be made between ‘imperialism’, which refers to a form of political, economic domination, and ‘empire’, seen as a potentially legitimate form of political order. This difference was already made by contemporaries in the late nineteenth century and, basically, it still seems valuable to me. I will therefore use ‘imperialism’, and its derivatives, such as ‘imperialist’, to refer to any form of expansionism, whether formally (through the foundation of stable colonial settlements and the establishment of permanent forms of economic and political domination) or informally (through the implementation of mechanisms of indirect control or domination). Both the colonisation of Algeria and Cochinchina would fit the first category, whereas the Mexican venture would belong to the second group. As such, the concept of ‘Empire’ (in capital letters) will be used to refer to the political regime that emerged from the 1852 coup d’état and that, led by Napoleon III, lasted until 1870. The term ‘empire’ (in small caps), will be used instead to describe French domination overseas.¹⁶

The Interplay between Liberalism and Imperialism

The relationship between the concepts of liberalism and imperialism is one of the most controversial of both nineteenth-century politics and political thought.¹⁷ Historians and political scientists alike have questioned for decades how the liberal ideals of freedom, individualism, openness and self-fulfilment, which have so contributed to the

¹⁶ See David Todd, ‘A French Imperial Meridian, 1814-1870’, *Past and Present*, 210/1 (2011).

¹⁷ There is a plethora of scholarly work on the topic, dealing with different chronological and spatial contexts. Scholars from Anglo-Saxon academic environments are surely the most active in carrying out research on the interplay between liberalism and empire. The most recent example including the detailed, updated bibliographical account is Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

achievement of democracy in modern European societies, could match with a system of power based on domination and control over peoples as well as the way in which those who claimed to be liberal came to justify, support and even encourage such domination.¹⁸

When bringing together the concepts of liberalism and imperialism, the British imperial project emerges immediately. There is a strong consensus among scholars in considering Great Britain as *the* liberal empire, especially during the Victorian period in which, according to the literature, a clear ‘liberal mission’ ruled all British internal and foreign policies.¹⁹ Uday Mehta and Jennifer Pitts’ noteworthy contributions have broadened the ways of understanding why liberalism, which had been very critical of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century European imperial expansion, came to adopt a supportive position with regard to European imperialism by the mid-nineteenth century.²⁰ Focusing on the figures of Locke and John Stuart Mill, Mehta argues that liberalism over the course of the nineteenth century found in imperialism ‘the concrete place of its dreams’,²¹ a space where to test its reaction to otherness and the ‘unfamiliar’. The truth is, Mehta argues, that whereas liberalism claimed to be universalist, in the end, it proved parochial, for it was unable to accept difference and rather tried ‘relentlessly’ to ‘align or educate the regnant forms of the unfamiliar with its own expectations’.²² Thus, liberalism was an imperial ideology from its origins. All those who did not share European mores and customs were rapidly labelled as

¹⁸ An important contribution dealing with this dialectic is Bernard Semmel, *The Liberal Idea and the Demons of Empire: Theories of Imperialism from Adam Smith to Lenin* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

¹⁹ The literature on the topic is overwhelming. Examples worth mentioning are David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); *Victorian Liberalism: Nineteenth-Century Political Thought and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1990); Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment, and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2004).

²⁰ Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*.

²¹ Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, p. 37.

²² Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, pp. 11, 18.

backward. Jennifer Pitts broadened Mehta's analysis²³ by considering liberalism as a 'complex ideology whose exemplars share family resemblances rather than any strict doctrine', and as an ideology which is able to both justify and combat imperialism.²⁴ Pitts detects a flourishing period of anti-imperialism in the late eighteenth century, followed by a 'turn of empire' some half of a century later, when, according to her, there were 'no relevant liberal thinkers in Europe questioning the justice of European empires'.²⁵

These contributions are iconic examples of the history of political thought, based on the analysis of the works of main thinkers and philosophers. Their approach to a 'textual' history of ideologies lack wider notions about the ways in which these ideas, these texts, were connected to their political and social context. First, instead of using the term 'liberalism', which entails a serious risk of falling into too conceptual an abstraction, I stand for using the term 'liberal' or its plural 'liberals', to refer to those individuals claiming themselves to be liberal, or to share, at least regarding a particular topic, liberal values. I am therefore interested in how the ideas, points of view, utterances, perceptions and attitudes of these liberals were created and evolved depending on particular events related to the Second Empire's expansionist project in Algeria, Cochinchina and Mexico. Instead of being an example of the history of political thought, this thesis embraces the approach and methods of the history of political culture, leaving aside any individual-centred analysis to focus rather on groups of people sharing values and interests, acting in the same political or professional sphere, and their efforts to make them visible and influential in society.²⁶

²³ Alongside Pitt's contribution, other analyses deserve to be mentioned as alternative accounts to Mehta's seminal work: Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014).

²⁴ Jennifer Pitts, 'Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 13 (2010), p. 218.

²⁵ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, p. 1.

²⁶ The *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* defines political culture as 'the set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviour in the political system'. It encompasses both the political ideals and operating norms of a polity. Political culture is thus the manifestation in aggregate form of the psychological and subjective dimensions of politics. 'A political culture is the product of both the collective history of a political system and the life histories of the members

Keith Baker's work on French political culture in the times of the Revolution has been inspiring to understand politics and the political experience as 'the activity through which individuals and groups in any society articulate, negotiate, implement and enforce the competing claims they make upon one another and upon the whole'. To Baker, political culture would thus be 'the set of discourses or symbolic practices by which these claims are made'.²⁷ It is precisely in the realm of discourses and the political imaginary that this thesis is framed. For our purpose, the discussion and debate *per se* is more important than the act of decision-making itself. All in all, the purpose of this thesis is to go beyond the archetypal assumptions of the liberal movement under the Second Empire and to provide elements for a more complex analysis of the relationship between liberals and the new Bonapartist regime, focusing on the debates around France's expansionist project in the 1860s.

A CASE STUDY: WHY FRANCE?

While the section above has presented the main academic contributions to the issues of liberalism and imperialism in the nineteenth century, it is now time to explain the spatial and chronological context on which this thesis focuses: France during the Second Empire in the 1860s. As already stated, the interplay between liberalism and imperialism has been tackled from diverse perspectives regarding different 'national' contexts, mainly the British. Such accounts, however, have tended to neglect a crucial imperial context, the French, in an even more crucial time: Napoleon III's Second Empire. As Chapters 1 and 2 will explain in more detail, France in the decades prior to the advent of the Third Republic was already a truly imperial power, whose expansionist projects intended to reach faraway territories on virtually all continents. Under Napoleon III's rule, such an undertaking gained more speed with the acceleration of Algeria's colonisation, the establishment of the first colonial settlements in Cochinchina and the beginning of the Mexican campaign.

of the system and thus it is rooted equally in public events and private experience'. *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1968, vol. 12) p. 218.

²⁷ Keith M. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 4.

Rosanvallon has pointed out how difficult—impossible in his own words—it is to speak of the existence of modern liberal thought in nineteenth-century France.²⁸ While the difference between economic and political liberalism makes sense for France, for Britain, this distinction is useless, as they go always hand in hand.²⁹ Both types of liberalism, however, had several aspects in common, like their strong belief in ‘cheap government’.³⁰ Rosanvallon’s point of view, however, should not prevent us from acknowledging the existence of a ‘liberal movement’ throughout the century, in spite of its changes, evolutions and nuances. In the 1860s, as I will argue in Chapter 1, there was in France a modest, albeit significant, group of politicians, intellectuals and publicists who responded to the main characteristics of being a ‘liberal’ in the nineteenth century. They were not organised over a well-established political party but they defended, and saw themselves as defenders of, a particular ideological creed having the ideal of freedom as its main cornerstone. Theirs was a mostly Paris-based, elitist group, formed of well-educated and rather wealthy people well connected to bourgeois circles. Their sociological background, as we will see later, played an important part in distinguishing them from other ideological groups at the time, mainly legitimists and the Bonapartists, better connected to aristocracy.

Far from the celebrated ‘the Empire is peace’ with which Louis Napoleon had defined the imperial regime in Bordeaux in 1852, Napoleon III’s expansionist policies implied an active, vigorous plan of military expeditions worldwide. As David Todd has made clear, France’s imperialist endeavours in the 1860s were far from extraordinary, but were part of a continuity in the nineteenth-century French expansionist pretensions.³¹ As Chapter 1 will stress, France acted during the Second Empire as a truly imperial power. Beyond the reasons given to explain this phenomenon, related to the need of opening new markets and trade routes, to defend Catholicism and civilisation where its values were in danger, or to ensure a prominent role for France on the global stage, I argue that another motivation must be considered: the search for political legitimacy

²⁸ Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le moment Guizot* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), p. 14.

²⁹ Rosanvallon, *Le moment Guizot*, p. 15.

³⁰ Dan Warshaw, *Paul Leroy-Beaulieu and Established Liberalism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), p. 16.

³¹ Todd, ‘A French Imperial Meridian, 1814-1870’.

and social support within the country. Napoleon III founded his imperial rule upon the legitimacy of his lineage, despite the fact that his biological belonging to the Bonaparte family was questioned already at the time. Beyond his historical ascendancy, as we will learn in Chapter 1, the Emperor wanted his new regime to appear as a project for the nation's modernisation; a force of social and material progress for the French; a project rooted in the past, valuable for the present and with projection into the future. His economic, cultural and social policies sought to reach this goal. The Empire's expansionist policies were used to promote the idea that France deserved to play a leading role on the global stage, and that the Empire was the only regime able to defend the nation with all vigour, connecting the internal progress of France to its power overseas. In his 1852 speech, Louis Napoleon promised that his new imperial regime would strive to preserve peace. As probably some contemporaries could already suspect, today we surely know that he, who barely one year later would be proclaimed emperor of the French, was referring that day to internal affairs, as his harshest actions to dominate important regions of the world were yet to come. However risky the endeavour of promoting war overseas to favour domestic issues might be, Napoleon III did not hesitate to undertake it and, en passant, to involve all institutions of the regime in the achievement of his personal goal.

France's expansion overseas was often imbued with liberal values, such as the defence of free trade or the fight against autocratic regimes, such as the Annamite in Cochinchina. Yet broadly speaking, liberals were reluctant about the way in which the Bonapartists managed France's expansionism. As I argue, this behaviour can be explained by the fact that French liberals, unlike their English counterparts—where were in power—, felt the political pressure to undermine the Bonapartist government by generating the image that the Bonapartists were unable to properly rule the country, due to their immoderate ambition and irresponsibility. By criticising and questioning the way in which the Second Empire's government was orchestrating France's colonial expansion, liberals took the opportunity to build their own political brand, related to the values of moderation and good government. As the conclusion will further develop, imperial and liberal dimensions in that epoch in France were certainly connected and inter-related. They had an impact on each other.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND SOURCES

The thesis combines three types of narratives. At an immediate level, it provides key insights into French imperial ambitions in the 1860s; in the context of the history of political thought, it examines the development of mid-nineteenth-century French liberalism focusing on liberals' responses to France's expansionism under Napoleon III. In this respect, a revision of the ideological battle between liberals and Bonapartists helps us to better conceptualise the Second Empire. From a historical perspective, the thesis seeks to review the significance of the Second Empire in both its domestic and imperialist dimensions, bringing together the traditionally neglected connection between national and imperial histories of France which, as a matter of fact, is fostering a promising field of research in France nowadays.

Beyond the purely intellectual approaches to the topic, which have encouraged a fruitful field of scholarship centred on the works of main liberal individuals and thinkers, I opt for what Matthew Fitzpatrick has called 'the need to historicise' liberal approaches to empire in the nineteenth century. The transnational approach does not reveal a pan-European liberal imperialist agenda, but rather a cacophony of competing projects and voices that does not necessarily equate with the visions of leading liberal thinkers of the period.³² To historicise implies providing contextualisation to issues of the past; tackling events of the past and fitting them in their appropriate framework, considering their complex dimensions of time and space. To evaluate this interplay, I propose to analyse the relationship between liberal thinking and French expansionism, drawing on the study of the processes of diffusion and reception of political ideas, discourses and images of empire. As Sudhir Hazareesingh has noted, the 1860s were in France a remarkable decade in which different political groups, notably liberals and Bonapartists, applied their ideologies to important issues that led to a new conception of democracy and the establishment of new political rules within French society.³³ The French political culture, however, was also—and decisively—shaped by all the issues related to imperialist expansion and colonial domination, to which both liberals and the

³² Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Europe*, p. 10.

³³ See Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of French Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Bonapartists also devoted great efforts in the two practical and discursive dimensions of politics. Thanks to the social and technological changes of the period, both ideological groups were able to connect more efficiently to an increasingly educated public, making the battle for controlling and shaping public opinion even harsher than in previous epochs.

Intellectual History as Political History

Pierre Rosanvallon has suggested that the history of ideas is senseless if it is not 'historical'.³⁴ In stating this, Rosanvallon stands for taking into account the importance of context—in line with the renowned Cambridge School—when analysing the generation and spreading of ideas in a particular time in the past. Ideas are far from being monolithic and immutable blocks, perdurable across time and space. Instead, they evolve according to the political, social, economic and cultural context in which they develop. They also mutate depending on the individual, or group of people, who produce, spread and defend them. And even more importantly, ideas can change or be shaped according to the inner changes and evolutions experienced by individuals in their current lives. In a context of censorship and a lack of fundamental liberties, the defence of freedom of the press and freedom of speech was the way liberals found to channel and express their political claims, namely addressed to question the Empire and present themselves as an alternative political option. These were the issues that structure liberal thinking in the 1860s.

The key is to integrate the context of a particular event in order to make it much more comprehensible. In this sense, I consider what has been called the 'New Political History' to be a useful tool for studying liberal political culture at the time, understood here as 'the combination of mentalities and collective attitudes within the broader context of work and community in which they were formulated'.³⁵ Despite the transnational impulse in contemporary historiography, we cannot deny the national context, especially important for the study of nineteenth-century social and cultural

³⁴ Rosanvallon, *Le moment Guizot*, p. 13.

³⁵ Roger Price, *People and Politics in France, 1848-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 8.

processes. Furthermore, there is a methodological need to integrate both national and global dimensions and thus to assess the interrelation between these distinct levels. In this sense, colonial and metropolitan histories need to be taken into account jointly.

Aiming to challenge existing narratives based on ‘main’ individuals’ accounts on empire, this thesis seeks to provide a broader perspective by focusing on a larger spectrum of historical agents. Deputies in parliament (called in that epoch the *Corps législatif*), publicists, academicians and journalists are the focus of my enquiry. Their speeches in the chamber, compiled in the parliamentary proceedings, and their published articles and pamphlets are thus the main sources on which this thesis is based. Both of them acted as key elements for the configuration of public opinion, since they were the means through which educated people interested in politics could have access to valuable information. During the course of the century, liberals, not only in France but across Europe, showed great concern about all issues related to public opinion and the people’s capacity to both express and share their concerns, as well as to receive information on relevant political, economic and social matters. The press, with all the limitations it suffered in the nineteenth century, was seen as a useful tool for spreading political messages and creating political imaginary. The role given to public opinion in this thesis is key to understanding how journalists, publicists and liberal thinkers contributed to configure a space where society and power interacted with each other. As Pablo Piccato has pointed out in his study of political languages in post-imperial Mexico, public opinion must be understood as a ground for political struggle, a domain in which political discourse develops and evolves in continuous negotiation with its social diffusion.³⁶ Both processes, creation and diffusion, have to be considered jointly, as different but complementary pieces of a same ensemble. Thus, the political role played by these ‘men of the press’ cannot be overlooked. In this sense, it has to be kept in mind that the press played a decisive role in the conquest and consolidation of democracy in the nineteenth-century Western world.³⁷

³⁶ See Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion. Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

³⁷ The role of the press in the transformation of France’s political culture in the 1860s has been addressed by Dominique Kalifa, ‘L’entrée de la France en régime médiatique: l’étape des années 1860’ in Jacques Migozzi (ed.), *De l’écrit à l’écran. Littérature populaire: mutations génériques, mutations médiatiques* (Limoges: Pulim, 2000), pp. 39-51.

For the configuration of the political imaginary in the mid-nineteenth century, the press played an important role as the main, rather sole, medium of communication. Scholars studying the topic have noted that newspapers and journals were powerful tools for what has been labelled as ‘journalistic stereotype’ through which the political representation of ‘the other’ was built.³⁸ Not only ideas *per se*, but the language through which they were expressed are essential to understanding social behaviour and the development of a particular political culture. The visions and representations that liberals built around empire in the 1860s must thus be tackled in close relationship to the language they used to express them.

When analysing such historical issues, so closely related to the development of domestic politics, to question ‘methodological nationalism’ is essential. Intellectual history has to make an effort to go beyond national borders and to understand political phenomena in their global dimension or, at least, to place them into a broader context. In this sense, there is a need to deconstruct France as a research topic and to take into consideration that domestic politics were dramatically influenced by events that occurred outside the continental national borders.³⁹

As for the political arena, the focus of this project is mainly on the deputies that constituted the so-called Group of Five, especially Émile Ollivier, Jules Favre, Alfred Darimon and Ernest Picard, who were the most active in discussing the Second Empire’s foreign policy. As Chapter 1 will show, this reduced group of deputies played an important part in the Empire’s parliamentary life, and its utterances and standpoints can be considered as representative of the contemporary liberal mindset. Moreover, the visions by eminent republican deputies such as Adolphe Thiers are also categorised as ‘liberal’. As Chapter 1 will further discuss, during the Second Empire, liberal ideas were principally expressed in parliament, which requires some consideration about the functioning of the Corps législatif and its place within the Second Empire’s institutional structure. The national sovereignty exercised by the representatives of the people was

³⁸ Dominique Kalifa and Alain Vaillant, ‘Pour une histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIXe siècle’, *Le Temps des médias*, 1/2 (2004), p. 211.

³⁹ An excellent article with abundant useful references to literature on the topic is Stephen W. Sawyer and Aurore Clavier, ‘Ces nations façonnées par les empires et la globalisation. Réécrire le récit national du XIXe siècle aujourd’hui’, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 1 (2004), pp. 117–37.

never questioned in principle by Napoleon III, although the emperor limited from the beginning its constitutional expression. The new 1852 imperial constitution introduced tricameralism, which in practice limited the Corps législatif's powers, and shared them with the Senate and the Council of State. Moreover, the members of the Corps législatif were no longer called representatives of the people, as it was the emperor—who kept the right to control legislation together with his government—who was the sole representative of the nation. The number of deputies was reduced from 750 to 261.⁴⁰

Throughout the 1860s, liberals and republicans pressured the regime to adopt liberal measures, which it did progressively. This was the decade in which Adolph Thiers gave his celebrated speech asking for five 'needed' freedoms in 1864, and in which other liberal intellectuals such as Édouard Laboulaye and Prévost-Paradol published their major political works inspired by British and American models.⁴¹ Economists such as Jules Duval were likewise prolific in their intellectual production on French expansionism. Liberals also profited from the possibilities, though limited by censorship, that the press provided them with to channel their ideas. Some of the columnists and contributors that centre the analysis of this thesis were less known than their parliamentary counterparts, making it more difficult to categorise them individually, as biographical accounts on these individuals are often inexistent. In these cases, I depart from the assumption that the points of view of authors writing in liberal media can be considered equally liberal. There is wide agreement among scholars that the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the *Journal des Débats* were the liberal media in 1860s France for their defence of free trade, parliamentarism and religious tolerance.⁴² *Le Temps*, founded by Auguste Nefftzer in 1861, rapidly became a true representative of liberal thinking, too. This newspaper was deeply influenced by the liberal, protestant philosophy of its founder, and indeed was an example of business success—its readers almost quadrupled in just eight years since it was launched.

⁴⁰ Eric Anceau and Jean Garrigues, 'Discussing the First Age of French Parliaments (1789-1914)', in Pasi Ihalainen, Cornelia Ilie, Kari Palonen (eds.), *Parliament and Parliamentarism. A Comparative History of a European Concept* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), p. 56.

⁴¹ Anceau and Garrigues, 'Discussing the First Age of French Parliaments', pp. 56–7.

⁴² Roger Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967), p. 111.

As is always the case regarding journalistic sources, an important aspect to be taken into account when evaluating their impact on public opinion is the numbers of copies sold or distributed, although, the older the publication, the more difficult it is for the historian to have valuable data. In relation to the papers mentioned above, some studies highlight the fact that they were ‘successful’ publications. The *Journal des Débats* sold some 7,000 copies per day in a context in which to sell between 7,000 and 8,000 copies was considered an achievement. The *Journal* gained prestige because of the quality of its contributors and its intellectual debates, its selected readers and economic supporters. In the late 1820s, the *Journal* became the organ of liberal opposition and in later years, it was committed to the Orleanist regime, linked to the values of moderation, freedom and order. With around 9,500 copies sold in 1858, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* had an ‘almost hegemonic’ position as a publication in the Second Empire due to the quality of its contributors, its sales numbers and economic gains.⁴³ Of course, one does not have to consider only the number of copies, but also the plausible diffusion of such papers, whose reading was expanded through libraries, public readings and private clubs, among others.⁴⁴

Most of thinkers and intellectuals belonging to liberal institutions like the Académie Française contributed very often with their writings and articles to the papers mentioned. In the times of the Second Empire, being a journalist was far different from what the profession would become in later decades. There was no specific university training for such a profession. Rather, people who had succeeded in their studies and had the curiosity and desire to express their ideas to a wider public engaged in journalistic writing. Many university professors, for example, were the most read authors in the 1860s.⁴⁵ These individuals never wrote a specific book on the expeditions under study, which may complicate things at first sight. To tackle their utterances on these imperial ‘adventures’, several sources have been checked. First and foremost, their speeches and interventions as deputies of the Corps législatif, where heated debates often took place, especially when dealing with delicate issues related to

⁴³ See Thomas Loué, *La Revue des Deux Mondes, de Buloz à Brunetière, de la belle époque de la revue à la revue de la Belle époque* (PhD thesis, University of Paris 1, 1998).

⁴⁴ Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire*, p. 137.

foreign policy and the defence of basic individual and social liberties, were consulted. Articles published in the press are very useful, too, to analyse liberal approaches to imperial ventures, the language and images created on them and the way these visions were spread amid the public opinion. Personal writings and short pamphlets have also been used when available and relevant.

It is important to make some considerations on the theoretical framework in which these sources, especially the press, have to be framed. It is widely known that the notion of ‘public sphere’ was theorised by Jürgen Habermas, who presented it as an arena of social life where discursive relations take place as a sort of social theatre for debating and deliberating.⁴⁶ Habermas’ work has influenced the works of students of media theory since it was published, as it treated for the first time the development of the media as an integral part of the formation of modern societies, arguing that the circulation of printed materials and the articulation of critical public opinion played an important part in the transformation of modern democratic life. His account has been complemented by more recent studies, which tackle in more depth the importance of the media’s symbolic dimension.⁴⁷ The power of symbolic activity is thus crucial, as it is ‘a fundamental feature of social life for individuals are constantly engaged in the activity of expressing themselves in symbolic forms and in communicating with one another and exchanging information and symbolic content’. Symbolic power, which ‘stems from the activity of producing, transmitting and receiving meaningful symbolic forms’ needs to be considered as relevant as economic, political and coercive ones.⁴⁸ The issue of how this symbolic dimension really affected public opinion would require an analysis of the processes of reception which, as Thompson recalls, are far from unproblematic.

⁴⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

⁴⁷ Particularly interesting is the work by John B. Thompson, who stands for leaving aside ‘the intuitively plausible idea that communication media serve to transmit information and symbolic content to individuals whose relations to others remain fundamentally unchanged’ to see, instead, that ‘the use of communication media involves the creation of new forms of action and interaction in the social world’. John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), especially p. 4.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 16. As for the different types of power, see especially Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1: *A History of Power from the Beginning to 1760*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Ernest Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History* (London: Collins Harvill, 1988).

INTRODUCTION

It is thus necessary to abandon the idea that citizens are inclined to absorb uncritically the messages and visions transmitted through the media.⁴⁹

Before delving into the last section of this introduction, it is crucial to make some comments on the use of the press as a valid historical source. Given its intrinsic characteristics, the historian needs to take precautions when analysing it, that is, to problematise its genesis and reception and keep in mind that the press' structural changes can have an impact on the processes of communication themselves. The basic rule would thus be to avoid reading the information provided by the press uncritically, as a sort of indisputable truth. On the contrary, it is the historian's duty to contextualise the information taken from the press, consider aspects such as the author's personal background, the group of interests to which he or she belongs and the political affiliation of the journal's owner, among others. The press is undoubtedly one of the most precious sources to analyse nineteenth-century political and social dimensions, for it had the power to echo public opinion and be a privileged testimony of daily events. When analysing the press for academic purposes, and this also applies to parliamentary sources, one has to take into account that as important—if not more—as what is said is *how* it is said. In this sense, the vocabulary, expressions and references employed by the authors to express their ideas become key containers of cultural meaning that need to be carefully tackled. The following chapter will address the context of the press in France in the 1860s.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This thesis is far from a chronological narration of facts related to the interplay between liberals and empire under Napoleon III's rule. It rather seeks to present an analytic, thematic account of the languages and attitudes deployed by French liberals in their conceptualisation of the Second Empire's expansionism in the 1860s. The thesis is split into two main parts. Part I includes the two first chapters and deals, broadly speaking, with the political, chronological, domestic and global context of the dissertation topic. Part II encompasses the three main thematic chapters focusing

⁴⁹ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 25.

particularly on the liberal responses to the Second Empire's expansionist project in relation to the role of France in the world; economy and finances; and religion. Chapters 1 and 2 outline the key political contexts for comprehending the development of liberalism under Bonapartist rule and, therefore, liberals' attitudes towards the Empire's expansionist project in the 1860s. Chapter 1 seeks to rethink the French Second Empire by highlighting both its liberal dimension and the existence of an active liberal galaxy that embraced important political and social arenas through their activity in parliament and the press. I argue that Napoleon III's regime is better comprehensible if one considers it as a continuous struggle between two different, at times even opposed, political ideologies. Some of the Emperor's biographical aspects are key to understanding the ways in which his regime was configured, and the goals it aimed to achieve, especially regarding foreign affairs and colonial policy. The notions of dynastic legitimacy, combined with the pursuit—rather persistent—of social legitimacy profoundly shaped Napoleon III as a singular leader in the nineteenth century, as well as the Bonapartist political tradition to which he belonged. Loyal heir of his uncle Napoleon I, Napoleon III nonetheless sought to make his own mark on France's history. The notions of empire and nation were deeply intertwined in 1860s France. The Empire, understood as either an institutional scheme of government and or as a machinery of power and domination overseas, adopted a clear discursive symbiosis with the values that the nation represented. Both liberals and the Bonapartists contributed decisively to shaping these notions through a rich variety of languages and rhetorical images. Their discussions show the extent to which their notions of France could diverge, and sometimes converge, as they both took the opportunity to channel their deepest political convictions, often built in opposition to each other. It is in this dialectic context that liberalism organised itself around important spheres of action, such as the parliamentary arena and the press. A whole section of this chapter analyses the liberal galaxy in that epoch in France by highlighting its connections to Orleanism and bourgeois economic, intellectual elites. The global context of the 1860s, a decade of important transformations at all levels, serves to provide the needed global context to better understand France's expansionist attempts in that decade and their geostrategic value. For decades, historiography has tended to overlook the imperial role of France between the fall of Napoleon's empire and the Third Republic. France, however, remained an important power at many levels during these years, and the 'French

Imperial Meridian' identified by David Todd was a period of continuity for France's global ambitions. Contrary to what historiography has traditionally argued, France under Napoleon III's reign was a truly imperial power engaged in an ambitious colonial project overseas.

Chapter 2 is intended to highlight the importance of the Second Empire's foreign policy in order to better comprehend the Empire itself and the liberal political culture that developed in France in the 1860s. The aim of the chapter is twofold. On the one hand, it seeks to provide some context on the three overseas ventures chosen to analyse the relationship between liberalism and imperialism in 1860s France, that is, Algeria, Cochinchina and Mexico. Although the Bonapartist mainstream tried hard to present these three ventures as part of a same coherent political project (the one of seeking for France an eminent place on the global stage and defending France's glory worldwide), liberals had different reactions to each venture. Far from presenting an exhaustive and detailed account on each one, I aim to highlight their major political, military and economic implications for the Empire, always dealing with the duality represented by both liberal and Bonapartist approaches to the issue, sometimes convergent, most of the times divergent. On the other hand, I seek to connect these three overseas ventures with the configuration and diffusion of imperial languages and concepts such as glory, greatness and the civilising mission.

Part II presents liberals' viewpoints and attitudes towards the Second Empire's imperialism from a thematic point of view. Chapter 3 investigates liberal perceptions of France's civilisational role and its projection worldwide. Furthermore, the chapter interrogates liberal approaches to the 1860s global context and its guiding principles, especially considering liberal views on international law and the principle of non-intervention. The aim is not only to shed light on the liberal perspective on French imperialism, but also to highlight its interplay with Bonapartism. The two main sides of the political divide must be considered jointly in order to evaluate the extent to which they interacted, converged and/or diverged. Liberal visions on France's political role in the world had much to do with values of realism, moderation, openness and transparency, values that liberals tried hard to oppose to those of Bonapartism, that they related to immorality, corruption and waste. In doing so, I argue, liberals sought to

create their own language and to build their own political image of the nation. Overseas ventures and expansionist projects opened the door to a profound debate on the way in which France should act and present itself in the world. Whereas the Bonapartists tended to overuse the concepts of glory and greatness as justification of their political actions, liberals advocated much more moderated positions. They agreed with the Bonapartists in considering France as a special, even superior, moral and intellectual political entity in the world. Liberals contributed decisively to the formation of a particular policy of patriotism in France and to the development of French nationalism. Liberals were fully committed to France's national progress and development, both domestically and abroad, and indeed shared with the Bonapartists a certain political imaginary. The difference between them came when they conferred to this imaginary a political use. In this case, liberals presented themselves as a prudent option, much more sensitive to the country's needs. Liberals also tried to break the 'patrimonialisation' of concepts that the Bonapartists were making when considering any attack or criticism towards their policies as an attack on *la patrie*. On the contrary, liberals perceived their objections to government actions as very patriotic.

The need of rigorously controlled budgets lay at the heart of the liberal mindset in 1860s France. Indeed, it was one of the major points that differentiated their political standpoint from that of the Bonapartists. Whereas the government did not mind making all the needed economic efforts to fund overseas ventures or 'expéditions lointaines', liberals were much more cautious when it came to approving, for instance, a budgetary increase. In general terms, they criticised the state's uncontrolled expenses. All issues related to the opening of new trade routes, markets, commercial agreements and the fostering of industrial production were at the core of liberals' claims and policies. Economic issues were a sort of hobbyhorse to nineteenth-century liberals. Chapter 4 seeks to highlight the centrality given to economic discourses when debating overseas ventures and imperialist projects.

Chapter 5 examines liberal approaches to religion in a colonial context. Religion was at the core of most European expansionist endeavours in the nineteenth century. Patriotic values had an intimate connection with the defence of Christianity. Together with other much more pragmatic economic and political aims, the defence of religious

INTRODUCTION

missionaries was commonly used as an effective justification for military intervention and, consequently, territorial domination. This was clearly the case of the expedition to Cochinchina, where both Spanish and French missionaries were allegedly suffering from the intolerant practices of Kingdom of Annam. In the case of Algeria, religion also played an important role in the conception and management of the colony. The relationship between French and European settlers—mostly Christian—and both Muslim and Jewish local populations was far from straightforward. Indeed, the religious component (in this case united to racial differences) of the Algerian colonial conflict was inseparable from other political and military actions. In Mexico, the French expedition and later intervention in the country were much less related to the defence of Catholicism but rather driven by a scientific boost. Hence, this chapter investigates liberal visions of the promotion of Christianity in the imperialist/expansionist context. These three aspects were closely linked.

Finally, the conclusion summarises the key dimensions of debate and presents them analytically in order to understand the extent to which liberalism and empire interacted and influenced each other in 1860s France. Certainly, liberals took advantage of the Empire's expansionist policies to channel their political claims in favour of moderation, economic and social progress, respect of law, and the pursuit of a respectable role for France in the world. Liberals reacted differently to different overseas ventures and imperialistic endeavours and managed to adapt their rhetorical discourse to each situation according to their political goals. In general terms, liberals reacted to empire in a way that allowed them to build their own political brand, presenting themselves as a truthful alternative to Bonapartist rule.

Part I

RETHINKING
THE FRENCH SECOND EMPIRE

Chapter 1

New Bonapartism, Liberal Voices and French Expansionism in the Global Context of the 1860s

Continuons à suivre la marche tracée : à l'extérieur, [...] ne faisons entendre la voix de la France que pour le droit et la justice ; à l'intérieur, [...] élevons l'âme et fortifions le corps de la nation.

— Napoléon III, 1865¹

*S'il parle, applaudissez, son verbe est évangile / Il ne peut se tromper, même seul contre mille.
Pourtant il est prudent et souple, quand il faut / Quitte à reprendre après ton encor plus haut.
[...] O Libéral ! Amant des faveurs populaires / O grand publicateur ! Vous l'homme aux circulaires !*

— Anonymous author, 1867²

I. INTRODUCTION

With its lights and shadows, the French Second Empire has generated as much disdain as fascination among students of the period since its rather unexpected, hasty end in 1870.³ As noted in the general introduction, scholars have tended to disregard the political regime which ruled France for eighteen years in the mid-nineteenth century and which indeed represented a sort of *rara avis* in the contemporary European context, halfway between a restricted democracy and a progressive populist empire. Whereas some have tended to exclude Napoleon III's empire from the republican-driven

¹ ASCL 1865, vol. 1, session of 15 February, p. 5.

² *Un Libéral, chanson nouvelle sur l'air du Tra...* (Roubaix: A. Lesguillon, 1867), BNF, YE-53297.

³ The political importance of the Second Empire for the history of France and Europe has been highlighted by Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of French Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), and Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) and previously tackled by Louis Girard, Vincent Wright and Theodore Zeldin. For a historiographical review of recent works on the Second Empire, see Éric Anceau, 'Nouvelles voies de l'historiographie du Second Empire', *Parlement[s]: Revue d'histoire politique*, 3 (2008), pp. 10-26.

historical narrative, others have cheered it as a splendid moment in France's modern history. Some years after the fall of the Second Empire in 1870, liberal thinker and politician Émile Ollivier noted in the introduction to his celebrated *L'empire libéral*, paraphrasing Bossuet, that 'il ne suffit de regarder devant ses yeux, c'est-à-dire de considérer ces grands événements qui décident tout à coup de la fortune des empires. Qui veut entendre à fond les choses humaines doit les reprendre de plus haut'.⁴ This chapter seeks to tackle Napoleon III's regime from a different perspective, placing it within a broader global context of inter-imperial competition in the 1860s and highlighting the importance of the contemporary ideological battle between liberals and Bonapartists, an aspect to which historiography has shown even less interest.

Early historians of the period mainly focused on Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte as the major inspirational figure of a political regime that, as its name indicated, was seen as a direct continuation of Napoleon I's imperial times, disconnected, however, from other republican and monarchic experiences.⁵ During the Third Republic, when most of the historical accounts on the Second Empire were written, the years stretching from the 1851 coup d'état to the defeat of Sedan in 1870 were remembered as years of failure, far away from the proud new republican spirit that had imbued public life. Orleanist historian Pierre de la Gorce or republicans such as Taxile Delord, Charles Seignobos and Ernest Lavisse are among the first scholars who seriously tackled the period, although they did not end the bad reputation that the regime had among the public.⁶

⁴ Émile Ollivier, *L'Empire libéral. Études, récits, souvenirs*, vol. 1 (Paris: Garnier frères, 1895), p. 1.

⁵ Much more recently, Eric Anceau and Pierre Milza have emphasised the idea that Napoleon III's regime must be considered in terms of continuity rather than rupture with contemporary political tradition in France. See Éric Anceau, *Napoléon III. Un Saint-Simon à cheval* (Paris: Tallandier, 2008); and Pierre Milza, *Napoléon III* (Paris: Perrin, 2004).

⁶ Among their main works are: Pierre de la Gorce, *Histoire du Second Empire* (Paris: Plon, 1894-1905) and *Napoléon III et sa politique* (Paris: Plon, 1933); Charles Seignobos, *Histoire de la France contemporaine* (Paris: Hachette, 1922-1933); Ernest Lavisse, *Histoire de France contemporaine, depuis la Révolution jusqu'à la paix de 1919* (Paris: Hachette, 1921-22), especially vol. 6 *La Révolution de 1848-Le Second Empire*, and vol. 7 *Le déclin de l'empire et l'établissement de la Troisième République*. For a discussion of these authors' historiographical contributions, see Hervé Robert, *Le Second Empire: métamorphose ou reniement ?* (La Roche sur Yon: Presses universitaires de l'ICES, 2011) and James F. McMillan, *Napoleon III* (London: Longman, 1991).

The ‘black legend’ of Napoleon III began from the very moment he seized power as president of the Republic in 1848.⁷ Republican, leftist and liberal deputies mistrusted the return of a Bonaparte to the head of state. Victor Hugo certainly was one of those who put more energies towards alerting the French people of the danger of empowering such a ‘timide, inquiète’ man, ‘sans ressemblance avec l’Empereur (Napoleon I)’.⁸ This quote significantly denotes a certain respect for the figure of Napoleon I, who, in spite of his authoritarian, violent policies, was seen as a man of character, able to lead a country. His nephew did not seem to share these features. Hugo’s criticism of Louis-Napoleon reached its peak after the 1851 coup, which he defined as ‘the crime of all crimes’, and which included ‘la trahison dans la conception, le parjure dans l’exécution, le meurtre et l’assassinat dans la lutte, la spoliation, l’escroquerie et le vol dans le triomphe’.⁹ The works by Karl Marx and the series of novels by Émile Zola also contributed to discrediting the regime and to deteriorating its reputation.¹⁰

Yet in the twentieth century, British historians such as Theodore Zeldin and William H. Smith revisited the period, trying to detach themselves from the French political passions.¹¹ In France, a group of scholars under the leadership of Jean Tulard united

⁷ The existence of a black legend has been acknowledged among others by Jean-Claude Yon, *Le Second Empire. Politique, société, culture* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004).

⁸ Victor Hugo, *Œuvres complètes: Napoléon le Petit* (Paris: J. Hetzel et A. Quantin, 1882), p. 5.

⁹ Hugo, *Œuvres complètes: Napoléon le Petit*, p. 14. Hugo’s description of Napoleon III’s personal features is not more benevolent. He portrayed him as a ‘homme de moyenne taille, froid, pâle, lent, qui a l’air de n’être pas tout à fait réveillé [...] un personnage vulgaire, puéril, théâtral et vain [qui] aime la gloriole, le pompon, l’aigrette, la broderie, les paillettes et les passequilles, les grands mots, les grands titres, ce qui sonne, ce qui brille, toutes les verroteries du pouvoir’. See Hugo, *Œuvres complètes: Napoléon le Petit*, p. 28. Hugo’s opposition to Napoleon III has been addressed, among others, by David Baguley, *Napoleon III and his Regime: An Extravaganza* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: State University Press, 2000), pp. 31-47.

¹⁰ See Karl Marx, *Le Dix-huit brumaire de Louis Bonaparte* [translated from German by E. Fortin] (Lille: G. Delory, 1891); and Émile Zola’s several press articles at the newspaper *La Cloche*.

¹¹ Theodore Zeldin has devoted a great part of his academic career to studying the French Second Empire and its main leader, Napoleon III. His works include *The Parliamentarians of the Second Empire* (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1957); *The Political System of Napoleon III* (London: Macmillan, 1958); *Émile Ollivier and the Liberal Empire of Napoleon III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); and *A History of French Passions 1848-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). William H. Smith is author of works such as *Eugénie, impératrice des Français* (Paris: Bartillat, 1998) and *Second Empire and Commune: France 1848-1871* (London: Longman, 1985).

their efforts to ‘rehabilitate’ the Second Empire from its bad reputation,¹² while others, as Philippe Séguin, tried to counteract the Empire’s ‘black legend’ by creating a ‘golden’ one.¹³ Much more recently, an attempt to read nineteenth-century French political history from different lenses has been made, trying to break the sort of ‘republican teleology’ which led to thinking that France’s modern political history was only worthy if it was imbued with republican values. Such a vision took for granted a continuous path towards the establishment of a liberal parliamentary regime from the 1840s onwards.¹⁴ Far from the temptation to ‘condemn’ or ‘rehabilitate’ the Second Empire, a current generation of historians is seeking to analyse the period beyond the constraints of traditional nation-centred historiography. The Second Empire, they claim, was neither a success nor a failure in France’s modern history, but rather a historical period whose diverse domestic and imperialist dimensions still have not been properly tackled.¹⁵

Given the controversial place that the Second Empire occupies within French historiography, this chapter aims to contextualise the thesis’ general goals, that is, to stress the importance of liberals as a main force of opposition to Napoleon III’s regime (without which the regime itself cannot be properly understood); to explore the relationship between liberals and the Bonapartists as representatives of two competing political ideologies; and to analyse the extent to which this competition—rather interplay—affected liberals’ notions and attitudes towards the Second Empire’s expansionist project overseas. As we will learn, liberals in 1860s France did not

¹² The results of their works were published in the collective book: Jean Tulard (ed.), *Pourquoi réhabiliter le Second Empire ?* (Paris: Bernard Giovanangeli, 1998), with the participation of experts in the field such as Maurice Agulhon, Thierry Lentz, Alain Plessis, among others.

¹³ Philippe Séguin, *Louis Napoléon le Grand* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1990). Needless to say, the title that Séguin chose for his work implied that his book was directly addressing Victor Hugo’s account of Napoleon III.

¹⁴ Jean-Luc Mayaud, ‘Le Second Empire: façade économique ou épisode négligeable ?’, in Tulard, *Pourquoi réhabiliter le Second Empire?*, p. 105. A prominent historian who has questioned the existence of this republican teleology in historiography is Pierre Rosanvallon. See his *La monarchie impossible. Les chartes de 1814 et de 1830* (Paris: Fayard, 1994).

¹⁵ An excellent example of this trend is Quentin Deluermoz, *Le crépuscule des révolutions, 1848-1871* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2012), which includes an updated bibliography on the period. This work is the third volume of the collection edited by Johann Chapoutot, *Histoire de la France contemporaine*, the most recent attempt in French historiography aiming to broaden the borders of traditional national history by implementing the methods and approaches of transnational and global history.

conform to an institutionalised political organisation but, as a force of opposition and despite the difficulties created by the regime's censorship, succeeded in developing a genuine political rhetoric which was efficiently deployed in parliament and the press. Their aim, I argue, was to position their political claims as a plausible, positive alternative to the Bonapartist mainstream. Like the Bonapartists, liberals put public opinion at the centre of their demands, becoming wholeheartedly the defenders of common interest.

Colonialism, and in general all aspects related to imperialist ventures, provided liberals with a fruitful space to convey their demands. Commenting on the Empire's expansionist project, liberals developed a rich range of thoughts about its key aspects, such as nation, empire, citizenship, international law, economy, free trade, to name but the most significant. Not only did they reinforce their own ideological corpus, but they also found a way to channel their criticism towards the emperor and his government. The way in which the colonial experience shaped domestic perceptions of politics, and contributed to creating a specific liberal political imaginary of empire, is the focus of my enquiry. Not in vain can the French Second Empire be considered a 'turning point' in the development and expression of French political ideas.¹⁶ The imperial mindset that developed during those years played a key role in the definition of this ideological turn that endured after Napoleon III's fall. The importance of the figure of Napoleon III in the building of a new Bonapartism in the 1850s, the ideological interplay between his regime and the different liberal voices expressed at the time in both parliament and the press, and France's expansionist policies in the global context of the 1860s are the main topics addressed in the following sections.

II. NAPOLEON III, THE EMPIRE AND THE NATION

From 1852 to 1870, between two republics, France returned to the Empire. The Revolution did not extinguish such a distinctive power structure in the nineteenth century; instead, empires were the most common political entities in by the beginning

¹⁶ Alan S. Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 111; Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, p. 3.

of the ‘new’ imperialism in the 1870s.¹⁷ France was not an exception, and shifted from a short republican period to a brand-new imperial era founded upon the figure of its controversial leader, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, who ruled ‘par la grâce de Dieu et la volonté nationale’, as Napoleon III. The self-proclaimed emperor chose a name and a motto with the clear aim of conferring to his newly imperial regime a double source of legitimation: historical and popular. First, the whole Second Empire as an institutional apparatus was based on the previous French imperial experience led by his uncle, Napoleon I, to whose dynastic legitimacy Louis-Napoleon sought to connect. Second, the new Empire did not want to appear as an imposition resulting from an illegitimate political manoeuvre. The aim was rather to both avoid any republican reappraisal and to make sure that the hereditary character of the emperor’s power was not perceived as the rebirth of any feudal right, but as the result of the nation’s will.¹⁸ Indeed, finding the ways to overcome the duel between national sovereignty and dynastic legitimacy was an obsession of Napoleon III. As liberal deputy Jules Simon noted shortly after the fall of the Second Empire, one of the most—if not the most—defining features of Napoleon III’s Bonapartism was precisely its continuous ‘appel au peuple’ (interpellation to the people’s will) as a sign of unity and legitimation.¹⁹

Hence, the Second Empire was a form of power defined from the beginning by its instability and ambiguity. As Juliette Glikman has suggested, it was an ‘imperial democracy’ based on an hereditary legitimacy and the people’s right to vote.²⁰ The introduction of universal male suffrage immediately after the advent of the Empire was key for Napoleon III to gain the vote of most of the peasantry, upon which he

¹⁷ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), p. 332. In the same line of reasoning, Jürgen Osterhammel considers that the nineteenth century was ‘much more an age of empire than an age of nations and nation-states’. See Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 392.

¹⁸ Juliette Glikman, *La monarchie impériale. L’imaginaire politique sous Napoléon III* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2013), p. 163.

¹⁹ Jules Simon, *Souvenirs du 4 Septembre. Origine et chute du Second Empire: le gouvernement de la défense nationale* (Paris: Librairie Illustrée, 1874), p. 22.

²⁰ Glikman, *La monarchie impériale*.

supported his regime in its early years.²¹ Knowing that the people would validate his choices in the elections, the emperor orchestrated a refined system of official candidacies to the Corps législatif, which ensured him the absolute control of the chamber.²² Glikman argues that the Second Empire was not the result of simple Caesarism—a form of political rule based upon a cult of personality of a charismatic strongman—supported by illiterate citizens or subjects, but rather was a complex, controversial and singular political regime. For his part, Pierre Rosanvallon argues that Napoleon III's regime was an 'illiberal democracy', supported by people's suffrage but characterised by lack of important individual liberties, especially in its authoritarian phase. It was a sort of 'accepted tyranny' with clear connections to France's imperial Napoleonic past, which made of it a true 'hybrid regime'.²³

The Emperor and New Bonapartism

Louis Napoleon's life was inevitably marked by the intertwined intrigues of his family. Prisoner of a large amount of mocking gossip about his real paternity, Napoleon III had to deal with doubt about being a true Bonaparte.²⁴ Notwithstanding this fact, he was marked by his lineage. Being officially part of the Bonaparte dynasty conferred to him a particular sense of destiny and historical mission. As a nephew of the emperor Napoleon I, he felt the need to become the guardian of the Napoleonic tradition and to accomplish a renewal project for France 'by combining the outlook of a romantic mystic and the instincts of a political opportunist'.²⁵ The heritage of his lineage and the historical weight of his precursors are undeniable when considering the origins of his

²¹ As for the history of universal suffrage in modern France, see Alain Garrigou, *Histoire sociale du suffrage universel en France, 1848-2000* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002).

²² Zeldin, *The Political System of Napoleon III*, p. 10.

²³ See Pierre Rosanvallon, *La démocratie inachevée* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000); Stuart L. Campbell, *The Second Empire Revisited: A Study in French Historiography* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1978), p. 24.

²⁴ Most biographies of Napoleon III refer to the fact that the emperor's mother loathed her husband and thus avoided sexual contact with him. Louis-Napoleon might therefore be the son of one of his mother's lovers. See John Bierman, *Napoleon III and his Carnival Empire* (London: John Murray Ltd., 1989), p. 3; and McMillan, *Napoleon III*, p. 7.

²⁵ Roger Price, *The French Second Empire. An Anatomy of Political Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 44.

political legitimacy. In other words, Napoleon III cannot be understood separately from the political image built by his uncle.

It is clear that among all the images and myths created to represent values and universal principles in nineteenth-century France, the figure of Napoleon I is one of the most outstanding, from the times of his reign to nowadays. As the rich popular culture created around his figure suggests, the image of Napoleon I has played a key role in French politics. Even today, the figure of the emperor still holds a pre-eminent place in the French, and European, political imaginary.²⁶ In France, the concepts of ‘emperor’ and ‘empire’ immediately related to the first Napoleon and his regime in the early nineteenth century. A sense of institutional continuity marked the foundation of the Second Empire, since, as Louis-Napoleon pointed out in 1852, ‘I have taken as models the political institutions that once before, at the turn of the century, in similar circumstances, gave a new strength to a shaken society and raised France to the height of prosperity and grandeur’.²⁷ The Second Empire, however, is not to be seen as an exact copy of the first one, as Napoleon III’s main political project implied the union of the old Bonapartist tradition with his time’s new political winds.²⁸ In this respect, Theodore Zeldin has noted that Napoleon III succeeded in reading correctly the political context of his days, for he knew that the regime could not remain authoritarian forever. The emperor was aware that his regime, sooner or later, would need to adopt liberal measures to stop any attempt of revolt. Freedom, in Napoleon III’s eyes, was the perfect ‘coronation’ of a regime and not the necessary instrument to build it.²⁹

A turning point to test the regime’s willingness to truly embrace liberal postulates came with the approval of a new constitution in 1852. Proclaimed some weeks after Louis Napoleon’s coup, the new constitution was technically a republican one, as the Empire was not legally established until after the popular referendum which approved, by a

²⁶ See among others the works by Sudhir Hazareesingh, *The Legend of Napoleon* (London: Granta Books, 2005); and Natalie Petiteau, *Écrire la mémoire: les mémorialistes de la Révolution et de l’Empire* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2012) and *Napoléon, de la mythologie à l’histoire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999).

²⁷ Napoleon III as quoted in Price, *French Second Empire*, p. 41.

²⁸ Campbell, *The Second Empire revisited*, p. 11.

²⁹ Zeldin, *The political system of Napoleon III*, pp. 101–2.

large majority, the reestablishment of the imperial dignity in France. The 1852 constitution was described as being ‘quasi-absolutiste’ by the liberal opposition which, some years later, recognised that it had moved in the direction of liberalism, not for the emperor’s exclusive will, but because of ‘la force des choses [...] cette nécessité invincible qui résulte du mouvement et de la pression de l’opinion publique’.³⁰ The constitution remained the same for as long as the Second Empire lasted, although it went through several modifications.

Liberals always tried to make the idea of freedom their own, yet the truth is that the dichotomy between the idea of freedom and the Bonapartist regime proves much more complex than the liberal opposition wanted to recognise. A pamphlet close to the Bonapartist ideological spectrum noted in 1863:

Oui ! La France veut un gouvernement fort ; mais les gens qui n’entendent rien à la politique, ou qui veulent n’y trouver qu’un moyen de satisfaire leurs intérêts, donnent un singulier sens à ce mot. Ils entendent par là un gouvernement qui a dans les mains le plus de moyens possibles de compression ; et ils se croient forts, parce qu’en usant des ressources nationales uniquement pour se maintenir au pouvoir, ils peuvent arrêter l’opinion et enchaîner momentanément la liberté qui se tournerait contre eux.³¹

These utterances reveal a rejection of any form of unjustified authoritarianism and advocate a different way to understand strength in politics. Far from repressing the nation with all means at its disposal, a proper government should rather respect the peoples’ freedom to express themselves in order to avoid extremism and partisan radical thinking. The Empire, according to this line of reasoning, needed to appear as the guarantor of peace, order and basic liberties. In this sense, freedom was seen as a concession from the top and not as a conquest from below.

Un gouvernement qui ne pense qu’à être fort contre la liberté, non-seulement se fait haïr et mépriser de la masse du peuple, mais il a encore cet inconvénient d’éloigner les uns

³⁰ Alfred Darimon, *Histoire de douze ans (1857-1869): Notes et souvenirs* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1883), pp. v-vi.

³¹ Anonymous author, *Les hommes de parti en face de l’Empire* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1863), p. 14.

des autres les esprits extrêmes, de telle sorte que lorsqu'un événement quelconque laisse le champ libre aux passions diverses, tous se traitent en ennemis mortels, en oubliant qu'ils sont avant tout les citoyens d'une même patrie.³² [...] Les hommes d'état qui répriment la liberté et font ainsi, selon nous, un grand tort à l'Empire [car] les partis ne peuvent pas donner la liberté : seul, l'Empire doit la donner et peut la rendre féconde.³³

Despite the efforts that liberals expended to establish a clear distinction between the defence of all kinds of liberties and the Bonapartist regime—which they insistently depicted as being authoritarian—the notion of freedom, as this paragraph exemplifies, also centred the political debate among the Bonapartists and supporters of the regime themselves.

In any case, the ascendancy of Napoleon I in the French political culture over the course of the nineteenth century, especially during the Second Empire, is easily noticeable in public speeches and private accounts at a moment that has been labelled as the 'golden age' for political imagination in France.³⁴ During the Second Empire, France's national day went back again to being celebrated on August 15th, in order to remember Napoleon I's birthday. The political symbolism of this celebration was carefully planned by the government, which sought to create a civil solidarity towards the regime in order to sacralise it, and to reinforce national cohesion.³⁵ Similarly, the anniversary of the Emperor's death on May 5th was remembered with funeral ceremonies at Notre Dame. All Republican symbols and names were removed from the country's public life, making evident the regime's will to highlight its historical and ideological origins.³⁶

³² *Les hommes de parti en face de l'Empire*, p. 15.

³³ *Les hommes de parti en face de l'Empire*, p. 18.

³⁴ Sudhir Hazareesingh, 'Memory and Political Imagination: The Legend of Napoleon Revisited', *French History*, 18/4 (2004), p. 463. As for the importance of commemorative practices in nineteenth-century France, see Sudhir Hazareesingh, *La Saint-Napoléon. Quand le 14 Juillet se fêtait le 15 Août* (Paris: Tallandier, 2007), pp. 14-22; and Alain Corbin, Noëlle Gérôme and Danielle Tartakowsky (eds.), *Les usages politiques des fêtes aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1994). See also Glikman, *La monarchie impériale*, p. 25.

³⁵ Rosemonde Sanson, 'Le 15 août: fête nationale du Second Empire' in Corbin, Gérôme and Tartakowsky, *Les usages politiques des fêtes aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, p. 118.

³⁶ Robert, *Le Second Empire: métamorphose ou reniement ?*, p. 20.

Under Napoleon I's reign, France aimed to dominate Europe by imposing a specific model of state on its European neighbours.³⁷ This tendency, however, changed during the Second Empire, when the regime rather focused on expanding its power—in the form of direct or indirect control—over extra-European territories as a strategy of finding sources of popular legitimation beyond the idea of *légitimité dynastique*. Napoleon III's efforts were addressed to making the Empire not only visible at the international level, but also convincing as a global power. Fully persuaded of his historical mission, the emperor promoted an ambitious plan of foreign expeditions (Chapter 2 will discuss this plan in depth).

These imperialist endeavours had a direct impact on the metropole. As a dynamic imperial power, France excelled for the dynamism of its capital city. The 1860s was the decade of the city of *la Seine*, whose urbanism was profoundly shaped by Baron Haussmann. With its new parks, boulevards, avenues and outstanding buildings, Paris was arguably Europe's most important capital.³⁸ Yet not only urbanism mattered at the time, as Paris strengthened its role as a central space for political power in 1860s France.³⁹ Cafés, literary and political clubs were the centres of a vibrant journalistic, political and cultural life.⁴⁰ In these days, for example, Paris shone as Europe's centre of the international art market.⁴¹ News and spectacle were features of an effervescent epoch for the city and all of France, in which hundreds of new periodicals, pamphlets,

³⁷ There is a vast literature on the Napoleonic era. Examples of works on political and foreign relations include Michael Broers, *Europe Under Napoleon 1799-1815* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Susan P. Conner, *The Age of Napoleon* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004); Geoffrey Ellis, *The Napoleonic Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). As for military endeavours and the First Empire's expansion to neighbouring countries, see for example Charles J. Esdaile, *The French Wars, 1792-1815* (London: Routledge, 2001); Michael Glover, *The Peninsular War, 1807-1814: A Concise Military History* (London: Penguin, 2001, c.1974); and Jean-Clément Martin (ed.), *Napoléon et l'Europe* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2002).

³⁸ A classic, good account on the transformation of Paris under the Second Empire is David H. Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958).

³⁹ Jean El Gammal, *Parcourir Paris du Second Empire à nos jours* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2001), pp. 12–3.

⁴⁰ The literature on Paris under the Second Empire is vast and includes Marc Gaillard, *Paris sous le Second Empire. Au temps de Charles Baudelaire* (Etrepilly: Presses du Village, 2002); El Gammal, *Parcourir Paris du Second Empire à nos jours*; Pierre Pinon, *Paris-Haussmann* (Paris: Pavillon de l'Arsenal-Picard, 4 ed., 1998); and Pierre Pinon, *Paris, biographie d'une capitale* (Paris: Hazan, 1999). As for the cultural, social and political life in Second Empire times see also Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach ou le secret du Second Empire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).

⁴¹ Christophe Charle, *Paris fin de siècle. Culture et politique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998), p. 41.

newspapers and all sorts of publications were spread among an increasingly literate population. As historian Roger Bellet describes:

Les glaces et les terrasses célèbres du Tortoni n’effacent pas les prodigieux creusets de la politique, de la finance, du journalisme et de la littérature que furent ici le Café de Paris, le Café de Madrid et le Café Anglais [...] Poètes, gastronomes, boulevardiers, faiseurs de mots, vaudevillistes, acteurs, journalistes : tous se coudoyaient à la lueur du gaz ou des premiers éclairages au pétrole, ne rechignaient point devant le vin, le café, le tabac et la soupe aux choux, émigraient d’un café à l’autre, en bref vivaient dans cette réalité effervescente et lumineuse de la rue du Second Empire, toute d’apparence et de spectacle... C’est cette rue qui vit la presse : elle vient s’y nourrir, elle vient s’y vendre.⁴²

Political authorities were fully aware of this exciting environment, and tried their best to profit from it.⁴³ As Bellet points out, the press became a truly social actor in the 1860s, a decade of cultural and technological outburst. Public opinion was rapidly shaped by the launching of dozens of new newspapers and journals. The regime understood—as the liberal opposition did, too—that a great battle needed to be fought in the realm of the political imaginary expressed through the press. In its aim to overcome its earlier authoritarian touch, the regime sought to seduce public opinion and to become the people’s voice. The very same strategy was indeed followed by liberals, aware of public opinion’s social power. Expansionist endeavours played a remarkable role in this strategy, for they rapidly became topics of discussion promoted by the press.

⁴² Roger Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967), pp. 31–2.

⁴³ As a leader, Napoleon III particularly recognised the importance of public opinion to sustain power and therefore made sure that all ranks in his regime’s hierarchy did so, too. Moreover, he established a system of secret reports which kept him updated on the people’s opinion on different political and social issues. See Lynn M. Case, *French Opinion on War and Diplomacy during the Second Empire* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972).



FIG. 1. Paris in the 1860s, the Empire's capital in full swing. *L'Illustration*, vol. 39, 1 February 1862.

In order to draw a general view of the Second Empire's global role, it is necessary to rethink the political significance of Bonapartism as an ideological movement and Napoleon III as a leader who embraced imperialism as a way to legitimate and justify his postulates and actions. Napoleon III has been seen as an active representative of the spirit of the nineteenth century—involving support for industrialisation, faith in progress, the struggle between ideologies, the battle between order and movement, political stability, romanticism, realism, and eclecticism—a leader who from the very beginning understood and took advantage of the importance of appearances and images to control power.⁴⁴ The extravagant round of balls and receptions that constituted the Second Empire's *fête impériale* was intended to be a means to bring glamour to the new imperial regime, making it appear at the level of Europe's most deep-rooted monarchies.⁴⁵ Napoleon III was also a figure with an extraordinarily complex personality, which indeed shaped his political role as well as his government

⁴⁴ See Anceau, *Napoléon III: un Saint-Simon à cheval*; and Matthew Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics: Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and the Fête Impériale, 1849-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁴⁵ McMillan, *Napoleon III*, p. 61.

and the regime he inspired.⁴⁶ Without claiming that great men determine exclusively the paths of political history, it is certainly undeniable that the emperor's figure is key to understanding the way in which mid-nineteenth-century Bonapartism dealt with imperialist affairs, for he sought to project the image of being the nation's seeker of glory.⁴⁷

Yet, the Second Empire must not just be seen as the work of a single man, but as a collaborative enterprise with multiple centres of power. Both military and economic elites, together with other power centres capable of political organisation (social groups, political alliances, institutional bodies) marked the boundaries of state action. Nonetheless, Napoleon III's political and social position gave him the role of guarantor of the established social and moral order.⁴⁸ According to his personal writings, Napoleon III sought to create a political regime based on the principles of order, social control, and material and patriotic progress for France.⁴⁹ These were the principles he inherited from his Bonapartist ancestry.

Bonapartism in 1852 was closely linked to the heritage of Revolution, the Napoleonic legend, a certain mistrust in notables, anticlericalism and a desire to defend the threatened order.⁵⁰ Defined by a complex process of transformation from a republic to a hereditary empire, Bonapartism relied on mechanisms of militarisation, and on what has been called 'offensive modernisation'.⁵¹ In this sense, Sudhir Hazareesingh has portrayed the Second Empire as a regime that rested on deep contradictions. He argues

⁴⁶ Robert, *Second Empire: métamorphose ou reniement ?*, p. 33.

⁴⁷ See André Encrevé, *Le Second Empire* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004).

⁴⁸ Price, *The French Second Empire*, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁹ Louis Napoleon Bonaparte indeed wrote several books, pamphlets and journalistic articles. Among his main works, in which he explained his thoughts and plans for the regeneration of France, it is worth mentioning *Des idées napoléoniennes* (1839) and *L'extinction du paupérisme* (1844).

⁵⁰ Frédéric Bluche, *Le Bonapartisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1981), p. 87. Other good syntheses on Bonapartism can be found in Frédéric Bluche, *Le Bonapartisme aux origines de la droite parlementaire* (Paris: Éditions latines, 1980); Cristina Cassina, *Il bonapartismo o la falsa eccezione. Napoleone III, i francesi e la tradizione illiberale* (Roma: Carocci, 2001); Bernard Ménager, *Les Napoléon du peuple* (Paris: Aubier, 1988); Théodore Zeldin, *Histoire des passions françaises*, vol. IV (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981); and René Rémond, *Les droites en France* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1982).

⁵¹ Peter Baher and Melvin Richter (eds.), *Dictatorship in History and Theory: Bonapartism, Caesarism, and Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 9.

that Bonapartism constituted a ‘chameleon’ regime, in between despotism, populism and even proto-republicanism,⁵² a system based on the fierce defence of the national unity around the ‘great family of the state’.⁵³ From the 1840s onwards, the term Bonapartism indeed began to be used to describe a strong nationalistic sentiment and the cult of the leader, and not only to refer to people who were nostalgic for the first empire.⁵⁴ Above all, it would be a term closely related to a dynasty, so defining the specific ideas expressed by the dynasty’s members.⁵⁵ Taking this into account, the definition of Bonapartism is blurred. These ‘ideas formulated by its members’ are different over time and depend on the context in which they developed. Indeed, it can give the impression that Bonapartism was simply a personal adventure of a family, when it was the representation of an important part of the French society, ‘model for some and counter-example for others’.⁵⁶

Moreover, in the times of Napoleon III, Bonapartism began to be influenced by liberalism, since the regime increasingly adopted measures of political liberalisation around 1860, such as the possibility for both the Corps législatif and the Senate to discuss and vote the content of an ‘adresse’ to the emperor in order to support or question the government’s policies. Ministers without portfolios were in charge of commenting on the deputies’ concerns in the chamber. Moreover, the emperor promised to present a new document every year including diplomatic and official information on the Empire’s principal issues.⁵⁷ These political changes affected the parliament’s everyday life in a way that liberals applauded, like Prévost-Paradol, who in the 1860s recognised that ‘les pouvoirs de la Chambre sont tellement changés que nous ne la reconnaissons plus’.⁵⁸

⁵² Sudhir Hazareesingh, ‘Bonapartism as the Progenitor of Democracy. The Paradoxical Case of the French Second Empire’, in Baher and Richter, *Dictatorship in History and Theory*, p. 131.

⁵³ Robert, *Second Empire: métamorphose ou reniement?*, p. 39. See also Glikman, *La monarchie impériale*, p. 299.

⁵⁴ Cassina, *Il bonapartismo o la falsa eccezione*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Bluche, *Le Bonapartisme*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Séguin, *Louis Napoléon le Grand*, cited in Anceau, *Napoléon III, un Saint-Simon à cheval*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Éric Anceau, *Les députés du Second Empire. Prosopographie d’une élite du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000) p. 44.

⁵⁸ *Journal des Débats*, 2 December 1860.

In fact, Bonapartism came to prove that a certain economic and social liberalisation was compatible with social control, avoiding any revolutionary danger. Bonapartism acted as an effective machine of power, although it had to deal with a fairly important internal instability. The defence of France's 'grandeur' and the development of an active authority were features of the regime until its fall. Bonapartism sought to build a regime based on the principle of 'legitimacy', thus all sorts of 'populist' policies were undertaken to gain popular support. According to this, the Empire spread rapidly across continents and oceans, connecting Napoleon III's geopolitical interests in Europe and overseas. The aim was to promote an ambitious imperialist policy presented at home as an expression of the excellence of the French nation.⁵⁹

Empire and Nation

On 31 October 1849, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte announced at the French National Assembly the beginning of 'tout un système [politique]' closely linked to his name, '[qui] est à lui seul tout un programme'. The agenda of the recently elected President of the Second French Republic was clear and ambitious: 'à l'intérieur, ordre, autorité, religion et bien-être du peuple ; à l'extérieur, dignité nationale'. Solemnly, he concluded: 'c'est cette politique que je veux faire triompher, avec l'appui du pays, de l'Assemblée et celui du peuple'.⁶⁰ Bonaparte's claim to guarantee order at home and national dignity abroad remained unchanged during the Second Empire. It indeed became stronger as time went by. Louis Napoleon's claims were representative of the Bonapartist mindset, and predicted his guiding ideological principles over the following years, when he became emperor of the French. The strengthening of the state through a profound belief in the nation and the values that it represented had been a feature of Bonapartism since the time of Napoleon I, the ruler who undertook one of the most ambitious plans to develop and rationalise France on many levels. One way to pursue this aim 'with the country, the Assembly and the people's support', as Louis Napoleon claimed, would be to promote a powerful empire overseas.

⁵⁹ See Robert, *Second Empire: métamorphose ou reniement?*, p. 50.

⁶⁰ Louis Napoleon Bonaparte at the Assemblée Nationale, 31 October 1849, cited in Thierry Dehan, *Les Français sous le Second Empire* (Toulouse: Privat, 2006), p. 8.

Such an aim tells us much about the ideological mindset of Napoleon III and his ambitious plans for France, seen as a way to foster the country's 'national dignity'. Given the specific political and institutional features and the chronological moment in which the French Second Empire developed—when nation-, state-, and empire-building processes were converging at a global level—the use of the concepts of empire and nation by the Second Empire demands a closer examination of the contemporary meanings and interrelatedness of these terms. In 1850s and 1860s France, the concepts of nation and empire were commonly used almost synonymously:

C'est précisément là ce qui fait la force de l'Empire ; c'est qu'il est, par son origine et par son essence, un gouvernement national.⁶¹

La force de l'Empire, c'est d'avoir un passé qui ne le cède en gloire au passé d'aucun parti, c'est de personnifier la France moderne en s'appuyant sur un principe nouveau, c'est de tenir bien haut le drapeau français, en un mot, c'est d'être éminemment national.⁶²

Nation-building processes, ideologies of nationhood, and their relation to globalisation in modern times have become an important field of study for historians. As Sebastian Conrad suggests, late-nineteenth-century globalisation did not undermine the nation state, but made it stronger. The spread of nationalism from the 1880s demonstrates this tendency.⁶³ In France, this process found a clear precedent in the 1860s. References to the nation were continuous in both political and journalistic discourses during the Second Empire. No matter whether they belonged to the spheres of those in power or in the opposition, an invocation to the nation was a common feature of virtually all ideological options at the time. During the Second Empire, the concept of nation—generally understood as the ensemble of the French people, united by a common destiny, historical institutions, and shared language, values and belief systems—entered

⁶¹ *Les hommes de parti en face de l'Empire*, p. 29.

⁶² Anonymous author, *L'Empire et les partis* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862), p. 27.

⁶³ Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 380.

in direct contact with the concept of empire, which was often conceived as the nation's projection into the outer (non-European) world.

Hardly two months before being formally proclaimed emperor, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte clearly stated that 'j'ai, comme l'Empereur, bien des conquêtes à faire' and 'nous [the French] avons d'immenses territoires incultes à défricher, de routes à ouvrir, des ports à creuser, des rivières à rendre navigables, des canaux à terminer'. This explicit reference to promote all manners of conquest showed a clear connection between the ideal of progress and the technical and material development of the nation. Furthermore, these aims could also be read in imperial terms, in terms of 'expansionist' projects abroad. The conquests to which Napoleon III refers, addressed to the 'vast uncultivated territories to be cleared', could also be understood as 'the illiterate colonies to be civilised, or discovered, or enlightened'. I argue that both understandings fitted within the Bonapartist willingness to spread civilisational values abroad, for which Napoleon III needed explicit support from 'vous tous qui m'entourez, qui voulez comme moi le bien de notre patrie', whom he addressed as 'mes soldats', a choice intentionally reminiscent of the first Napoleon and his empire.⁶⁴

The empire was seen as an ambitious project for both promoting national progress and dominating peoples overseas. As suggested, the two aims depended on each other to the extent that imperialist affairs shaped domestic politics and society. Scholars have recently shown great interest in the ways in which empires influenced politics and the people's daily life in the metropole. This way of being 'at home with the empire', as Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose have suggested, opens the door to a new framework for analysing imperial societies in the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ The way in which the empire was perceived by metropolitan populations and the impact that overseas expansion had both on domestic politics and the media has become a well-developed field of history, especially in the British case. The extent to which people thought or acted imperially can best be understood by analysing everyday social and political practices, the role of

⁶⁴ Ministère de l'État, *Discours prononcé par le prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte à Bordeaux, le 9 octobre 1852* (Bouquot, Imprimeur de la Préfecture, 1852).

⁶⁵ Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (eds.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

the media and cultural products such as literary works, songs, caricatures or paintings. Under Napoleon III's reign, empire-making came back to political life. Parliamentary and journalistic sources suggest that the notion of an overseas empire in France during the 1850s and 1860s still had much to do with the idea of prestige, genius and exquisiteness of the French nation expressed in earlier imperial epochs. Empire and nation were controversial concepts whose unclear usage, sometimes intentionally so, was a feature of political discourse.

As Chapter 5 will show, when it came to promoting national consciousness, the Church was also a powerful institution that linked national civilising values with a specific religion. This was certainly the case of Catholicism and French patriotic sentiment with regard to the imperialist projects of Cochinchina, Syria or even Algeria, to name but a few representative examples. In this context, settlers, colonisers and missionaries were key pieces of the civilising mission, for they were supposed to assure the proper conversion or submission of indigenous local people to the new religion.⁶⁶ In the case of Cochinchina, the issue adopted particular relevance, since the defence of Catholicism was not only used as a tool to dominate the local populations but to justify from the very beginning the whole military expedition, and the whole project of establishing a new colony in Asia. 'Il n'appartenait qu'à la France de combattre pour une idée', an anonymous pamphlet pointed out in 1862,

et cette fois encore elle a montré qu'elle était bien le soldat de Dieu. Non-seulement l'Empereur a rendu à la France son prestige passé, mais il s'est appliqué aussi à étendre son influence dans le monde entier. L'expédition de Syrie, celles de Chine et Cochinchine, n'ont été entreprises que dans cette pensée.⁶⁷

These sorts of utterances were common in both the regime's official discourse and its supporters' accounts. France was seen as a superior moral entity called to spread civilising values around the world. With their nuances and differences, the fact remains that liberals and Bonapartists could effectively come together over the idea of empire

⁶⁶ See Owen White and J. P. Daughton, *In God's Empire. French Missionaries and the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶⁷ *L'Empire et les partis*, pp. 33–4.

and nation. And, more importantly, they agreed on the need to fight for spreading the nation's prestige beyond its borders. France's glory and greatness, as the following chapters will show, were directly related to political, economic and religious matters. The battle for its achievement certainly went beyond the limits of the metropole, for the colonies were called to play an important part in it.

III. LIBERAL VOICES IN AN 'ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY'

In October 1862, Henri d'Orléans addressed to his friend Adolphe Thiers a letter of gratitude for his last book on the 1815 Napoleonic campaign, the twentieth volume of the latter's celebrated *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire*.⁶⁸ D'Orléans congratulated Thiers for his efforts in keeping alive the memory of this historical episode, which he defined as 'the last calamity of our history'. With these words, D'Orléans was expressing a veiled criticism of the Bonapartist regime, whose obsession to pursue France's glory always ended by leading the country into disaster. The message came just a decade after the controversial coup that had opened a new imperial era in France under Napoleon III's authoritarian regime. Political liberties were the first and main victims of the new Empire, which for D'Orléans was indeed even more calamitous: 'Bien qu'il y a de craquements de par le monde', he complained to Thiers, 'il n'y a qu'à réclamer la liberté qu'on nous doit'.⁶⁹ A similar view was expressed by Louis Philippe d'Orléans, who also thanked Thiers for the last two volumes of his history of France, in which he had honoured the figure of his father, King Louis Philippe, as a figure 'qui n'eut jamais d'autre pensée que de contribuer à la grandeur et au bonheur du pays'. Louis Philippe claimed to be part of those 'qui ont conservé leur foi dans un avenir libéral', with whom he shared 'entièrement leur manière de voir'.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Published in 1862, this book saw an unprecedented success with more than one million copies sold. Along with the *Histoire de la Révolution française*, the book allowed Thiers to enter the Institut de France and be considered as the 'historian of the nation' by the emperor. See Anceau, *Les députés du Second Empire*, p. 459.

⁶⁹ Henri d'Orléans to Adolphe Thiers, letter dated October 1862, BNF, DM, NAF 20619.

⁷⁰ Louis Philippe d'Orléans to Adolphe Thiers, letter dated 9 December 1860, BNF, DM, NAF 20618.

This example of correspondence tells us much about the liberal galaxy of 1860s France, its members' key political concerns and their socio-economic profile. The two Orléans, members of the family that ruled the country under the so-called July Monarchy until the 1848 Revolution—and that has indeed been identified as one of the main 'sources of liberalism' in France—⁷¹ wrote to a prominent and prestigious politician and historian, leader of the so-called Tiers Parti, a conservative-liberal group of opposition. All of them were members of a well-educated, wealthy bourgeois milieu that had in mind an idealised vision of France's republican past, its achievements and conquests for the French society in its struggle against absolutism and all sorts of authoritarianism.⁷² Their political concerns were indeed in danger in a moment in which a new Bonapartist government was seriously threatening a great amount of individual and social rights and liberties. Their political aims were shared by other groups of opposition, namely the so-called 'Group of Five', as will be shown in what follows. Yet what did it mean to be a liberal in the 1860s? Who were the so-called liberals? A good starting point to answer such questions may be found in contemporaries' views:

D'abord, qu'entend-on par libéraux ? Sauf un petit nombre d'hommes, tous les partis se parent également de ce titre, quoique plusieurs d'entre eux diffèrent complètement de principes, d'opinions et de doctrines [...] Nous déclarons entendre par libéraux tous ceux qui ont adopté les grands principes de la révolution française.⁷³

According to C. de Senneval, who authored an instructive book on the relationship between the Second Empire and liberalism, liberal Bonapartists, Orleanists and republicans, there were three categories of French liberals under the Second Empire. For liberal Bonapartists, freedom, universal suffrage and recognition of Napoleon III as legitimate emperor of France were the main values. In their eyes, only the Bonapartist dynasty was able to ensure freedom and universal suffrage, that is, free participation of the people in public matters through elections. They were convinced that Napoleon III's strength and popularity would improve the nation's greatness and prosperity since

⁷¹ Gabriel de Broglie, *L'Orléanisme: la ressource libérale de la France* (Paris: Perrin, 1980).

⁷² According to Éric Anceau, 61.3% of deputies came from bourgeois milieus, and 31% from aristocracy. See Anceau, *Les députés du Second Empire*, p. 80.

⁷³ C. de Senneval, *Napoléon III et la France libérale* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1861), p. 7.

‘la volonté nationale, promulguée par un Napoléon, est une autorité devant laquelle s’incline le monde’.⁷⁴ The Orleanist’s motto was ‘Il faut que la patrie soit non-seulement heureuse, mais suffisamment glorieuse, et suffisamment libre’. Their differences with the liberal Bonapartists rested on their diverse defences of freedom. Whereas the former defended universal suffrage, the latter considered the right to vote as a sort of privilege which asked for some political education.⁷⁵ The Republicans, finally, rejected both the Orleanist and the Bonapartist dynasties, which they saw as a reminiscence of past times.⁷⁶

Yet the truth is that describing what a liberal during the Second Empire was proves more complex. The difficulty of establishing clear definitions in the political arena was already recognised by contemporaries such as Jules Simon, who in 1869 pointed out that ‘il y a tant de partis en France et tant de divisions au sein des partis qu’il n’y a plus un seul mot du vocabulaire politique qui soit parfaitement clair’.⁷⁷ Even the *Dictionnaire du Second Empire* includes no specific reference to liberalism. When tackling the groups of opposition to the regime, the terms ‘republicans’ and ‘Orleanist’ are preferred, which is indeed evidence of the extent to which liberals (or those attached to liberal values) were a blurred group in 1860s France. In fact, the label *liberal* served to define a rather heterogeneous group of people belonging to very different ideological divides. In the 1860s, however, a reduced but significant group of five deputies gave a strong voice to liberal postulates at the Corps législatif.

Historians have devoted some efforts to shedding light on this blurred historical environment and have provided some explanatory clues. Robert Tombs has suggested that the liberal opposition to Napoleon III was primarily formed by a small elite closely related to Orleanism which refused to support the Empire ‘for reasons of pride and principle’. As he points out, this elite of the nation dominated the French intellectual establishment, were present in the French academy, learned societies and clubs, and

⁷⁴ Senneval, *Napoléon III et la France libérale*, pp. 8-10.

⁷⁵ Senneval, *Napoléon III et la France libérale*, pp. 11-2.

⁷⁶ Senneval, *Napoléon III et la France libérale*, pp. 13-5.

⁷⁷ Cited in Jean Dubois, *Le vocabulaire politique et social en France de 1869 à 1872 à travers les œuvres des écrivains, les revues et les journaux* (Paris: Larousse, 1962), p. 367.

operated in parliament and the quality press.⁷⁸ More importantly, this elite was self-aware of being so and thus fought to ‘rendre le gouvernement à la classe éclairée’⁷⁹ and struggled to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church on society and politics and the state’s interference in their professional domains.⁸⁰ Certainly, during the years the Empire lasted, liberals were the most visible, effective form of opposition to the Bonapartist government. Roger Price has also highlighted liberalism as ‘a more substantial form of opposition’ than that of legitimists and republicans. He describes liberals as belonging to professional milieus, as individuals who tended to found their fundamental ideological underpinnings (defence of individual freedom, private property and social order) on the principles of the Revolution.⁸¹

In a period over-dominated by Bonapartist semantics, forces of opposition—liberal or not—found it difficult to express themselves and to build a coherent ideological corpus. Most of the time, the groups of opposition were indeed perceived, and represented, simply as ‘the opposition’ to the regime, with the aim of blurring their internal differences. The regime’s effort to draw a bipolar political picture, however, was not successful. Among the groups of opposition, monarchical legitimists and republicans, more or less engaged to revolutionary principles, were for example easily distinguishable. Liberals were more blurred.

The Group of Five

The 1857 elections marked a significant change in France’s politics, for a new group of political opposition to Napoleon III’s Second Empire began to be forged: the Group of Five.⁸² These elections proved to be a central moment for the political organisation of the liberal movement, which tried its best to profit from the connections and networks

⁷⁸ Robert Tombs, *France 1814-1914* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 411.

⁷⁹ Antoine Schwartz, *L’Union libérale. Contribution à une sociologie politique des “libéraux” sous le Second Empire* (PhD thesis, University of Paris Ouest Nanterre, 2011), p. 19.

⁸⁰ Schwartz, *L’Union libérale*, p. 20.

⁸¹ Price, *The French Second Empire*, p. 291. For a wider account on liberalism as a form of opposition, see pp. 291-317.

⁸² A detailed, autobiographic account on the origins of the Group of Five in parliament, including examples of contemporary correspondence, can be found at Darimon, *Histoire de douze ans*, pp. 1-47.

it had created in the press world. Émile Ollivier and Alfred Darimon, who had known each other for a long time, were the two first to be elected after being promoted by the liberal publicist Havin, director of *Le Siècle*, who decided that his newspaper could no longer remain impartial before the regime's democratic malpractices. As Darimon recalled some decades later, his nomination caught him by surprise as it seemed to have been orchestrated by Havin and August Nefftzer, a colleague of his also working for Émile de Girardin at *La Presse* and who himself would found *Le Temps* some years later. Nefftzer engaged deeply in the 1857 campaign in favour of opposition candidates. Émile Ollivier, promoted by Ernest Picard—member of the management board of *Le Siècle*—was also part of a plan that he rapidly accepted.⁸³ The *Journal des Débats* soon gave its support to these candidates. The initial idea was to create an 'opposition to the emperor', emulating the opposition to the queen that existed in Great Britain. Nefftzer, who suggested such a label, knew about the fierce reaction that the whole operation would elicit among the regime's official candidates, although he always stood for a legal, constitutional form of opposition. Loyal to their historical tradition, liberals always defended moderation and political centrality as their main defining features.⁸⁴

The group's main goals, according to its founders, were twofold: on the one hand, the Group was meant to give confidence to all men of freedom who, although abhorring the existence of an uncontrolled, irrepressible autocratic regime, 'se tenaient à l'écart plongés dans un désespoir stérile'. On the other hand, the Group sought to change the regime's illiberal nature which considered any will of social independence as an outrage and an attack on the established order. In order to achieve such goals, liberals believed that they needed to avoid any revolutionary social turmoil. Recognising the emperor and his regime's legitimacy was a necessary first step to make their voices heard and respected, or at least not completely rejected from the outset.⁸⁵

⁸³ Alfred Darimon, *Histoire d'un parti: les Cinq sous l'Empire* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1885), pp. 19-22.

⁸⁴ Darimon, *Histoire d'un parti*, p. 38.

⁸⁵ Darimon, *Histoire d'un parti*, pp. 1-2. The origins of the Group of Five and their first actions in the chamber were considered by contemporaries such as Émile de Girardin, *L'Empire avec la liberté* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1859), especially pp. 5-6.

When Ollivier and Darimon first entered the Corps législatif in 1857, they rapidly felt the mistrust that their presence aroused among the rest of the deputies, especially the Bonapartists.⁸⁶ ‘Avant même que nous ayons manifesté nos sentiments, nous sommes classés parmi les opposants systématiques’, declared Darimon, who admitted to having been treated as an intruder deserving neither a greeting nor a smile.⁸⁷ However, contrary to what many seemed to expect, both Ollivier and Darimon took the oath of allegiance to the Empire (‘je jure obéissance à la constitution et fidélité à l’empereur’), as it was recommended to all new deputies in the Corps législatif. This was not an irrelevant detail, but rather a declaration of intent. Most people engaged with radical republicanism and related to leftist revolutionary postulates saw in the oath to the Empire a red line which could not be trespassed, for it represented, they thought, an open, public recognition of the regime’s legitimacy. Among liberals this discussion created some internal trouble, too.⁸⁸ The third deputy of the Group at the time, Hénon—considered ‘un jacobin de la vieille roche, entiché d’idée surannées, qui se pliera difficilement aux exigences d’une politique de conciliation’—⁸⁹ for instance, did not take the oath.

On 27 April that same year, Jules Favre was elected and just one month later, Ernest Picard joined the Group as a result of a ballot vote. The constituent members of this group were surely united by a set of values and ideas and shared a common aim to counteract Bonapartist political power, yet the truth is that they were far from acting as a cohesive, coherent group.⁹⁰ They tried to agree on the sense of their vote with regard to important issues, but allowed each other freedom to act in relation to minor issues. This created different perceptions of what their parliamentary activity needed to look like. On a number of minor issues, they proved unable to resolve their voting intention internally. In general terms, this situation did not weaken their power as a force of opposition, although it created some internal trouble that risked undermining the

⁸⁶ Émile Ollivier, *Le 19 Janvier: Compte-rendu aux électeurs de la 3e circonscription de la Seine* (Paris: A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoven & Cie., 1869), p. 164.

⁸⁷ Darimon, *Histoire d’un parti*, pp. 71, 75.

⁸⁸ Ollivier, *Le 19 Janvier*, p. 109.

⁸⁹ Darimon, *Histoire d’un parti*, p. 75.

⁹⁰ Zeldin, *Émile Ollivier and the Liberal Empire of Napoleon III*, pp. 51–2.

confidence they professed to each other. Picard complained about this ‘absolutely incoherent’ situation and stood for changing it.⁹¹ Ollivier was more optimistic in this respect and tended to diminish the importance of their internal differences. As he recognised years after the Group split, ‘nous nous attachâmes surtout à maintenir l’unité sans tomber dans l’uniformité ; nous cherchâmes l’accord, non la discipline ; les lignes principales tracées, nous laissons chacun de nous libre de suivre ses inspirations propres et de se développer suivant l’impulsion de son individualité’.⁹² They were all good orators, although Jules Favre was probably the most celebrated as, in Theodore Zeldin’s words, he ‘produced an overwhelming impression of vigour, with his vehement, bitter language, and his rich voice echoed in thundering periods’, making people doubt whether he actually had ‘any firm political beliefs, or whether his real interest was not the form rather the content of his speeches’.⁹³

The relationship between liberals and the Bonapartists became even more tense in early 1858, after the so-called ‘Orsini affair’, when a radical ex-Mazzinian attempted to assassinate the emperor and his wife when they were approaching the Opera Garnier in Paris. This event had immediate implications internally as well as for foreign policy (it created problems with Great Britain, since there was a clear connection between Italian nationalists and English radicals—who saw in the French emperor a danger for European politics as someone who embodied the new conservatism—, and accelerated France’s intervention on Italian affairs). The regime turned to more restrictive measures to protect the figure of the emperor from further attempts and to avoid a plausible social turmoil. As the emperor himself declared, ‘le danger, quoi qu’on en dise, n’est pas dans les prérogatives excessives du pouvoir, mais plutôt dans l’absence de lois répressives’.⁹⁴ The deputies of liberal opposition, as Darimon wrote shortly after the affair, saw their situation in the chamber become more difficult, since ‘ce n’est plus de la répulsion que nous inspirons, c’est de la défiance’.⁹⁵ After the Orsini affair, the regime tried to strengthen both the emperor’s personal security and public order and

⁹¹ Darimon, *Histoire d’un parti*, pp. 241–2.

⁹² Ollivier, *Le 19 Janvier*, p. 179.

⁹³ Zeldin, *Émile Ollivier and the Liberal Empire of Napoleon III*, p. 53.

⁹⁴ Napoleon III on 19 January 1858, in Anceau, *Napoléon III, un Saint-Simon à cheval*, p. 277.

⁹⁵ Darimon, *Histoire d’un parti*, p. 103.

took legal steps in this direction, which crystallised in the law of general security. One of the first political issues that the Group of Five had to confront was precisely the adoption of this law, which they proudly combated in name of the ‘principe sacré de la liberté individuelle’.⁹⁶

Émile Ollivier shone as one of the brightest members of this group. Deeply concerned about freedom of the press and freedom of religious conscience, which he considered fundamental aspects of the ‘modern spirit’, Ollivier progressively distanced himself from the rest of the group as he became closer to the Empire’s centres of power until, in 1867, the Group of Five formally broke up.⁹⁷ Ollivier was far from being a revolutionary. He once declared that between the choice of a republican system without liberty and a monarchy with partial freedom he would stand for the second. Ollivier’s standpoint was moderate, far away from any radical postulate. His defence of liberty was resolute and sincere but, as a contemporary wrote in 1864, ‘s’il défendait la liberté, avant tout il respectait la loi’.⁹⁸ This approach to politics indeed caused him some trouble, for his conviction that political freedom could be achieved in the context of a non-democratic empire was increasingly rejected by many opposition deputies, including his closest colleagues. His excessively moderate behaviour, according to many, was incompatible with the duties of an opposition which needed to question the very illiberal foundations of the regime instead of legitimise it. But Ollivier was always clear in stating that ‘je suis venu ici pour défendre la liberté, dans les limites qu’a tracées la Constitution [car] nous voulons perfectionner, élargir, améliorer, et non saper ni détruire’.⁹⁹ In 1869, he also explained to his voters the difference he made between a legitimate and an illegitimate government, which always guided his political action. Given the importance of this distinction, which was at the core of part of the French liberal mindset in the 1860s, his words are worth quoting at length:

⁹⁶ *Cinq députés de l’opposition (Alfred Darimon, Jules Favre, Émile Ollivier, Ernest Picard, Hénon) à leurs électeurs de Paris et de Lyon: compte-rendu de leurs travaux* (Paris, 1863), pp. 1-2.

⁹⁷ Ollivier was very worried about the opinions his electors could have after what he saw as a smear campaign against his political career. He wrote several books in order to explain the reasons for his political choices and standpoints. See Émile Ollivier, *Démocratie et liberté (1861-1867)* (Paris: A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoven & Cie., 1867) and *Le 19 Janvier*.

⁹⁸ Alphonse Daudet, *La trahison d’Émile Ollivier* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1864), p. 6.

⁹⁹ Daudet, *La trahison d’Émile Ollivier*, pp. 5, 7.

À mon avis, la distinction fondamentale entre les gouvernements doit être prise d'un ordre d'idées différent ; je ne connais que deux espèces de gouvernements : les gouvernements dans lesquels le chef se croit un droit propre, dont il délègue ou retient, à son gré, une portion, et les gouvernements dans lesquels le chef n'est qu'un délégué de la nation, pour l'exercice des droits sociaux ; les droits individuels demeurant la propriété exclusive, souveraine, inviolable, de chaque citoyen. Tout gouvernement qui rentre dans la première catégorie est un mal ; on ne doit jamais s'en accommoder ni lui prêter assistance ; contre lui, l'insurrection est légitime ; ceux qui l'attaquent sans succès sont des martyrs ; ceux qui le renversent sont des héros. Dès qu'un gouvernement se range dans la deuxième catégorie, il est légitime ; on doit le reconnaître, l'aider ; contre lui, l'insurrection est un attentat ; ceux qui l'attaquent sans succès sont des perturbateurs ; ceux qui le renversent sont des factieux.¹⁰⁰

His eagerness to not exceed the limits of the constitution and to work for changing the regime from inside were seen as an actual desire to enter the government. Criticism was quick in coming and mistrust among the members of the Group of Five, especially between Ollivier and Favre, grew considerably.¹⁰¹ The latter's entourage went as far as saying that 'Ollivier a été républicain pour être préfet, il devient bonapartiste pour essayer d'être ministre'.¹⁰² Yet Ollivier, even when he was no longer part of it, never disowned the Group: 'j'ai été l'un des Cinq. Ces simples mots vous disent quels ont été mes principes. J'ai été également éloigné de toutes les exagérations, ferme mais modéré, j'ai poursuivi infatigablement, pendant six années, l'alliance de la démocratie et de la liberté'.¹⁰³

Despite considering the Church as a sort of enemy of liberty, Ollivier never declared himself as anti-clerical. Ollivier rather stood for improving society's rights constructively, instead of fostering confrontation and social division.¹⁰⁴ On the occasion of a tense parliamentary session in January 1864, a Bonapartist deputy

¹⁰⁰ Ollivier, *Le 19 Janvier*, p. 119.

¹⁰¹ Darimon, *Histoire de douze ans*, p. 161.

¹⁰² Daudet, *La trahison d'Émile Ollivier*, pp. 21, 27.

¹⁰³ Ollivier, *Le 19 Janvier*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁴ Zeldin, *Émile Ollivier and the Liberal Empire of Napoleon III*, pp. 5, 35.

interrupted him, implying that his words were already known (implicitly suggesting that they were also useless). Making use of his iconic fine rhetoric, Ollivier immediately responded that such a lack of respect for his words was but another good example of the way in which Bonapartism conceived the exchange of political visions in parliament and, indeed, how different the Bonapartists were from him and his liberal counterparts. Ollivier skilfully took advantage of the situation and stated:

Je ne me trouble pas de cette interruption, et je fais remarquer à l'honorable interrupteur qu'elle est le meilleur témoignage qu'il puisse me rendre, à moi et à mes honorables amis. Quand les oppositions sont taquines, misérables et sans avenir, savez-vous comment elles procèdent ? Elles n'ont pas de but, pas de plan systématique ; elles marchent au hasard [...]. Mais quand les oppositions sont honnêtes, consciencieuses et vivaces, elles se donnent un but, et ce but, elles le poursuivent infatigablement. La liberté est notre but, jamais nous ne laisserons de le poursuivre et de vous le rappeler.¹⁰⁵

The way in which Ollivier constructed his sentence was a clear declaration of intentions. The pursuit of freedom was thus a solid political claim in the 1860s that certainly transcended the borders of the parliamentary sphere. The problem for the historian comes not so much from the term 'freedom' itself as from the uses that different political ideologies conferred to it. If Ollivier, as his quote clearly shows, was demarcating liberals as the unique, true defenders of freedom in France, the truth is that the very same concept was part of the Bonapartists' political vocabulary, although they tackled it from a different perspective. 'Ce mot de liberté', deputy Marquis d'Havrincourt argued,

il nous charme ; tous nous l'aimons cette liberté, seulement nous l'aimons avec différentes interprétations. La manière dont Ollivier la demande nous rappelle à nous notre jeunesse aussi ; il y a trente ans nous avons les mêmes aspirations ; nous voulions aussi la liberté et nous l'unissions toujours avec le régime parlementaire.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ ASCL 1864, vol. 2, session of 8 January, p. 278.

¹⁰⁶ ASCL 1865, vol. 2, session of 29 March, p. 119.

The deputy's words were a poisoned dart against liberals. Although showing certain agreement with his opponent, Havrincourt's reference to youth aimed at presenting Ollivier's political ambitions as naïve and immature. His was indeed a well-known, well-used rhetorical strategy—still very present in today's politics—which tries to present the opponent's standpoint not as absolutely mistaken, but rather as uncritical, unrealistic, unpragmatic. Liberals, the deputy noted, always sought to legitimise their positions by claiming that they were acting on behalf of public opinion, representing the views of the silent majority of the people. The Bonapartists saw in this strategy 'le grand argument de tous ceux qui réclament des libertés', and indeed did their best to counteract its effects. As Havrincourt made it clear, if public opinion was the yardstick to measure the legitimacy of a particular policy, Bonapartism was the most legitimate political option, since it was 'cette puissante majorité qui représente vraiment le pays, qui le représente sincèrement'.¹⁰⁷

The Bonapartists' rejection of promoting freedom in the way that liberals wanted is explained by their different understanding of what the country needed. Whereas liberals were fully persuaded, at least theoretically, of the benefits of the free exchange of opinions and information as a way to ensure social progress, the Bonapartists believed instead that this greater good, the nation, needed to be protected from those who sought to destabilise it. Of course, this vision was based on the premise that their own understanding of the nation was the correct one.

Jules Favre, the other big name among liberal deputies, started his career as a lawyer, but when the regime began to liberalise, he moved into politics and was elected deputy for Paris. In 1863, he became the leader of the Republican Party and actively opposed the Mexican expedition. His eloquent and incisive speeches made him gain a seat at the Académie française in 1867. He represented the formalist and liberal type of republicanism, which was far from political radicalism, socialism and materialism. Alfred Darimon spent most of his professional career writing articles for *La Presse*, mainly on economic and financial issues. He was the principal inspiration of the liberal opposition to the Empire's economic and budgetary policy. Defender of free trade and

¹⁰⁷ ASCL 1865, vol. 2, session of 29 March, p. 125.

the Franco-British Commercial Treaty, he contributed actively to the Empire's progressive liberalisation.¹⁰⁸ Ernest Picard was born in a wealthy bourgeois family from which he took his deep liberal culture. As the son of an affluent banker, Picard handled himself well in conservative circles and indeed represented the image of the iconic bourgeois Parisian, of an independent nature, inclined to a moderate, ordered political rebellion. Picard proved to be a refined, provocative orator.¹⁰⁹ His professional career was closely linked to the press, being a major stockholder of the liberal journal *Le Siècle*. From this position he easily got involved in politics, since the press played an important political role in a period in which political parties, groups and associations were still rather unorganised, especially in the nomination of candidates for elections. As a member of the Group, he developed a brilliant parliamentary career, showing great public speaking and technical abilities. In 1863, he contributed to the foundation of the Liberal Union, a political movement that sought to gather all liberal factions in order to gain political presence at both the local and national levels.¹¹⁰

Already in times of the Third Republic, Darimon, as Ollivier, Picard and the rest of the members of the group maintained a proud sense of having played a part in such a small political group 'qui eut, pendant six années, l'insigne honneur d'être le représentant de la conscience publique' and therefore 'a laissé une trace trop profonde dans l'histoire de l'Empire'.¹¹¹ The way in which he claims that the Group was indeed the representative of the people's voice is telling, for liberals in the 1860s proved on several occasions, and in relation to different issues, to be persuaded of their moral superiority and their innate connection with the popular will.

Other Liberal Voices

Apart from the Group of Five and their action in parliament, liberal thinkers and intellectuals who represented an heterogeneous group of people united by their strong

¹⁰⁸ Biographical notes written by Eric Anceau in Jean Tulard, *Dictionnaire du Second Empire* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).

¹⁰⁹ Zeldin, *Émile Ollivier and the Liberal Empire of Napoleon III*, pp. 53–4.

¹¹⁰ Biographical notes written by Maurice Agulhon in Tulard, *Dictionnaire du Second Empire*.

¹¹¹ Alfred Darimon, *Histoire d'un parti: les Cinq sous l'Empire* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1885), p. 1

belief in political freedom tried to channel their political concerns in more structured ways. Unlike what happened in other neighbouring European contexts, like the British or the Spanish, liberals in 1860s France were far from constituting an organised political party. However, important steps were made in this sense. As Édouard Laboulaye's *Le parti libéral* shows, liberals aimed to make their political claims and social visions widely visible.¹¹² An interesting pamphlet showing these ideas is the *Programme démocratique libéral*, which includes information on the private meetings organised from 1866 to 1868 in order to find 'the ideal towards which modern societies tend to go'. The final goal of these meetings may have been to create a major political party, in France (*Parti démocratique libéral*) and abroad, in order to gather everyone committed to liberal ideals under one political roof. The aim was to assemble different 'hommes de toutes professions, anciens membres des assemblées nationale et législative, anciens journalistes, jurisconsultes, philosophes, entrepreneurs, ouvriers'¹¹³ and to collect different opinions and ideas on specific topics, 'the fundamental topics of modern politics'.¹¹⁴ The main values that the movement defended were those of individual freedom, as well as freedoms of religion, philosophy, discussion, education, work and property, the administration of local interests by local inhabitants, the reduction of the permanent army and the real independence of justice. The pamphlet shows the extent to which the debate on liberalism was animated during the 1860s. The fact that a liberal party as such did not exist at that stage proves the 'dispersion' of the liberal message. Moreover, the document makes no reference to imperialism or overseas ventures.

A prominent deputy who contributed decisively to the creation of the Liberal Union was Adolphe Thiers, most renowned for his speech 'Les libertés nécessaires' given at the Corps législatif on January 1864, a manifesto 'où sont exposés, énumérés tous les griefs, tous les vœux, toutes les espérances qui, dans leur ensemble, constituent aujourd'hui le programme de l'opinion libérale'.¹¹⁵ Thiers' words in parliament defending in such a vivid manner the need for French society to organise itself around

¹¹² Édouard Laboulaye, *Le parti libéral. Son programme et son avenir*, 6 ed., (Paris: Charpentier, 1863).

¹¹³ *Programme démocratique libéral* (Paris: Imprimerie Simon Raçon et Cie., 1868), p. 3.

¹¹⁴ *Programme démocratique libéral*, p. 4.

¹¹⁵ *Journal des Débats*, 13 January 1864.

the notion of freedom were applauded by some contemporaries and inspired admiration in generations to come. Jules Favre enthusiastically praised Thiers' performance in the chamber, where '[c]e n'est pas seulement la gloire de l'orateur qui vous récompense de votre sacrifice et de votre courage, c'est la conviction où vous devez être de l'immense service que vous rendez à la cause de la liberté'.¹¹⁶ Thiers' 'Les libertés nécessaires' and his other most significant political speeches were rapidly published and distributed among his acquaintances and friends. The Empire's regime of censorship could have made it difficult for the opposition to spread their ideas across society, but could not prevent liberal elites from building up their network. That very same year, Henri d'Orléans also congratulated Thiers for his inspiring efforts to defend freedom, and the striking, vivid 'souffle libéral [et] l'esprit pratique qu'on retrouve dans chacune de ces brillantes improvisations'.¹¹⁷ He was one of the most important and active members of the liberal Orleanist opposition to Napoleon III. His speeches and writings are important, as they convey both the spirit of liberal opposition to the Second Empire and a view of the liberal understanding of the concept of civilisation. In this respect, he declared:

À mesure que l'homme se développe, il devient plus attaché à ce qu'il possède, plus propriétaire en un mot. À l'état barbare, il l'est à peine ; à l'état civilisé, il l'est avec passion... C'est par lui que Dieu a civilisé le monde, et mené l'homme du désert à la cité, de la cruauté à la douceur, de l'ignorance au savoir, de la barbarie à la civilisation.¹¹⁸

Another thinker who represented the Orleanist liberal branch was Lucien Prévost-Paradol.¹¹⁹ Politician, writer, journalist, and member of the Académie française, he wrote for *Le courrier du dimanche* and *La Presse*. Ambassador in Washington, he devoted his journalistic career mainly to covering political topics and wrote profusely on foreign affairs, distrusting the principle of nationalities defended by Napoleon III. He was a

¹¹⁶ Jules Favre to Adolphe Thiers, letter dated 6 May 1864, BNF, DM, NAF 20619.

¹¹⁷ Henri d'Orléans to Adolphe Thiers, letter dated 26 July 1864, BNF, DM, NAF 20619.

¹¹⁸ Adolphe Thiers, *Petits traités publiés par l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, quoted in Reuel A. Lochore, *History of the Idea of Civilization in France (1830-1870)* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid, 1935), p. 90.

¹¹⁹ A classic work on this prominent liberal is Pierre Guiral, *Prévost-Paradol 1829-1870. Pensée et action d'un libéral sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1955).

liberal fiercely opposed to the Empire and a great admirer of Great Britain.¹²⁰ Along with the liberal mindset these deputies and publicists represented, liberal ideas were defended by other so-called liberals ‘de la voie étroite’, such as Michel Chevalier, who considered himself a defender of liberty against socialist principles and, above all, of economic freedom. Chevalier represented, better than anyone else, the complexities and ambiguities of the liberal label. His personal career reminds us that being a liberal in the 1860s led to heterogeneous and even conflicting positions.¹²¹

Lawyer, economist and journalist Jules Duval was a fierce defender of colonisation of Algeria. Until 1862, he was a settler in the colony himself, where he participated in politics. His own experience as a settler surely shaped his strong standpoints in favour of French settlers’ rights and against Napoleon III’s Arab policy in Algeria. Duval was originally involved with Fourierist projects although, in the 1860s, he was very well connected to liberal economic and journalistic circles. His contribution as a journalist to *Le Journal des Débats* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, two pillars of French liberal thinking in the 1860s, made him a respected voice among liberal networks for his defence of trade and economic development. Duval’s book *Notre patrie* was applauded by August Nefftzter’s *Le Temps* and his close friend Édouard Laboulaye—a renowned liberal—praised him for his ‘useful ideas’. Although not being a self-declared liberal, Duval’s standpoints will be used throughout the dissertation as an example of what liberal circles thought about certain topics, especially in relation to economy and French expansionism in Algeria.

Censorship and Freedom of the Press

During the Second Empire, France lived under a regime of censorship. The government’s control and repression of anything related to freedom of speech and published information was implemented in multifarious ways. Especially in its first years, the Empire excelled at deploying such a regime of censorship, taking advantage

¹²⁰ André Jardin, *Histoire du libéralisme politique, de la crise de l’absolutisme à la constitution de 1875* (Paris: Hachette, 1985), pp. 376–7.

¹²¹ Schwartz, *L’Union libérale*, p. 97.

of the fact that, in 1852, more than half of the population was illiterate.¹²² Despite the measures of political and economic liberalisation undertaken mainly from 1860 onwards, social control always remained a defining feature of Napoleon III's regime. French liberals' constant efforts to conquer new spaces of individual and social freedom in the 1860s can only be explained by the persistence of the new Bonapartist regime in monitoring both the private and public spheres of life. It was precisely the very concept of freedom and the different approaches to the way in which it had to be developed, fostered and respected that defined the development of competing liberal and Bonapartist political ideologies.

Liberals were strong defenders of freedom of the press, which they considered to be the guardian of political freedom, 'la garantie des autres libertés, le gouvernement de la nation par la nation', as Ernest Picard solemnly noted.¹²³ The press was seen as a key element in any modern and liberal state, as the natural intermediary between citizens and their political representatives, and so liberals made great efforts to vindicate it in public debate.¹²⁴ Adolphe Thiers expressed this idea in a passionate speech in parliament:

Grâce en effet à la liberté de la presse, la pensée du pays se forme, se dégage ; grâce à la liberté des élections, elle se communique aux représentants légaux du pays, grâce à la liberté de règne dans le Parlement, cette pensée se communique aux dépositaires de l'autorité publique [...] et alors vous voyez la nation, être multiple et collectif, agir comme un individu qui pense, délibère, hésite, est agité, troublé même, mais qui se décide enfin, forme des résolutions et les exécute.¹²⁵

In Second Empire France, however, not only was the situation of freedom of the press very poor to liberal standards, but so was the capacity of large sections of the population—namely in the countryside—to read any press other than the official.

¹²² Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire*, pp. 25, 33.

¹²³ Papiers Ernest Picard, BNF, DM, NAF 24372.

¹²⁴ Schwartz, *L'Union libérale*, p. 215. See also the entry of 1861 in Émile Ollivier's personal diary AN 542AP/5, where he considers freedom of the press and freedom of conscience as fundamental ingredients of the 'modern spirit'.

¹²⁵ ASCL 1866, vol. 1, session of 26 February, p. 216.

Centralist Republican deputy Eugène Vacherot urged to deliver ‘le peuple des campagnes’ from the Bonapartist’s overwhelming influence.¹²⁶ ‘C’est notre plus grand intérêt’, he wrote in his personal papers, ‘de travailler [pour] l’initier dans la vie politique. La presse quotidienne lui est difficilement accessible, il faut créer pour lui une presse nouvelle, brève, simple, résumant les faits qu’il lui importe de connaître’.¹²⁷ The omnipresence of the Bonapartist press under the Second Empire became a matter of concern for the liberal, and not strictly liberal, opposition to the regime, which was fully aware of the strong power that newspapers, journals and other sorts of publications could exert over public opinion.

Freedom of the press was thus seen as a fundamental step towards achieving a veritable liberal and democratic society. To liberals, its defence implied a hard struggle across the 1860s. Napoleon III’s regime coincided with a period of great development of all sorts of journals, magazines, newspapers and pamphlets. The regime was aware of the great influence these media could exert on society and therefore tried to monitor them as much as possible. As L. Comermin vividly pointed out in 1867:

Où le livre ne pénètre pas, le journal arrive. Où le journal n’arrive pas, le pamphlet circule. Il court, il mont l’escalier du grand salon. Il grimpe sous les tuiles par l’échelle de la mansarde. Il entre, sans se heurter, sous la basse porte des chaumières et des huttes enfumées. Échoppes, ateliers, tapis verts, âtres, guéridons, escabeaux, il est partout.¹²⁸

Probably imbued with a similar perception of what journals and pamphlets represented for 1860s French society, the imperial government tried to regulate their circulation in the context of what Lucien Jaume has defined as ‘one of the hardest-fought battles of the nineteenth century’. As he reminds us, between 1814 and 1880, almost forty ‘freedom of the press’ laws were voted on in France, including the four decrees

¹²⁶ The political figure of Eugène Vacherot has been highlighted by Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially pp. 129–65.

¹²⁷ Papiers Eugène Vacherot, BNF, DM, NAF 21598.

¹²⁸ L. M. Cormemin, 1867, as quoted in Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire*, p. 37.

promulgated under Napoleon III.¹²⁹ The government's task surely was ambitious and complicated, as by the mid 1860s, there were some 300 political journals in France, 60 of those alone based in Paris.¹³⁰

The 1852 constitution included no specific clauses on the press. Only in February 1852 an imperial decree conferred on the press a preventive and repressive condition, which placed its control exclusively into the hands of the government. Every new journal needed specific governmental approval, to be renewed every time there was a change of editor. All political journals had to contribute to costs with a particular tax.¹³¹ In 1868, with the promulgation of a new bill, the regime of the press turned more flexible, although things remained complicated for the political press because every article, especially those engaging in controversial issues, had to be reviewed by censors twenty-four hours before being published. The liberalisation of the Empire was an ongoing process that was unable to guarantee real freedom of expression.¹³² The Empire's government not only implemented measures of direct censorship, but also promoted the journalists' and editors' self-censorship as it favoured economically those who did not cross the 'red lines' and pressured them under the threat of applying repressive measures.¹³³ Liberals considered these legal endeavours as an intolerable attack against the people's right to freely access information.

Nevertheless, the press experienced a great transformation under the Second Empire, becoming a truly professionalised industry.¹³⁴ Technical improvements, combined with the growth of cities and increasing levels of literacy, provided the press with a much wider public and, thus, with much greater power. Professionals of the press acquired greater prestige and social recognition under the Second Empire because political elites

¹²⁹ Lucien Jaume, 'The Unity, Diversity and Paradoxes of French Liberalism', in Raf Geenens and Helena Rosenblatt (eds.), *French Liberalism from Montesquieu to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 48–9. The importance of the press in the nineteenth century has also been highlighted by Éric Anceau, *Les députés du Second Empire*, p. 339. He also points out how controlling journalists was among the first measures the Regime undertook after the 1851 coup.

¹³⁰ Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire*, p. 66.

¹³¹ Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire*, p. 13.

¹³² Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire*, p. 18.

¹³³ Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire*, pp. 24–5.

¹³⁴ See Christophe Charle, *Le siècle de la presse, 1830-1939* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004).

began to see in the press a source of social influence.¹³⁵ Seen as a tool to both maintain order and legitimise power, and to create disorder and delegitimise authority, the press gained importance rapidly in the 1860s in the central scene of political debate.

Liberals struggled to achieve a greater degree of individual freedom against a regime whose belief system was the contrary to their desires. However, the Bonapartists also believed in freedom—yet a regulated, controlled, monitored one. Unlimited freedom of the press could indeed be a threat to society; unrestrained individual freedom could threaten the right of all, since individual excesses could jeopardise public order and social peace, as Napoleon III said in 1852 on the occasion of the opening of the legislative session.

Liberals' criticism of the Empire found a particularly fruitful way of expression in the domain of expansionism and colonialism, since they firmly combated costly military ventures, such as those in the Far East and Mexico, which seriously put the Empire's budgetary balance at risk. By 1863, Mexico was going through difficult times politically. Napoleon III's determination to politically subjugate the country by imposing a foreign prince as head of state had to confront the fierce opposition of the vast majority of the Mexican people, including those who the French thought would be supportive of the emperor's cause. Anticipating what indeed was a very troubled experience, the government tried to take the Mexican question out of the focus of the media in France, trying desperately to keep public opinion away from the bad influences that the press purportedly was having on society. With this in mind, the government wanted to ban the publication of parliamentary proceedings. Liberal deputy Ernest Picard reacted against this measure, reminding the government that the French constitution protected the right of all citizens to access the content of the political debates in the chamber.¹³⁶ This confrontation was not isolated. Rather, it represented the daily bread of a battle between two opposing visions of French politics and society: that of those who claimed

¹³⁵ Schwartz, *L'Union libérale*, p. 39.

¹³⁶ Picard defended the right to publish the proceedings of the political debates held in the Corps législatif as a way to ensure the existence of a well-informed public opinion in France, necessary feature of any advanced society. See CRCL 1863, unique vol., session of 9 February, p. 158.

that freedom had to be limited for the greater good, and that of those who considered that the greater good could not be achieved without unrestrained freedom.

Significantly, a Bonapartist deputy connected the turbulent French political scene in the nineteenth century to the freedom of the press. Among all the liberties that liberals sought to achieve, freedom of the press was probably the most urgent and, at the same time, the most contested by the Bonapartists. ‘Il ne me coûte pas de dire que j’aime mieux cent fois le régime actuel que la liberté illimitée’, argued the Bonapartist deputy, defending a regime where freedom is regulated, limited and monitored in order to ensure the good development of the country. Again, this does not mean an absolute lack of freedom, which he indeed considered as a good asset of the Empire. In this respect, he reacted against a controversial statement by Jules Favre, who in the past had declared that in France there was but a mute, sycophant, corrupted press and that all journals were the echo of government thinking. As he added, ‘[d]ire aussi qu’il n’y a en France, comme l’a proclamé un jour Jules Favre, qu’un journaliste, et que ce journaliste c’est l’Empereur, c’est se heurter contre l’évidence’.¹³⁷

All the matters related to the press and freedom of the press were fundamental both for liberals, who were aware of the need to foster the free diffusion of ideas to strengthen their political project, and the Bonapartists, who were equally concerned about the power of the press and the way in which it could jeopardise their political hegemony. The battle of dialectics between these two political ideologies had much to do with the development of the periodical press, and with their own conception of the social role they were meant to play. The configuration of liberalism as a convincing alternative to the Empire in the 1860s was likewise linked to the very same process. A deputy in parliament summarised the different visions about the press:

La presse périodique est un instrument d’une liberté admirable ; il est juste d’avoir de son pouvoir une grande idée. La presse a rendu la tyrannie impossible, même dans les pays soumis à une monarchie absolue. Elle étend son action des lieux où elle règne où elle

¹³⁷ ASCL 1865, vol. 2, session of 30 March, p. 170.

règne jusque sur ceux où on la craint en la proscrivant. Il suffit qu'elle soit libre quelque part pour qu'elle protège partout la raison et l'humanité.

At the same time, moreover, the press was presented as a powerful tool to

passionner les esprits, de les diriger, de les pousser au bien comme au mal, de les grouper autour des lois ou de les lancer dans les révolutions ; qu'elle est à la fois ce qu'il y a de meilleur et ce qu'il y a de pire. [...] La presse est donc comme toutes les puissances de ce monde, il lui faut un frein.¹³⁸

IV. FRENCH EXPANSIONISM IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF THE 1860S

Geopolitics and thus the conception of global political interactions were conceived in the 1860s from the prism of European superiority over non-European peoples. Values of modernity and civilisation were tightly linked to this vision. Almost from the very beginning, the French Second Empire put into practice an ambitious policy of political, territorial and economic expansion. Liberal understandings of the Second Empire's expansionism in the 1860s were generally based on mistrust towards government endeavours, although important nuances can be seen in the way in which liberal deputies and publicists perceived the regime's colonial expansion.

The French empire assumed a prominent position in the mid-nineteenth-century Europe imperial context. One of the architects of the 'Scramble for Africa' during the last decades of the century,¹³⁹ France was able to build a vast empire based on both formal and informal ways of controlling foreign territories.¹⁴⁰ To understand the

¹³⁸ Lafond de Saint-Mûr, ASCL 1865, vol. 2, session of 31 March, p. 171. The very same day, deputy Guérault noted: 'Quand un journal est modéré, quand il exprime la vérité d'une situation, il n'est pas seulement puissant, il est invincible'.

¹³⁹ As for the so-called 'Scramble for Africa', see Muriel Evelyn Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa* (Harlow: Longman, 2010).

¹⁴⁰ Whereas the study of 'informal imperialism'—concept which was developed as an analytical tool for the study of nineteenth-century imperialism by Robinson and Gallagher—has produced a vast literature focusing on the British Empire, scholars have not used the term with regard to the French case until very recently. See Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, 'The Imperialism of Free

reasons for such an imperialist deployment across continents and oceans, it is necessary to connect it to previous imperial periods in France's history, as well as to take into account old rivalries of empires in the nineteenth century. These periods are tightly linked to the imperial mindset fostered by Napoleon I and his Bonapartist lineage, continued by his nephew nearly forty years later.

David Todd has pointed out that France's imperial ambitions in the nineteenth century, especially during the period stretching from the fall of Napoleon I's empire and the advent of the Third Republic, can no longer be seen as hesitant or unstable. On the contrary, he convincingly argues that these ambitions were determined and straightforward, proof of a true willingness to be a decisive actor on the geopolitical chessboard. This 'French Imperial Meridian', recovering Bayly's terminology, in the sense of a historical chasm between two classical periods of imperial expansion, was a critical period to assess the development of French expansionism in the mid-nineteenth-century.¹⁴¹ The reason why historians have tended to overlook France's expansionism in the 1860s may be found in the long tradition of French historiography of considering Napoleon III's reign as a sort of 'historical mistake', as a period that interrupted an alleged teleological path towards the Republic. Thus, what France accomplished during the years of Louis Bonaparte's reign has remained somewhat hidden and over-shadowed by the great enterprises of republican periods.¹⁴²

'L'Empire c'est la paix' was one of the French Second Empire's most celebrated maxims.¹⁴³ Nonetheless, the empire which defined itself by its peaceful character was in fact plunged into a number of military endeavours overseas. Expeditions to New Caledonia (1854); Senegal (1853–6); Cochinchina (1858); Syria (1860–1); Indochina (1862); new experiments in governing Algeria (1858–65); the economic penetration in virtually all of the Mediterranean area, the Suez Canal—France's most famous and co-operative venture—(1859), and wars in China (1858 and 1860), among others, marked

Trade', *The Economic History Review*, 6/1 (1953), pp. 1-15; and Edward Shawcross, 'When Montevideo Was French: European Civilization and French Imperial Ambitions in the River Plate, 1838–52', *European History Quarterly*, 45/4 (2015), p. 639.

¹⁴¹ David Todd, 'A French Imperial Meridian, 1814-1870', *Past and Present*, 210/1 (2011), p. 155.

¹⁴² Todd, 'A French Imperial Meridian', p. 158.

¹⁴³ Ministère de l'État, *Discours prononcé par le prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte à Bordeaux*.

France's imperial policy, which was if not always fruitful, at least impressive in its extent and variety.¹⁴⁴

The colonisation of Algeria aside, which as a matter of fact finds its origins in the 1830s, two of the most representative and important imperialist endeavours under Napoleon III were the 1858 expedition to Cochinchina and the intervention in Mexico in 1861. These cases are representative of two different types of imperialism, in terms of both their conception and their motivation. In Cochinchina, the French sought direct control of the territory and the application of a conventional colonial system based on the exploitation of natural resources, in what could be seen as a classical example of formal imperialism. In Mexico, France aimed instead to establish a dependent government that would facilitate the implementation of its economic and geopolitical interests in the region.

It has been argued that a fundamental feature of Napoleon III's foreign policy was the notion of sharing ideas and civilisation;¹⁴⁵ thus, the Mexican campaign carried out in conjunction with Britain and Spain was an ideal opportunity to further develop his relations with his neighbours and to pursue the goal of a united Europe.¹⁴⁶ Such a line of reasoning rejects other traditional arguments (economic, religious, patriotic) to explain the French intervention in Mexico. Some scholars have questioned this interpretation by highlighting the weakness of an argument claiming that Napoleon did not have in mind any change of government in Mexico when he decided to conquer the country.¹⁴⁷ I argue that Napoleon was clearly seeking France's influence in Europe and the world, which explains his desire to promote an ambitious imperialist and expansionist plan in Europe, Asia and America. It is important to recognise that the Second Empire's imperialist project focused not only on extra-European territories. It also sought to become a leading power in Europe by participating actively in some of

¹⁴⁴ J. P. T. Bury, *Napoleon III and the Second Empire*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 132-3.

¹⁴⁵ Michele Cunningham, *Mexico and the Foreign Policy of Napoleon III* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ Cunningham, *Mexico and Foreign Policy*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ Ann Pottinger Saab, review of Michele Cunningham, *Mexico and the Foreign Policy of Napoleon III*, *The International History Review*, 24/2 (2002), p. 429.

the most significant political events at the time. The Italian Unification decisively marked Napoleon III's agenda and came to demonstrate the extent to which the two aspects of the Second Empire's foreign policy—in Europe and overseas—informed and affected each other.

The 1860s was a turbulent decade characterised by numerous upheavals and a generalised political and social change. Between the revolutions of 1848 and the onset of high imperialism from circa 1870 onwards, the 1860s were the time of a troublesome transition towards democracy in Europe and the Western world. The consolidation of British imperial power, the processes of unification initiated or achieved in Germany and Italy respectively, France's willingness to strengthen its worldwide presence and the American Civil War (1861–65) are, to name but a few examples, events and movements that marked this decade of political shifts. As for geopolitical dynamics, the 1860s can be defined among others by the imperial triangle of power and the 'tense collaboration' between the French, British and Spanish empires, exercised through military but also economic and cultural ways.¹⁴⁸ Mid-nineteenth-century European international relations have largely been seen as a competition of autonomous and well-defined political structures. Following this line of reasoning, both nation-states and empires—and very often a combination of both—were fighting in what A. J. P. Taylor, writing in the early 1970s, called the 'struggle for mastery'.¹⁴⁹ These politics of rivalry were important during the 1850s and the 1860s, even though international relations and the imperial interplay were not only based on them.

According to Taylor, sovereign states in Europe had maintained a 'balance of power' determined principally by war since the fifteenth century, a balance ended by the International Communist and the League of Nations.¹⁵⁰ But surprisingly, Europe's relations with the outer world are not considered and have also tended to be overlooked in later scholarly works. Taylor's statements, essential for many historians

¹⁴⁸ Alfred W. McCoy, Josep Fradera, Stephen Jacobson (eds.), *Endless Empire: Spain's Retreat, Europe's Eclipse, America's Decline* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

¹⁴⁹ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe*, p. xxi.

for decades, over-exaggerate the importance of the nation-state as a political structure, and they also deny other forms of interaction between states and empires beyond the continuous struggle for power and balance. Indeed, Taylor's statements should be considered in their historical context, since he made them a few decades after the Second World War, when the European unification project was still in an early stage, and the weight of nation-centred conceptions in history were predominant. These visions have recently been challenged.¹⁵¹ It is plausible to consider that the relationship between European powers also took place on a co-operative basis, implying at the same time processes of imitation and emulation. As David Todd has noted, this was the case of the Franco-British relationship in the mid-nineteenth century, when the two empires undertook joint ventures overseas in alliance 'as representatives of Western civilisation against "barbarian" Orientals, or to restore order in Latin America'. The 'co-operative emulation' resulting from this mutual collaboration drove the two countries to strengthen their military and political power worldwide.¹⁵² However, the British and French empires maintained a notable struggle at both the military and diplomatic levels, in spite of some optimistic voices claiming that 'alliance anglo-française est un chef-d'œuvre de la science diplomatique, qui mérite bien d'être rangée à côté des premières inventions du génie dont fasse mention l'histoire et tous les peuples de l'univers'.¹⁵³

The 1860s global context was anything but peaceful. Tension and competition between empires were common features of international relations at the time. Yet neither tension nor competitiveness implied isolation. Rather, isolation often leads to insignificance, which by no means is, nor was, a good position in the global context. Avoiding insignificance was precisely what encouraged European powers to maintain a constant tension for power, based on both direct clash and implicit or explicit collaboration. Lord Palmerston—the liberal British Prime Minister during the first half of the 1860s—had illustrated this variable, pragmatic strategy in a celebrated quote: 'we

¹⁵¹ Imperial history has drastically evolved in the last decades towards a much more inter-related conception of empires in modern times. A significant example of this evolution is Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*.

¹⁵² Todd, 'A French Imperial Meridian', pp. 162–3.

¹⁵³ Anonymous author, *La France libérale en face l'Europe* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1860), pp. 3–4.

have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies; our interests are eternal and perpetual'.¹⁵⁴

Technology and the Arms Race

In the 1860s, technological discoveries and important advances in communication changed the way in which relations between countries and peoples were conceived. The first transatlantic telegraph cable laid in 1866 brought America and Europe much closer, and important advances in military industry, such as the invention of the submarine in 1863, altered the way to face wars and conflicts.¹⁵⁵ France's greatest contribution in terms of infrastructures was the construction of the Suez Canal during the 1860s, grandiosely inaugurated by Empress Eugenie in 1869. This magnificent work profoundly altered commercial and economic life, since Asia and the Mediterranean truly became neighbours.¹⁵⁶ The world, taking the commonplace phrase used to describe globalisation, became smaller and faster. It also became stronger and more dangerous, since techniques of war became more sophisticated with the construction of new iron and steel warships, in the context of a real 'arms race'.

On 24 November 1859, an imposing ironclad warship was launched at the arsenal of Mourrillon, on the southeastern French coast of Toulon. *La Gloire*, as the vessel was called, astonished the world with its technical features. Almost seventy-eight meters long and seventeen meters of beam in a ship able to host up to 570 men were, among others, the most impressive characteristics seen in a warship up to that moment. The launching of *La Gloire* was the result of the recent progressive development of French military industry. An eagerness to increase and strengthen France's worldwide power was expressed, more or less implicitly, by all the Second Empire's high-ranking figures, from the emperor himself to a wide range of military or political elites. To realise this ambitious endeavour, public investment in military technology was compulsory, and

¹⁵⁴ Speech to the House of Commons. Hansard, series 3, vol. 97, 1 March 1848, p. 122.

¹⁵⁵ Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), pp. 153, 177–8.

¹⁵⁶ Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*, p. 35. See also Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

indeed became a priority for the new Napoleonic regime. ‘C’est grâce à ce déploiement de force que la France a pu montrer sa grandeur et pourrait encore, s’il le fallait, maintenir sa fierté en face de quiconque essaierait de porter ombrage à sa politique’, proudly claimed a leading representative of the Empire when asked about the military budget’s progressive increase.¹⁵⁷

La Gloire was a perfect expression of such pride. Neither the decision of building the ship nor the name itself were haphazard. As a matter of fact, beyond satisfying the military needs of the time, the ‘glorious’ warship was built not to fall into oblivion. It was made to become a national symbol—imperial first, republican later, but always national. It is not surprising that a model of such a unique piece is hosted today at the Museum of the Army in Paris, with the motto *Honneur et Patrie* clearly presiding over the scene. These two concepts, appealing to military and patriotic values and familiar to contemporaries, came to define quite accurately the main purpose of *La Gloire*’s launching. It was evidence, furthermore, of France’s aim to be at the forefront of technical and military innovation. And technological matters were tightly related to national pride in the nineteenth century. After the Crimean War (1853–56), the main European powers felt the need of giving a new impulse to their imperial ambitions. The war had a number of consequences in the military field. Russia accelerated its process of modernisation and the British restructured and strengthened their armies, both at home and abroad.¹⁵⁸ Launching *La Gloire*, similarly, the French Second Empire wanted to demonstrate its capacity to implement its ambitions at the foreign affairs level. In short, the aim was to define its position as a decisive piece of the international geopolitical chessboard. This French military impulse provoked an immediate reaction on the British side. Considered the first ocean-going ironclad in history, *La Gloire* briefly enjoyed the privilege of being the most powerful ship on the seas. Hardly one year later, the British sent off the *HMS Warrior*, the first armour-plated and iron-hulled warship in the world, the pride of Queen Victoria’s fleet. It instantly became the fastest,

¹⁵⁷ General Allard was the president of the Section of War of the State Council, CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 24 May, p. 485.

¹⁵⁸ Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), p. 160.

largest and most powerful warship of the time, sixty per cent larger than its French counterpart.

The construction of these two impressive ships in just one year shows the escalating military production in mid-nineteenth-century Europe, closely related to the imperial struggle for power and the arms race in which the main European empires were immersed. Part of this context of increasing militarisation was the cult of the navy, or ‘naval game’, in which the launching of both *La Gloire* and the *HMS Warrior* clearly fit. This compulsive ship-building process was a characteristic of the ‘theatre of politics’, in which foreign and domestic imperial dimensions converged, and the clear willingness of the main European powers to dominate the seas. Representations of power such as festivals and commemorations were distinctive of a real change in the way that politics were conceived and expressed in mid-nineteenth-century Europe. Thus, rituals, identities, self-representations and the image of the ‘other’ started to be relevant aspects in the political arena.¹⁵⁹ At any rate, the British and French shared a common aim of spreading their values, influence and power beyond their own boundaries.

Behind most of these technological and military endeavours were the personal interests of shipowners, businessmen and rich men in general in a quest for new business opportunities. These economic actors were most of the time part and parcel of imperial rivalry since influential bourgeois or aristocratic men were commonly in charge of political decision-making, acting equally as lobbyists and political leaders. A powerful tool that political and economic leaders used to justify and legitimate their projects was the promotion of national pride. This is the reason that nationalistic sentiment shaped many military and technological endeavours at the time, having a direct impact on the way in which imperial powers interacted.

¹⁵⁹ As for the nineteenth-century Europe’s arms race, see the latest contribution with updated bibliography by Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), where the author reflects on the concept of ‘theatre of politics’ applied to the German and British cases.

The Press and Political Imaginary

Technological improvements enabled faster communication and the spread of ideas in a more effective way through sophisticated systems of publishing and the promotion of political image. Not for nothing, the 1860s has been viewed as a turning point towards the so-called 'mass culture', for this decade experienced a significant development of cultural industry.¹⁶⁰ Up to mid-century, news and information, especially from distant places, had been largely reserved for a narrow elite of relatively wealthy people. But in the 1860s and 1870s, advances in publishing and news-gathering technology—high-speed rotary presses, automatic paper folders, linotype machines, news photography, railroads, telephones—made cheap newspapers and low-priced books available to a rapidly expanding readership.¹⁶¹

Emulation processes between empires were greatly related to the new social and political uses conferred to these systems. European monarchs, with the prominent example of Queen Victoria of Great Britain, started to use the wide range of new technical possibilities to spread their personal image. By the late 1850s, for instance, two important newspapers in Britain, *The Times* and *Lloyd's Weekly*, were using advanced machinery that allowed them to make some 20,000 impressions per hour. This shows the extent to which technical advances made all sorts of printed material and publications affordable to the great public.¹⁶²

Hence, the relationship between power and people changed completely. A new language was established between rulers and ruled, and political strategies had to adapt to this new situation. For instance, Queen Victoria succeeded in establishing a fairly new concept of her royal image, fostering a high-profile monarchical role that was extremely influential upon later members of the British royal family.¹⁶³ The British

¹⁶⁰ Dominique Kalifa, 'L'entrée de la France en régime 'médiatique : l'étape des années 1860', in Jacques Migozzi (ed.), *De l'écrit à l'écran. Littératures populaires : mutations génériques, mutations médiatiques* (Limoges: Pulim, 2000), p. 45.

¹⁶¹ Robert MacDonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism 1880-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 9-10. See also Starr, *The Creation of the Media*.

¹⁶² John Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 4.

¹⁶³ Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch*, p. 239.

Empire took great advantage of this, and so too did the Second Empire, for Napoleon III needed to control the press and other sorts of publications in order to gain the people's support for his regime.¹⁶⁴ These strategies of communication and configuration of public image, however, were not exclusive of European great powers, but rather a common feature of all sorts of states and political leaders. In the nascent new Italian state, its founding leader Giuseppe Garibaldi became in the 1860s a paradigmatic example of how a combination of media communication and political publishing can lead to the development of a particular political cult, fashioned and promoted through a wide range of means such as photographs and engravings.¹⁶⁵

Political images were not only built through newspapers or journals, but also through literature, pamphlets and other expressions of popular culture, such as popular songs, exhibitions, advertising or caricatures, which were repeatedly used as propaganda weapons in Second Empire France.¹⁶⁶ These materials are extremely relevant to assess the ways in which European societies perceived politics and, consequently, imperialism.¹⁶⁷ The relationship between people and official messages on empire, however, cannot be seen as an unidirectional process. Propaganda was certainly a powerful tool for rulers to spread official insights of reality and thus try to influence public opinion. Yet it would be distorted to consider that the people reacted to those impulses without any critical spirit. As McKenzie's work suggested in the 1980s, popular enthusiasm for the British Empire was much more than a passive response to British conquests.¹⁶⁸ Propaganda has to be tackled as the extremely complex tool it was. Hence it appears to be needed to take into account all its social, political, economic and cultural dimensions, and also its shifting perspective about overseas expansion during

¹⁶⁴ See Natalie Isser, *The Second Empire and the Press. A Study of Government-inspired Brochures on French Foreign Policy in their Propaganda Milieu* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), especially p. 199.

¹⁶⁵ Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), especially p. 388.

¹⁶⁶ Isser, *The Second Empire and the Press*, pp. 15, 18.

¹⁶⁷ Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire. The Manipulation of the British Public Opinion*, cited in Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, *War of Words: Dutch Pro-Boer Propaganda and the South African War (1899-1902)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), p. 12.

the nineteenth century. Edward Berenson's work on colonial heroes shows how by the middle of the century, British and French ordinary citizens came to be fascinated by the trajectories of charismatic individuals, who gave imperialism 'a recognisable face'. Their adventures were fully covered by the press, which helped increase the interest of overseas expansion.¹⁶⁹ This tendency has to be framed in the context of a growing culture of spectacle in the nineteenth century, whose most evident consequence was the press' willingness to cover exotic stories by 'men on the spot' to increase their sales.¹⁷⁰ In his study about diplomatic relations between France and Spain during Napoleon III's reign, Juan Antonio Inarejos has suggested that public opinion acted as both subject and object of foreign policy. It is thus not surprising that, from the authorities' standpoint, newspapers and journals were 'as feared as the enemy cannons'.¹⁷¹ Foreign policy, domestic dynamics as well as public opinion and the press thus remained intimately connected, helping to depict in a clear way the canvas of inter-imperial dynamics in the 1860s.

The tools to spread this idea across society were numerous, and effective. Thousands of pamphlets, books and other printed materials were published by the *Imprimerie Impériale*, a governmental institution with the aim of disseminating official visions on a wide range of issues, from domestic to foreign affairs, not always related to strictly political matters. The *Imprimerie* worked as an indirect tool for the regime's propaganda, as far as it selected the works to be published and thus, implicitly, the message to be diffused. It has to be kept in mind that political documents, pamphlets and other similar publications, as 'literary' products, were conceived to be consumed by a wide audience. When it came to linking political purposes with rather propagandistic aims, the press was not the only tool used by the French regime. It was probably the most powerful and useful, but its effects must be united with the ones by these aforementioned literary products.

¹⁶⁹ See Edward Berenson, *Heroes of Empire: Five Charismatic Men and the Conquest of Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), especially pp. 2-3.

¹⁷⁰ See MacDonald, *The Language of Empire*.

¹⁷¹ Juan Antonio Inarejos Muñoz, *Intervenciones coloniales y nacionalismo español: la política exterior de la Unión Liberal y sus vínculos con la Francia de Napoleón III (1856-1868)* (Madrid: Sílex, 2010), p. 168.

In the case of foreign expeditions, the Empire itself became a consumer product.¹⁷² There is an abundant number of publications by colonial officers, missionaries, civil servants, diplomats and travellers involved in those expeditions, whose perceptions on the new conquered lands were fairly bucolic, presenting the new territories as idyllic places, with superb landscapes and lovable people. These visions came along with a rather subliminal message: the French had been able to reach these exotic corners of the globe and thus had the responsibility of taking care of them, including the indigenous populations, who deserved to be educated with new and civilised values. In Cochinchina, for instance, where ‘l’honneur national était engagé’,¹⁷³ it was urgent to intervene ‘si la France tient à conserver le rang de première nation civilisatrice’.¹⁷⁴

To conclude, considering that mid-nineteenth-century imperial European powers were only struggling for mastery disregards the capacity of diplomacy for establishing fruitful relations between empires and finding better ways to solve disagreements. The world of diplomacy was, again in Inarejos’ words, a world of a ‘deterrent cynicism’, in which acts and discourses—the contradictory realm of true aims and public claims—did not always coincide.¹⁷⁵ In the 1860s, like today, agreements and dissensions alike were intrinsic features of international (inter-imperial) relations. For the historian, the difference lies in the way these features are assessed and contextualised both in their domestic and foreign dimensions, as well as in bearing in mind that these imperial policies were profoundly shaped by contradiction and complexity.

V. CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown the extent to which the French Second Empire was a *sui generis* regime in the mid-nineteenth-century European political context. The 1789 Revolution

¹⁷² Joanna de Groot has suggested this idea regarding the British Empire at ‘Metropolitan desires and colonial connections: reflections on consumption and empire’, in Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire*, p. 176.

¹⁷³ Anonymous author, *Souvenirs de l’expédition de Cochinchine (1861-1862) par un lieutenant de l’ex 101* (Paris: Librairie du Petit Journal, 1865), p. 185.

¹⁷⁴ Edmond Fournier, *Avenir de la France et de la Cochinchine. Compagnie l’Union des Mers* (Paris: Lesueur, Baillehache et Compagnie, 1865), p. viii.

¹⁷⁵ Inarejos Muñoz, *Intervenciones coloniales y nacionalismo español*, p. 58.

had a great impact on France's politics and decisively shaped all of its political constellations. The Bonapartists, heirs of a brand-new dynasty created by Napoleon I in the early years of the century, remained as the self-proclaimed representatives of the spirit of the Revolution and the true defenders of the values of the French nation. In the early 1850s, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte embodied the Bonapartist values that had been present in France's political life since the fall of his uncle's world in 1815. Louis-Napoleon inaugurated a new imperial era in France in 1851 under the conviction that an Empire—as a form of government, in capital letters—founded on the dynastic legitimacy of his lineage was the best way to defend and promote the ideal of the French nation.

Napoleon III's regime sought to connect to Napoleon I's political imaginary and to pursue the emperor's legacy, thus trying to break the allegedly natural path towards a liberal republic. Mid-century French liberals were indeed deeply worried by the power of such a force, and aware of the difficulties they would have to confront in order to overcome it. The French 'illiberal democracy', as described by Rosanvallon, is indeed unthinkable without considering its liberal dimension. Although historians have tended to overlook the existence of a liberal movement during the flourishing years of new Bonapartism, which has led to a noticeable vacuum in the existing literature, the truth is that Napoleon III's regime cannot be tackled without taking into account one of its most defining features: the ideological battle between these two competing political ideologies.¹⁷⁶

The ideal of the nation needed to be promoted not only at home, but also overseas. Napoleon III's Empire rapidly understood the need to reinforce the empire—the capacity to exercise military and economic power and domination over foreign lands—in order to make the nation's glory greater. During the late 1850s and the 1860s, France expanded its colonial power across the world, in a way and intensity neglected by traditional historiographical accounts. The so-called 'French Imperial Meridian' that

¹⁷⁶ Exceptions worth mentioning are Anceau, *Les députés du Second Empire*; Gabriel de Broglie, *L'Orléanisme: la ressource libérale de la France* (Paris: Perrin, 1980); Louis Girard, *Les libéraux français, 1814-1875* (Paris: Aubier, 1985); Lucian Jaume, *L'individu effacé ou le paradoxe du libéralisme français* (Paris: Fayard, 1997); and Alan Laurent and Vincent Valentin, *Les penseurs libéraux* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2012).

allegedly lasted during the central decades of the century was but a period of continuity in the French imperialist ambitions, founded over strategies of both competition and collaboration with other neighbouring empires, especially the British. The French Second Empire succeeded in merging two different sources of political and social legitimisation: historical-dynastic and expansionist-imperialist. Whereas at home the regime claimed to be the guarantor of social peace and economic progress, it struggled abroad to ensure France's eminence on the global chessboard.

Napoleon III's regime profoundly shaped France's domestic and foreign policies. This chapter has analysed the global context in which this controversial regime developed and has highlighted the importance of the 1860s for the conceptualisation of global inter-imperial competition, considering this decade a pivotal one prior to the onset of high imperialism. Contrary to what historiography has traditionally argued, France in the 1860s was a true imperial actor, in continuous interaction with other imperial powers, namely Britain and Spain. A wide range of imperialist expeditions was undertaken in order to promote economic, political, cultural and 'civilisational' values worldwide. The development of new technological advances in both military and non-military spheres, especially in the field of communications, the press and propaganda, suggests that the 1860s were a decade of transition, characterised by a real political shift.

Nationalism and imperialism were not contradictory, but rather complementary processes.¹⁷⁷ Nation-building and empire-making processes went hand in hand, in the context of a state structure that allowed policymakers and many social actors to 'think like an empire', using Jane Burbank's terminology.¹⁷⁸ France's imperial role and political culture in the mid-nineteenth century needs to be carried out through a profound critical approach to concepts and political notions which, as Kevin Kenny has suggested, should not be seen anymore as given tools for historical inquiry but as

¹⁷⁷ Kuitenbrouwer, *War of Words*, p. 14.

¹⁷⁸ Jane Burbank and Mark von Hagen (eds.), *Geographies of Empire*, cited in Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, p. 154.

objects of study *per se*.¹⁷⁹ Although the Second Empire's 'imperial' character may at first glance have no relation to any 'imperialist' policy, the truth is that overseas expansion played a remarkable role in pursuing national-imperial glory. Not for nothing, the term 'imperialist' was coined in English to describe Bonapartist politics. Napoleon III's efforts to legitimise his regime at home by pursuing an ambitious plan of overseas ventures open the door to a reflection on the notions of nation and empire in 1860s France. These concepts overlapped and, indeed, mutually enforced each other.

Liberals acted in different spheres. Their social and political power depended largely on their capacity of being visible to public opinion and, in parallel and by no means exclusively, to affect influential social groups. One of the most important spheres where liberals made their claims was the Corps législatif. As already suggested, although they did not conform to a structured political organisation, liberals were present in the parliamentary arena. Their speeches remain among the most celebrated of that epoch's parliamentary history, for, in general terms, all their members demonstrated a fine, persuasive rhetorical ability which made their claims more effective and echoed by the general press. Theirs was never a destructive, revolutionary or seditious approach. Rather, liberals stood for defending moderate postulates. Both, liberals and Bonapartists, tried to fight each other with different forces. Imperialist endeavours were the perfect justification for them to deploy their rhetorical power. As their speeches and writings generally suggest, liberals under the Second Empire had a strong self-awareness of being the right political option, whose visions and actions could only be good for all of society. Their proud self-confidence was strengthened day by day in opposition to Bonapartism, which they considered to be an erroneous, negative way of thinking of the political and of guiding the destiny of the nation. As Édouard Laboulaye wrote about his friend and counterpart Jules Duval in the preface of one of the latter's books on Algerian colonialism:

¹⁷⁹ Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

CHAPTER 1
New Bonapartism, Liberal Voices and French Expansionism

Dans un siècle tel que le nôtre, siècle d'affaires et de publicité, il y a des hommes qui n'usent de la parole et de la plume que pour combattre les préjugés régnants, pour proposer des réformes nécessaires, pour propager des idées utiles.¹⁸⁰

Although written shortly after the fall of the Empire, this quote perfectly fits the liberal thinking of the 1860s, a moment in which liberals shared a sort of clairvoyant political standpoint. As the quote clearly shows, Laboulaye was convinced that Duval, a renowned liberal, was combating prejudices and malpractices in order to foster 'needed reforms' and to spread 'useful ideas'. His rhetorical strategy is indeed effective, since one can immediately notice the difference between this alleged liberal enlightenment and the 'darkness' practised by others. Laboulaye's words are also significant inasmuch as they connect to the mid-nineteenth-century liberal concern about business and publicity, a term clearly referring to the press and public opinion. Moreover, in writing these words in the preface of a book on Algeria's colonisation, Laboulaye puts together the two dimensions, liberal and imperialist, on which this thesis focuses.

The liberal opposition to Napoleon III's rule—expressed in the political arena in a more or less coherent way, and in the press through a more varied cast of voices—played an important part in the configuration of French political culture in the 1860s. As I argue, the battle between liberals and Bonapartists is a key factor to better understand the Second Empire and its overseas expansion. In their aim to achieve the people's support and position themselves as the ideological mainstream in 1860s France, the two ideological groups deployed all the political and rhetorical means at their disposal to weaken and discredit the opponent. However, probably more often than expected, they happened to share the same, or very similar, ideas on a range of issues, especially with regard to imperial languages, as Chapter 2 will show in more depth. It is important to bear in mind that political groups in the nineteenth century were not monolithic, impermeable blocks, but rather competing systems which influenced each other. The liberal opposition to the Empire was rather unorganised even though it had a powerful capacity of influence. Liberals succeeded in developing an effective rhetorical strategy which consisted of relating their political language to

¹⁸⁰ Jules Duval, *L'Algérie et ses colonies* (Paris: Librairie Guillaumin et Cie., 1877), p. xxiii.

CHAPTER 1

New Bonapartism, Liberal Voices and French Expansionism

universalism and the ideas of justice, moderation and patriotism. A network of intellectuals, writers, artists, deputies and businessmen struggled to promote liberal ideas in society, especially with regard to imperialist ventures overseas.

Chapter 2

Overseas Ventures and Imperial Languages

*Ayons donc foi dans nos entreprises d'outre-mer ;
commencées pour venger notre honneur,
elles se termineront par le triomphe de nos intérêts.*

— Napoleon III, 1864¹

Toute nation qui a beaucoup voyagé à travers le monde, découvert des îles et des terres inconnues, fondé des lointains et prospères établissements, éclairé des peuples sauvages et barbares, et a, par ces moyens honorables, activement concouru à la civilisation du genre humain et à la culture de la planète, est une grande nation aux yeux de l'humanité reconnaissante.

— Jules Duval, 1864²

I. INTRODUCTION

The French colonial world in the 1860s was imagined according to two separate categories: the ‘actual’ colonies (*les colonies proprement dites*) and the rest of the territories, among which Algeria shone with particular vigour.³ The former (Reunion, Guadeloupe and Martinique) were the representatives of France’s older colonial splendour: modest enclaves situated in remote places in the Pacific and the Caribbean which, sharing a similar culture and population, could be ruled from the metropole rather smoothly. Their existence thus created no significant trouble for the Empire, but did not provide it with any particular touch of glory either. Within the context of inter-imperial competition that defined European societies in the mid-nineteenth century, France’s

¹ Opening of the Legislative session ASCL 1864, vol. 1, session of 5 November 1863.

² Jules Duval, *Les colonies et la politique coloniale de la France* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1864), p. 445.

³ Jules Duval, *L’Algérie et les colonies françaises* (Paris: Guillaumin et Cie., 1877), p. 227.

glory mainly came from the side of the second category of territories: Algeria and, from the late 1850s, the Asian enclave of Cochinchina. In the 1860s, a new expansionist project in Mexico sought to keep France as one of the world's most powerful, influential empires. Not for nothing, as Marcel Emerit wrote already in the 1940s, the Second Empire's colonial policy was by no means 'a rigid bloc'.⁴ This chapter focuses on the second category of this French colonial policy and its three most outstanding examples: Algeria, Cochinchina and Mexico.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. On the one hand, it seeks to contextualise the three expansionist ventures mentioned above in their political, social and economic dimension. On the other hand, the chapter explores the development of imperial languages during the period of the Second Empire, attending to the abstract notions of glory, greatness and civilisation. These terms encompassed a complex, wide spectrum of intellectual perceptions that included all the projects of French expansionism at the time, either new or inherited from the past. The three ventures under study were merely examples for the ways in which these languages were deployed and evolved with special intensity. Beyond the purely theoretical approach to these concepts, the chapter seeks to lay the foundations for later discussion on the way in which liberals perceived the Second Empire's foreign political action, including in this category all the issues related to international law, colonial administration, geopolitical context and the expression of a specific political language. These issues can also be linked to economic and religious questions. They will be addressed separately in the following chapters and jointly in the conclusion.

2. IMPERIAL LANGUAGES: CIVILISATION, GLORY AND GREATNESS

Colonial projects and expansionist endeavours in Algeria, Cochinchina and Mexico were shaped by the discourse of pride and the need to promote France's influence on the global stage. The notions of civilisation, glory and greatness were not exclusive

⁴ Marcel Émerit, *Les méthodes coloniales de la France sous le Second Empire* (Alger: Société historique algérienne, 1943), p. 184.

‘political’ concepts. They had clear economic and religious connotations and indeed served to define France’s influence in the world in all its dimensions. But they did have a particular political use. Both the Bonapartist majority and the liberal opposition, far as they were from any revolutionary practice, agreed to consider France, the homeland (*la patrie*), as a superior nation with a specific civilising mission to accomplish towards the rest of the ‘inferior’ peoples. The difference between these groups lay in the political use they made of these concepts to create their particular political language. In general terms, whereas the Bonapartists used them to continuously justify their actions, liberals preferred to be more cautious and not to pursue France’s glory at any price.

Civilisation

The idea that modern empires had a specific mission to accomplish abroad, spreading high values of civilisation and progress, has been present in all European societies for centuries. Most imperialist projects have found in this idea a robust cornerstone to justify colonial expansion and the domination of non-European peoples. Historians have argued about the controversial notion of civilisation for decades, for its meaning has been changing over time.⁵

In France, where the term ‘civilisation’ has deserved close attention of thinkers and scholars since the nineteenth century, Guizot’s *Histoire de la Civilisation* remains probably the greatest contribution. It was not until the fall of the Napoleonic Empire that the term began to have a hierarchical meaning to differentiate between different peoples and nations in the world, mainly considering Europe to be at the top of a progressively descendent pyramid of moral and material progress. Up to then, the concept of civilisation had been used primarily in the singular, to describe all sorts of human

⁵ The history of the term civilisation has been told by scholars such as Lucien Febvre, ‘Civilisation: evolution of a word and a group of ideas’, in Peter Burke (ed.) *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Lucien Febvre* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 219-57; Georges Gusdorf, ‘Civilisation’, in *Les principes de la pensée au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Payot, 1971), pp. 333-48; Reuel A. Lochore, *History of the Idea of Civilisation in France, 1830-1870* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid, 1935); and François Guizot, *Histoire de la civilisation en France, depuis la chute de l’empire romain jusqu’en 1789* (Paris: Pichon et Didier, 1829).

accomplishments.⁶ The political experiences of the two Napoleonic empires in the nineteenth century distorted the term's liberal meaning and related it to more conservative forms of nationalism/patriotism. In the 1860s, the liberal movement of opposition had to deal with this new situation and to build up a new ideological corpus on the idea of French civilisation which could counteract Bonapartist understandings of the topic. Civilisation was both a liberal slogan used to fight against 'external' and 'internal' barbarians (those who denied the moral superiority of the Revolution's ideals) and to represent the idea of a secular national mission, on the one hand; and a core value of Napoleon III's regime, on the other. As the emperor himself once claimed, the Napoleonic idea was 'la seule cause civilisatrice en Europe'.⁷

The Bonapartist idea of civilisation had to adapt to the demands of the Second Empire's colonial policy in the 1860s. A closer collaboration with the Catholic Church was needed. The defence of Christian values as a sign of civilisation had therefore to be adopted with greater emphasis, resulting in a combination of both religious and national civilising dimensions.⁸ In any case, the truth is that the idea of civilisation in France was always related, either from the liberal or the Bonapartist side, to a moral, philosophical dimension, whereas in Britain, it had more to do with material and industrial progress. The dichotomy between Britain as the land of industry and France as the *directrice de l'humanité* was surely present in contemporaries' minds.⁹ As a matter of fact, civilisation became the highest criterion for social and political action in the national consciousness. In the 1860s, abuses in the political use of the concept soon occurred, since every political action could always be justified for the sake of civilisation.¹⁰ As Lochore noted, Guizot's interpretation of civilisation as a combination of individual and social progress still remained valid for the liberals of the Second

⁶ David Todd, 'Transnational projects of empire in France, c. 1815-c. 1870', *Modern Intellectual History*, 12/2 (2015), p. 268.

⁷ Lochore, *History of the Idea of Civilisation in France*, pp. 36, 71, 99.

⁸ Lochore, *History of the Idea of Civilisation in France*, p. 100.

⁹ Lochore, *History of the Idea of Civilisation in France*, pp. 73, 75.

¹⁰ Lochore, *History of the Idea of Civilisation in France*, p. 101.

Empire, who reacted to the Bonapartist patriotic interpretation of it by stressing the social-political issue as a central one.¹¹

As stated in the introduction, the concept that France was a superior moral and intellectual entity was at the heart of liberals' thoughts. Émile Ollivier demonstrated this rather explicitly when stating that

[d]ans tous les temps, il y a parmi les nations, une ville, un pays, un peuple qui est pour le monde ce que le Forum ou l'Agora étaient pour la cité antique, c'est-à-dire le centre où tout se rencontre, où tout se condense, où tout se synthétise. Ce lieu a été successivement Athènes, Rome, Florence. Dans le monde moderne, c'est la France. Ailleurs on prépare les idées, ici on les promulgue ; ailleurs on travaille pour un peuple, ici on travaille pour tous.¹²

The place where ideas were promulgated and the nation which worked not only for one people but for all in the world was a country specifically called upon to spread its values and expertise everywhere. Ollivier's statement demonstrates how deeply France's moral supremacy was rooted in the minds of liberals. The connection between this assumption and the defence of the French civilising mission was very close, since a superior moral nation was to spread its values everywhere, according to this reasoning. Indeed, all kinds of civilising missions are essential to understanding the ideological background of European imperialisms during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹³

Thus, a major question to be tackled is the meaning and relevance of the concept of *mission civilisatrice* for the history of France and the shaping of its imperial policy. *Mission civilisatrice* was one of the main concepts used during the Third Republic to refer to French colonial policy.¹⁴ From then onwards, the colonial question moved to the centre of French public discourse. The country's engagement with expansionist ventures was

¹¹ Lochore, *History of the Idea of Civilisation in France*, pp. 138, 142–3.

¹² ASCL 1867, vol. 1, session of 9 December, p. 164.

¹³ Mathew Burrows, 'Mission civilisatrice: French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860-1914', *The Historical Journal*, 29/1 (1986), p. 109.

¹⁴ 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).

seen as the result of a higher moral mission; a valuable instrument for the diffusion of the revolutionary gospel, and the realisation of the country's universal vocation.¹⁵ The reference to an 'indigenous policy' gives some clues about the ideological background of the concept. It explains all sorts of mechanisms that make it possible for a group of people to be 'civilised' by another one. This implies at least two levels of evolution within a common European vision of global order, particularly applicable to British imperial thought, according to which the world was divided into different 'imaginative spheres': peoples or states which are able to civilise and peoples or state which are 'deserving' or able to be civilised.¹⁶ This discourse flourished strongly in France in the last decades of the nineteenth century but, as I argue, it finds a clear precedent during the times of the Second Empire. As it seems clear, the ideal of civilisation in 1860s France was profoundly shaped by the national context and the political dynamics in which it developed. In nineteenth-century France, as Alice Bullard has suggested, this ideal was a sort of defence mechanism against the crisis of meaning generated by modernity. The nineteenth-century increasing rational secularism influenced the ideological foundations of the French civilising project, whether at home or abroad.¹⁷

Glory and Greatness

The notion of glory—*la gloire de la patrie*—has been widely present in modern French political discourse since at least the times of Napoleon. No matter whether the regime was imperial, monarchic or republican, political and intellectual elites continuously used this term to express their belief in France and to justify political actions addressed to achieving the country's material and intellectual progress. Its use evolved and interacted with two other key political concepts: nation and empire. They were particularly relevant in the late 1850s and 1860s, when France, after a second short republican experiment, returned to being an empire. What in the 1840s was national became

¹⁵ Dino Constantini, *Mission civilisatrice. Le rôle de l'histoire coloniale dans la construction de l'identité politique française* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008), p. 14.

¹⁶ See Duncan Bell, 'Victorian Visions of Global Order: An Introduction' in Duncan Bell (ed.), *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-25, especially pp. 9-10.

¹⁷ Alice Bullard, *Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific, 1790-1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 2-3.

‘imperial’, and references to the nation diminished considerably. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the newly Bonapartist regime rejected the concept of nation completely. Under the French Second Empire, nation and empire were often used almost as synonyms; they overlapped, intertwined and became almost confused. They mutually constituted each other. In any case, the defence of either the nation or the empire’s values had a direct connection to patriotism. As Jon Parry has convincingly suggested, patriotism became a major political question in nineteenth-century Europe. In the case of Britain, it was a feature of the leading liberal movement, which was ruling the country during most part of the Victorian era. In 1860s France, the politics of patriotism were more closely related to Bonapartism, although liberals contributed decisively to their shape.¹⁸

With regard to France, it has been said that the concept of patriotism became a common civic value under the Third Republic.¹⁹ Yet, as Sudhir Hazareesingh has pointed out, this assumption does not fit reality. As he suggests, the concepts of nation, empire and its glory (which implies a clear reference to the *patrie*) were present in France’s political vocabulary and used by all main political groups at least from the times of the Revolution.²⁰ The close defence of the nation’s glory and dignity at its highest levels and all around the world was a shared political claim in 1860s France. Bonapartism, as pointed out in Chapter 1, based its power on a particular historical legitimacy that presented it as the true defender of France’s interests and the maker of the nation’s best works. Indeed, Bonapartism contributed decisively to the theoretical and conceptual making of French nationalism. One has only to take a quick look at the press and contemporary political discourse to realise how common the claim to preserving France’s glory and greatness was among the Bonapartist symbolic world. Marquis d’Andelarre significantly claimed that the main goal of the Second Empire should be to achieve ‘la grandeur morale de la nation, son honneur et légitime

¹⁸ See Jon Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁹ Philippe Darriulat, *Les patriots: la gauche républicaine et la nation* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001), pp. 280–1.

²⁰ Sudhir Hazareesingh, ‘Memory, Legend and Politics. Napoleonic Patriotism in the Restoration Era’, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 5/1 (2006), p. 71.

préponderance'.²¹ This extended wish of making France a great nation was the expression of a rather extended self-confidence among French political and intellectual elites.

On a dit de la France qu'elle est la seule nation qui sache combattre pour une idée, et que partout où elle intervient, une grande pensée la précède, un grand peuple la suit. La France a une action et une diplomatie supérieures qui s'adresse aux âmes.²²

That France had a sort of historical mission to leave an enlightening trace in the world, showing the other nations the way towards refinement and civilisation, did not seem to be an exclusive feature of conservative Bonapartism. A direct connection between this belief system and the values of French nationalism can be made, and was increasingly present in France's political life and public opinion in the nineteenth century. Most liberal thinkers were in between the classical liberal reluctance towards empire, informed by late-eighteenth-century philosophical and theoretical postulates, and the sharing of the aforementioned values of glory and *grandeur*, expressed and visualised at the time mainly through the glasses and rhetoric of Napoleonic Caesarism. Flirting—or directly showing full support—with this discourse was far from uncommon among liberal circles. It is in this context that Édouard Laboulaye's conviction that '[c]e qui distingue la France entre toutes les nations de la terre, c'est moins la hardiesse et la nouveauté des inventions que la forme parfaite qu'elle donne à tout ce qu'elle touche'²³ must be framed. Whilst the government seemed not to care much about the economic cost of these overseas ventures, liberals—as well as some deputies of the 'dynastic majority'—did. In general terms, they considered foreign policy overspending as a double-edged sword, that is, as something that could strengthen France's diplomatic action (and increase its global presence and power) but at the same time dramatically weaken its domestic finances, which at some point could lead to a loss of power.

From the Bonapartist ranks, there was also some criticism towards the government's excessive spending on overseas ventures. More foreign expeditions implied inevitably

²¹ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 19 March, p. 294.

²² Kolb-Bernard, CRCL 1863, unique vol., session of 4 February, pp. 37–8.

²³ Édouard Laboulaye, *Le parti libéral, son programme et son avenir*, 6 ed., (Paris: Charpentier, 1863), p. 8.

more expenses in military manpower and weapons. Not only the liberal opposition saw it as an unsustainable burden to France's finances. 'Il faut provoquer autant que possible un désarmement général qui sera utile à la fois à nos voisins et à nous', suggested the Bonapartist deputy Raymond Larrabure. This businessman, interested in opening new trade routes and commercial markets for the French industry, saw with great regret that the need of imperial adventures was increasingly growing in France's military instincts. 'Cela nous pousse aux expéditions du dehors et à nous mêler trop des affaires d'autrui' came to explain that '[l]a gloire que nous y avons conquise est grande mais elle nous a coûté fort cher'.²⁴ Larrabure was not referring exclusively to an economic price. Certainly, all these overseas ventures implied great monetary expenses, as well as the use of an important contingent of human resources. Yet he was showing a different concern, much more related to France's image abroad. Such an aggressive foreign policy would bring a negative image of France and the enmity of other nations.

The deputy was making clear that other ways to conceive of the nation's glory were possible, and dared to challenge the chamber: 'M'opposera-t-on cette pompeuse puérité: La France est assez riche pour payer sa gloire ? Je dirai, moi: la France est assez riche de gloire pour songer enfin à ses finances !'²⁵ These words gained important support from the rest of the deputies and emphasised the extent to which these foreign imperialist adventures were controversial. Foreign and domestic policy were closely linked and France's glory could not be pursued at any price, even if these faraway expeditions were, again in Larrabure's words, the ones that best represented the taste of France for danger and generosity.

The Bonapartists did not hesitate to use the nation to justify their expansionist projects. Whenever the overspending of state resources was questioned, the government replied automatically that it was necessary to preserve France's glory and dignity. Referring to the colonisation of Cochinchina in 1861, general Allard recognised that the budget had sadly been exceeded, but 'par des causes que tout le monde apprécie, et c'est grâce à ce déploiement de force que la France a pu montrer sa grandeur et pourrait encore, s'il le

²⁴ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 11 June, p. 704.

²⁵ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 11 June, p. 705.

fallait, maintenir sa fierté en face de quiconque essayerait de porter ombrage à sa politique.²⁶

The rather abstract and ambiguous desire to reach for France's greatness and glory went hand in hand with another, much more practical aim: making the country a major actor in the global context. On the hectic chessboard that the world was in the 1860s, with multiple connections and interests waving in all directions, French political and intellectual elites expected their country to play not a minor but a central role on the global stage. Bonapartism found in militarisation and the launching of an ambitious plan of overseas ventures the way to seek the Empire's global influence. Liberals were much more cautious. Convinced as they were of France's moral superiority and ability to have a strong and influential voice in the world, they did not entirely reject the regime's foreign policy, but questioned it profoundly.

The glory of France was an idea with which liberals felt very comfortable. Ollivier, for instance, openly asserted that France was a great country in the international context. He and his direct counterparts (the liberals who sought rapprochement with the government by the mid-1860s) supported the regime in its attempts to get the highest levels of influence for the country, but differed in the ways to achieve it. They were fully aware of the fact that France's glory was not an objective value, neither to everyone nor everywhere. On the contrary, they knew that the term was being used abroad to question France's prestige when it was related to the idea of conquest. If the glory of France was linked to such an offensive and violent notion, this perception could irremediably diminish France's influence abroad due to the feeling of rejection developed among entire foreign populations. Ollivier significantly pointed out that the regime's foreign policy was being undertaken in a rather hesitant way, which made it difficult to spread the true aims of France in the world, the ones related to the defence of the principle of nationalities and respect for other nations.

A country committed to the spreading of freedom and the rejection of any expansive ambition would be a less-feared, more respected and more loved country. This was

²⁶ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 24 May, p. 485.

expected to also have a direct impact on the expansion of the French language and culture, since, as Ollivier pointed out, ‘les peuples reprendront l’habitude d’apprendre notre langue afin de comprendre ce qui se dit avec le plus d’éloquence en faveur des droits de l’humanité.’²⁷ The linkage between the nation’s glory and civil rights and intellectual values was what differed the most between the Bonapartists’ and liberals’ approaches to the notion of French greatness.

Liberals thus advocated fostering France’s intellectual and moral values beyond the military ones. They did not deny or hide their profound belief in the country’s superiority over other countries—‘we are surrounded by intellectually inferior peoples’ Ollivier significantly came to say—but they conferred to this superiority meanings other than the Bonapartist one. Liberals believed in the ability of their country to show the world its greatness through its scientific, industrial and financial power, represented by its top-skilled soldiers and officers and well-educated ambassadors. Indeed, all this made France ‘une nation supérieure, obligée aujourd’hui, par suite de la diffusion des lumières, de partager leur instruction avec les autres pays.’²⁸ And, above all, they related it to the value of freedom. This was what really produced a sentiment of national pride, a sentiment that strongly remained close to the liberals’ hearts. As Émile Ollivier noted:

Les nations étrangères, sachant qu’un peuple en travail de liberté n’a plus de désirs de conquêtes, cesseront de nous redouter ; et la France sera aimée autant qu’elle est respectée. [...] Le sentiment de fierté ! Est-ce qu’il est nécessaire de le justifier ? Comment ! Nous sommes entourés de peuples qui nous sont inférieurs en développement intellectuel, ou du moins qui ne sont entrés qu’après nous dans les voies de la liberté.²⁹

²⁷ ASCL 1865, vol. 2, session of 27 March, p. 62.

²⁸ Ernest Picard, ASCL 1869, vol. 2, session of 29 March, p. 5.

²⁹ ASCL 1865, vol. 2, session of 27 March, p. 59.

3. ALGERIA: THE COLONY, THE PROVINCE, THE KINGDOM

Since the beginning of its colonisation in the early 1830s, Algeria was both a nightmare and a hope for all French governments and regimes. The idea of conquering this North African country, however, came from earlier times, when Napoleon was striving to enlarge his Empire's influence over Muslim territories. The emperor knew about the great geostrategic importance of this area and promoted several military and scientific expeditions to explore it. Yet it was not until King Charles X's reign that the French troops made their first steps in Algiers. From then onwards, a long and arduous process of colonisation began, leading to the settlement of thousands of Europeans in the area and a controversial period of violence and domination whose consequences are still felt in French history.³⁰ In Algeria, France found an ideal place to taste its capacity to expand abroad and to confront the outer world. In Algeria, France had to deal with social, religious, ethnic, cultural difference which challenged the political notions of the nation itself.

The first years of colonisation came along with great social turmoil, with many revolts and political repression which lasted for decades. Still in the 1860s, given the difficulties of dominating the territory, the government applied severe military measures which led the colony to be placed under military control. The colony's political and administrative situation evolved according to its domestic social conditions. Periods of military rule were followed by other periods of civil administration. The administration of colonial Algeria was a major political issue from the beginning of its colonisation in the times of the Restoration, and no regime succeeded in finding a proper solution to it. In the late 1840s, Alexis de Tocqueville warned the authorities that colonising Algeria was a project which demanded much more than courage and military force. It required, above

³⁰ Among the rather extensive bibliography on the colonisation of Algeria, its motivations and first incursions, useful general works include Jean-Louis Marçot, *Comment est née l'Algérie française* (Paris: La Différence, 2012); Georges Fleury, *Comment l'Algérie devint française, 1830-1848* (Paris: Perrin, 2004); Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie coloniale, 1830-1954* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010); Abderrahmane Bouchène, *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale, 1830-1862* (Paris: La Découverte, 2012). On this period, see also Jenniffer E. Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

all, knowledge of the territory and its local populations.³¹ Contemporarily, Marshal Thomas Bugeaud, who was governor-general of Algeria under the July monarchy, pointed out that security was, too, a central matter to complete colonisation successfully, thus implying the creation of military settlements and the establishment of military order in the colony.³² Both perceptions can be considered as the germ of the Bureaux Arabes, an institution whose aim was to merge both military and intellectual approaches to the conquest of the new colony.³³ Indeed, the Bureaux Arabes were meant to play a major role in what anthropologist Bernard Cohn defined as the ‘conquest of knowledge’.³⁴ If knowledge about tribes, their relations to each other, as well as a wide range of details on their agricultural and industrial production systems were essential clues to colonial rulers, so were the mechanisms to control and dominate them.

During the Second Empire, Algeria continued to be a major issue for several political, economic and social reasons. The domination of this territory was in Napoleon III’s mind since the very moment he seized power, when he declared that ‘nous avons, en face Marseille, un vaste royaume à assimiler à la France’.³⁵ This claim meant two important things. First, that Algeria was intended to occupy a privileged place among the Empire’s expansionist projects—not for nothing was it viewed as the ‘pièce maîtresse’ in the emperor’s ‘grande politique méditerranéenne’—and, second, that the ‘assimilation’ of this North African colony was far from being fully achieved, almost

³¹ Tocqueville’s active contribution to justify France’s expansionism in Algeria in the mid nineteenth century has been tackled by a large amount of scholarly works. As he wrote in his 1837 *Second letter on Algeria*, he was clear that France would be able to build on the coast of Africa ‘a great monument to the glory of our country’. Tocqueville’s defence of imperialism has been seen as an example of liberalism’s ‘turn to empire’ in the central decades of the nineteenth century. See Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire* and ‘Empire and Democracy: Tocqueville and the Algeria Question’, *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 8/3 (2000), p. 295 for the quote.

³² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991); and Thomas Bugeaud, *De l’établissement de légions des colons militaires dans les possessions Française du nord de l’Afrique*, cited in Abdelmajid Hannoum, *Violent Modernity. France in Algeria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 18.

³³ Hannoum, *Violent Modernity. France in Algeria*, p. 20.

³⁴ Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 16.

³⁵ Ministère de l’État, *Discours prononcé par le prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte à Bordeaux, le 9 octobre 1852* (Bouquot, Imprimeur de la Préfecture, 1852).

CHAPTER 2
Overseas Ventures and Imperial Languages

three decades after the first military incursions into the region.³⁶ These important political and military issues would become a source of great political debate and ideological confrontation. In the 1860s, Algeria thus remained the greatest and most important French colonial endeavour, which provoked important debates on a number of key issues to tackle France's political, economic and religious role in the world. Under the Second Empire, the relationship between the colony and the metropole acquired new momentum and the European settlers began to develop a deeper awareness of community.³⁷

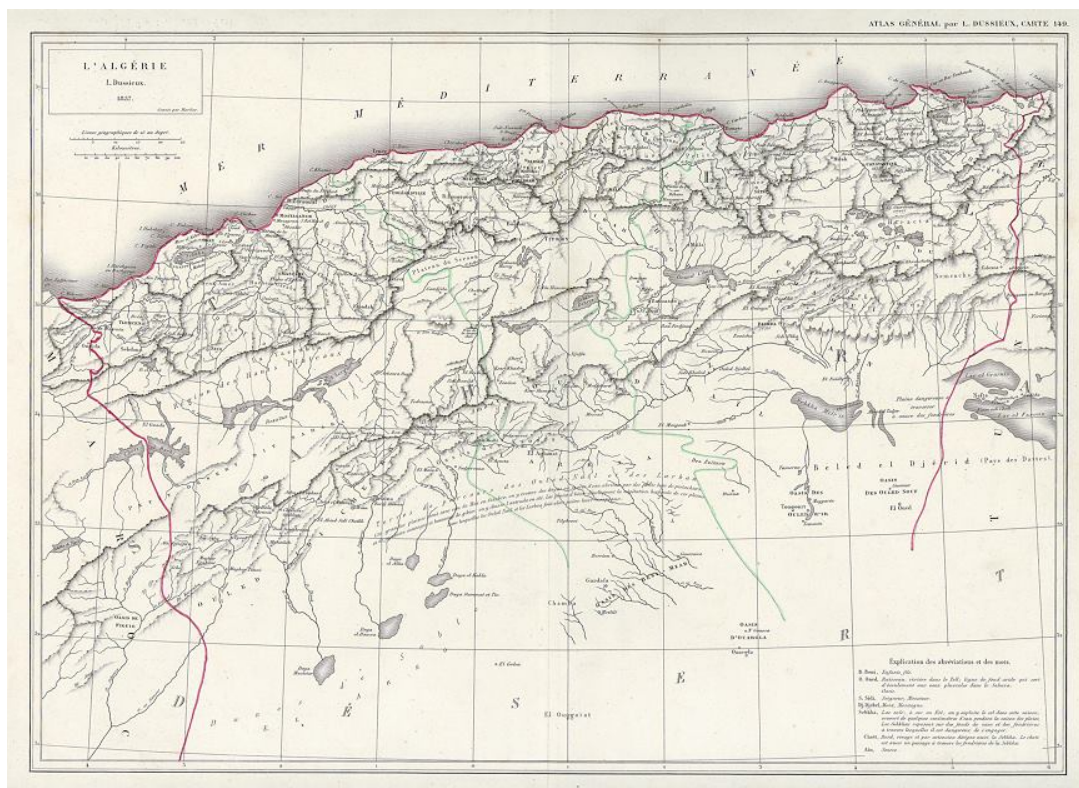


FIG. 2. French possessions in Algeria in the 1860s. L. Dussieux, *Atlas Général de Géographie* (1860).

Algeria was deeply rooted in the Bonapartist political imaginary. Napoleon's adventures in Egypt and the Near East still remained in the collective mindset as a glorious moment for French expansionism and helped confer a sense of romanticism and mysticism to France's mission in Africa. Napoleon III rapidly connected to his uncle's

³⁶ Éric Anceau, *Napoléon III: Un Saint-Simon à cheval* (Paris, Tallandier, 2008), p. 369.

³⁷ Annie Rey-Godzeiguer, *Le Royaume arabe: la politique algérienne de Napoléon III, 1861-1870* (Algiers: Société Nationale de l'Édition et de Diffusion, 1977).

Arab fascination and made it become an issue of great interest to the Second Empire.³⁸ Algeria was indeed seen as an opportunity to broaden France's influence in North Africa and, moreover, to fill the vacuum left by the increasing loss of colonies occurring since the times of the first Napoleonic empire. Geopolitics, cultural influence and economic power went hand in hand, which explains the fact that both liberals and Bonapartists viewed in Algeria a colony worth keeping despite the great sacrifices it demanded: the economic costs of maintaining peace and order in the region were extremely high, as were the efforts in terms of military and human resources.³⁹ Their major differences rather came in relation to the strategies to be implemented in order to properly rule the colony and profit from it.

Algeria's colonisation raised an important debate on the colony's territorial organisation, both internally and with regard to the metropole. The political status of the colony within the French institutional framework changed over time. Under the Second Republic in 1848, Algeria was for the first time considered as an integral part of France. Consequently, it was given the right to send political representatives to the National Assembly in Paris. This change, however, did not clarify the specific situation in which the indigenous populations remained. The problem of integration, assimilation or cohabitation between different religious and ethnic communities was still unresolved. With the advent of the Second Empire, Algeria was no longer considered as an 'integral' part of the Empire. The settlers' rights of political representation were abolished by the new 1852 constitution.

French thinkers and policymakers did not agree on the status that Algeria should have within the national community. Some considered it basically as an economic colony, in the classical sense of the term, a place from which France had to obtain as many benefits as it could. Others advocated instead for considering Algeria as an extension of French territory, that is, as any other province or department. Finally, there was a third

³⁸ Gérald Arboit, *Aux sources de la politique arabe de la France: le Second Empire au Machrek* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), pp. 23-30.

³⁹ Scholarly works on colonial violence are numerous. For a general overview on the French case, see Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844-1902* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); and William Gallois, *A History of Violence in the Early Algerian Colony* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

current claiming to make Algeria a sort of separate administrative entity attached to the metropole by strong economic and political links. Whereas the two first understandings were closely related to liberal milieus, the last option gained great support among the Bonapartists, particularly among the emperor's closest entourage.

In fact, Napoleon III dreamt of creating an 'Arab Kingdom', which he imagined as a political area united under French influence. This project was indeed an example of the Second Empire's policy towards Algeria, which can be placed in the general aim of making France a powerful actor in the Arab world.⁴⁰ According to the emperor, Algeria was not a colony, but a kingdom in which '[l]es indigènes ont comme les colons un droit égal à ma protection' because 'je suis aussi bien l'Empereur des Arabes que l'Empereur des Français'.⁴¹ This statement aimed to make clear that his and his regime's goal was by no means a full integration of the colony into France. Algeria would continue to be an important French place, a country tightly attached to France, but not a part of France. Indeed, the 'Arab Kingdom' can be understood as an attempt to halt 'colonisation' in the sense of settlement, something with which liberals did not agree. This way, problems concerning the official and political status of indigenous populations, either Muslim or Jewish, became less urgent to solve.

Nineteenth-century French political culture assumed that Algeria's Muslim indigenous population was unable to accept, and even to understand, the political and social principles issued by the Revolution due to their religion, mores and customs. The spirit of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, a renowned lawyer wrote,

⁴⁰ See Arboit, *Aux sources de la politique arabe de la France*. As for the general actions of Napoleon III in North Africa, see Rey-Godzeiguer, *Le Royaume arabe: la politique algérienne de Napoléon III*. Useful discussions include Charles-André Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine, I, la conquête et les débuts de la colonisation (1827-1871)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964); Abdeljedil Temini, *Recherches et documents d'histoire maghrébine, la Tunisie, l'Algérie et la Tripolitaine de 1816 à 1871* (Tunis: Publications de l'Université de Tunis, 1971); Georges Spillmann, *Napoléon III et le royaume arabe d'Algérie* (Paris: Académie des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1975); Charles Robert Ageron, *L'Algérie algérienne de Napoléon III à de Gaulle* (Paris, Sindbad, 1980); René Pillorget, 'Les deux voyages de Napoléon III en Algérie', *Revue du Souvenir Napoléonien*, 363 (February 1989), pp. 30–6.

⁴¹ Napoleon III to maréchal Pélissier, 6 February 1863, published at *Le Moniteur Universel* on 7 February 1863.

could not be applied to colonial natives because of their ‘backwardness’.⁴² From the very moment the French arrived in Algiers, the new colony was placed under an arbitrary legal system. Algeria was intended to be ruled by ordinances, and so it was until 1854, when according to a Second Empire’s sénatus-consulte, Napoleon III was given the right to rule the colony by decree.⁴³ In both cases, the local populations were viewed as different from their metropolitan counterparts, deserving different rules and norms. It was commonly acknowledged that the indigenous people, totally alien to the 1789 principles, ‘trouvent ce régime naturel puisque nous sommes les plus forts. Il fournit un moyen de répression souple, commode, rapide, qui évite de recourir à d’autres procédés plus rigoureux’.⁴⁴ This sort of ‘disciplinary regime’ would indeed gain momentum during the Third Republic, when diverse thinkers and intellectuals praised the system.⁴⁵

Napoleon’s projects for Algeria found great resistance among liberals and the ensemble of French and European settlers, who perceived the Empire’s policy towards the Muslims as an excessive concession to the indigenous Algerians and, consequently, as an affront to their own interests. The emperor, however, did not accept pressures and kept going with his plans. To do so, he surrounded himself with a little group of people sharing his views, such as marshal Pélissier and Ismaïl Urbain, a Saint-Simonian sympathetic interpreter of Islam and Muslim Algeria. Urbain, who even converted to Islam and married a Muslim woman, was indeed one of the most salient representatives of the so-called group of ‘Arabophiles’, with which the emperor felt himself comfortable.⁴⁶ The Arabophiles tended to see the Muslims not as the problem, but as part of the solution to the Algerian question.

⁴² Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *De l’indigénat. Anatomie d’un ‘monstre’ juridique: le droit colonial en Algérie et dans l’empire français* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010), p. 37.

⁴³ Le Cour Grandmaison, *De l’indigénat. Anatomie d’un ‘monstre’ juridique*, p. 19.

⁴⁴ Arthur Girault, *Principes de colonisation et de législation coloniale*, in Le Cour Grandmaison, *De l’indigénat. Anatomie d’un ‘monstre’ juridique*, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁵ Le Cour Grandmaison, *De l’indigénat. Anatomie d’un ‘monstre’ juridique*, p. 102.

⁴⁶ See a recent and outstanding work that combines both biographical and political approaches on this figure by Michel Levallois, *Ismaïl Urbain: Royaume arabe ou Algérie franco-musulmane? 1848–1870* (Paris: Riveneuve, 2012).

The emperor's inclination to consolidate land ownership in the hands of those who worked and lived on it, including the indigenous population, was applauded as much as it was contested.⁴⁷ Yet we should not see in this claim a gesture of high magnanimity. Opening the possibility for the Muslims to own their lands had a greater aim on the horizon: the pacification of the colony. Napoleon III was aware that many of the revolts produced recently had direct relation to property issues. In his opinion, it was thus urgent to tackle the problem and to try to convince the Muslims that they were an important part of colonisation, and not mere spectators of their own destruction. 'Aujourd'hui', declared the emperor, 'il faut [...] convaincre les Arabes que nous ne sommes pas venus en Algérie pour les supprimer et les spolier mais pour leur apporter les bienfaits de la civilisation, [o]r la première condition d'une société civilisée, c'est le respect du droit de chacun'.⁴⁸ Again, these visions contrasted radically with the ones of French and European settlers, people who kept in mind a deep sense of cultural and racial superiority over the natives and who came to be known as the 'arabophobes'. Expressions such as 'comme ces Arabes sont bêtes !', continuously heard in the streets of Algiers, illustrated the vast distance that separated the two communities.⁴⁹

Yet granting the indigenous population its own land was, in the emperor's opinion, also a way to increase the revenues of the colony. In a letter sent to the governor-general, he was clear in stating that 'on ne peut pas admettre qu'il y ait utilité à cantonner les indigènes' who cultivated two million hectares. France would benefit from involving local populations in the colony's economic development; therefore, the regime's political actions were to be entirely devoted to accomplishing this aim. To do so, he was convinced of the need to seek by all means 'à nous concilier avec cette race intelligente, fière, guerrière et agricole' and to avoid confining these populations to irrelevance, as the Native Americans in the United States, a situation that he branded as

⁴⁷ On land, see John Ruedy's classic *Land Policy in Colonial Algeria: the Origins of the Rural Public Domain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967).

⁴⁸ Napoléon III to maréchal Pélissier, letter dated 6 February 1863 and published at *Le Moniteur Universel*, 7 February 1863.

⁴⁹ George Wingrove Cooke, *Conquest and Colonisation in North Africa* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1860), p. 55.

‘impossible and inhumane’.⁵⁰ Algeria was big, rich and prosperous enough for everyone to find their own place, according to their needs, traditions and nature.

The emperor saw himself as the heir of a long political tradition starting with the Restoration. From the beginning of colonisation, the French government committed itself to respect the Muslims’ religion and properties. This was a ‘solemn and kind’ promise that needed to be accomplished. In doing so, Napoleon III wanted to please the indigenous populations, particularly the Muslim, for having supported his policy in the region.⁵¹ With this aim in mind, the emperor organised two trips to the colony in order to verify personally what the situation was and to appease both settlers and the indigenous population. He declared ‘le devoir de nous occuper du bonheur de trois millions d’Arabes [...], de les élever à la dignité d’hommes libres’.⁵² Years later, he claimed that ‘l’Algérie est un royaume arabe, une colonie européenne et un camp français’.⁵³

Algeria raised important issues of political and territorial organisation, which were closely linked to political rights and representation. How the imperial regime had to deal with more than three decades of administrative uncertainty and the difficulties of achieving the aims of colonisation was a key issue for liberals. The dual system of juxtaposing military and civil order was unsuccessful, so there was a need to find a new system which could combine the defence of the rights of both settlers and indigenous populations. Liberals also advocated to find the way to dominate properly the territory and to keep from it further economic benefits. Napoleon III’s aim was to make Algeria a political force at the service of the Empire’s strength. By being influential in the Arab world, France would be able to considerably expand its cultural and political influence

⁵⁰ Napoleon III to maréchal Pélissier, letter dated 6 February 1863 and published in *Le Moniteur Universel*, 7 February 1863.

⁵¹ Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Histoire de la France coloniale. Des origines à 1914* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991), p. 466.

⁵² Napoleon III at Algiers on 19 September 1860, *La politique impériale exposée par les discours et proclamations de l’empereur Napoléon III, 1848–1868* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1868), p. 334.

⁵³ Napoléon III to Marc-Mahon, 20 June 1865.

across North Africa, to control the pass towards the Far East and to counteract British, Ottoman and Russian powers.⁵⁴

The French Second Empire merely continued on this historical path.⁵⁵ Not for nothing, Algeria was key to creating a strategic role for France in the Mediterranean area, considered by many to be a 'French lake'. Its colonisation made competing visions arise on political and economic practice and brought to the surface important debates on the nature of the French nation. From the very beginning, the colony led the French elites to face the concept of otherness and to reflect carefully on key issues such as difference, integration and assimilation. These notions have remained alive within French political culture up to the present day and have profoundly shaped the way the French in general, and their different political divides in particular, have faced politics for almost two centuries.

4. AN INSIGHT INTO COCHINCHINA

The 1858 expedition to Cochinchina and its later colonisation played a prominent role within the French Second Empire's ambitious imperialist project. Not only religious but also economic, cultural and strategic reasons impelled Napoleon III's government to undertake a risky, costly colonial venture more than six thousand miles away from the metropole. Nevertheless, this military endeavour was not only a central issue for politicians, a select Paris-based group of economic and social elites or the editors of specialised press. Cochinchina's colonisation played an important role in the definition of the Empire itself, contributing to shaping its ideological underpinnings and to consolidating ways for its political justification and social legitimation. It also brought back to the public sphere the notions of nation, empire, *grandeur* and civilisation, as commonly present in political language at the time. The expedition fostered an open public and political debate on France's geopolitical role at the global level, providing a wide range of ideas and thoughts on the 1860s inter-imperial dynamics.

⁵⁴ Arboit, *Aux sources de la politique arabe de la France*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Kay Adamson, *Political and Economic Thought and Practice in Nineteenth-Century France and the Colonization of Algeria* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. 3.

At the very beginning of the seventeenth century, the first French Jesuit missionaries, expelled from Japan, arrived in the southern part of the Indochinese peninsula. Alexandre de Rhodes established the first mission in 1627, which attracted a great number of missionaries in the following decades, especially when the Vatican sanctioned their activity in the area.⁵⁶ The number of conversions to Catholicism never reached extraordinary peaks, and local authorities always viewed the presence of missionaries in the region as a dangerous threat.⁵⁷ Over the course of the eighteenth century, the imbrication of religious and political interest led to a greater presence of the French in the area, although any project of colonisation was still far away. Once the British added Hong Kong to their colonial possessions in 1842, the French felt the pressure to reinforce their political presence in the region.⁵⁸

The Church acted as a powerful lobby in Napoleon III's government, trying to push it to intervene in the Indochinese region in order to ensure the safety of the French (and also Spanish) missionaries against hostile enemies. A committed supporter of this lobby was Empress Eugenie herself, a woman of deep Catholic convictions, who always tried to be influential over her husband, especially when it came to fostering, spreading and defending religion. The emperor accepted to launch the military expedition in part to please a group of French Catholics unhappy with the regime's actions in Italy.⁵⁹ In part, Catholic lobbies also had depicted the situation in Cochinchina as if military efforts were going to be unnecessary, since indigenous populations, suffering from a tyrannical king, would welcome the French troops with open arms.⁶⁰ Yet religion was not the only reason for undertaking such a complex colonial project. France would have never invested so many economic and human resources only in religious matters, even if at the time there were approximately 300,000 Roman Catholic converts in Annam and

⁵⁶ Nguyễn Ba Thiên, *La Cochinchine. Histoire d'une colonie française en Asie extrême* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014), pp. 63–7.

⁵⁷ Milton E. Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia. Rule and Response 1859-1905* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 25.

⁵⁸ Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 12, 14.

⁵⁹ James F. McMillan, *Napoleon III* (London: Longman, 1991), p. 148.

⁶⁰ Ba Thiên, *La Cochinchine. Histoire d'une colonie française en Asie extrême*, p. 135; Cooper, *France in Indochina*, p. 13.

Tonkin. The prospect of enlarging the nation's *gloire*, as well as appealing economic opportunities, played an important part too.

With this in mind, the French Empire began to establish a small number of military forces in the area with the aim to carry out tasks of control and intimidation, with neither a clear strategy nor the will to conquer the territory. Indeed, colonisation was rather the result of individual actions by explorers, merchants and traders.⁶¹ It was not until 1858, shortly after a preliminary prospection in the form of a diplomatic mission, that Napoleon III decided to make a step forward to broaden France's dominion in the region and the conquest of 'Basse Cochinchine' materialised, an area with some one million inhabitants united by a common language and a national religion: Theravada Buddhism.⁶² As Franchini notes, 'c'est dans ces conditions que s'engage le processus d'une conquête, sans plan véritable, avec des objectifs non précisés, adaptables aux circonstances et aux décisions des chefs militaires'.⁶³

Asia was at the time an important centre of attraction for a number of economic and geopolitical reasons. The main European powers, namely Britain, France and Russia, manifested their intention to expand at one moment or another to the Asian continent in order to control strategic passage routes for both commercial and military purposes. Cochinchina was strategically positioned and thus remained a coveted place. In the 1860s, the British and French empires were involved in several wars against Qing's China, which sought to consolidate its power over the area. Nearby, trying to counteract both Chinese and European ambitions, the Japanese Empire also represented a flourishing power in the 1860s.

After the end of the Second Opium War in 1860, the governments of France and Spain decided to make an incursion into the 'Annamite Empire' when Emperor Tu-Duc ordered the decapitation of Monsignor Díaz, a Spanish bishop in Tonkin, a fact that

⁶¹ Cooper, *France in Indochina*, pp. 11–2.

⁶² Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia*, p. 5.

⁶³ Philippe Franchini, *Les guerres d'Indochine*, cited in Cooper, *France in Indochina*, p. 13.

was rapidly taken as a justification for military intervention.⁶⁴ Napoleon III approved a naval operation under Rigault de Genouilly before the French troops, which were at war against China, returned to France. On 1 September 1858, they arrived in Da Nang (Tourane)⁶⁵ with 2,300 men who, from the very beginning and contrary to what was expected, encountered a great resistance. Given that the expeditionary corps reduced its numbers due to the effect that disease had on a great numbers of soldiers, the Navy intervened to conquer Saigon and three southern Vietnamese provinces in February 1859: Bien-Hoa, Gia-Dinh and Dinh-Tuoang (My-Tho).⁶⁶ From then onwards, naval power proved decisive to control the territory and ensure a successful colonisation. The Navy controlled the colony for decades and, as the military had placed their officers in Algeria's Bureaux Arabes, the Navy placed its official administrators and indigenous affairs inspectors in Cochinchina after 1861, under the orders of Minister Chasseloup-Laubat.⁶⁷ After some years of continuous struggle and political instability, the Annamite emperor Tu-Duc and representatives of the Second Empire signed the Treaty of Saigon in June 1862, whose terms established the cession of the island of Con-Dao (Poulo Condor) and the three aforementioned southern provinces to the French. Three harbours were opened to French trade and religious freedom was established.⁶⁸ Hardly a year later, the treaty was confirmed by the Treaty of Hué, signed on 14 April 1863. This way, the Second Empire established a new colony in Cochinchine, from where it had direct and easy access to the rest of the Indochinese peninsula. The complicated terrain, the lack of an appropriate number of military forces and the high economic costs of maintaining a colonial administration in a fairly hostile territory constrained the French from undertaking further remarkable incursions in the immediate aftermath.

⁶⁴ Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina. An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), p. 19.

⁶⁵ With the exception of the well-known name of Saigon, Vietnamese toponyms are presented in their hyphenated Vietnamese form. No attempt has been made with either toponyms or personal names to render the diacritics and tone marks which are an essential part of the Vietnamese written language.

⁶⁶ Cooper, *France in Indochina*, p. 13; Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina. An Ambiguous Colonization*, p. 25.

⁶⁷ Brocheux and Hémery has noted that Cochinchina was indeed a direct result of nineteenth-century 'naval imperialism'. *Indochina. An Ambiguous Colonization*, p. 21.

⁶⁸ Cooper, *France in Indochina*, p. 14.

CHAPTER 2
Overseas Ventures and Imperial Languages

However, colonisation continued, even if slowly, under Admiral Charner. In 1867, the French Empire took over three more provinces (Vinh-Long, Chau-Doc and Ha-Tien).



FIG. 3. Lower Cochinchina in the 1860s. SHD G5-8.

The French arrived in the region in a moment of great political turbulence. The two Annamite seigneurial houses were contending to control power, which left the governance of the Annamite Empire in a rather weak position. The French army could take advantage of this situation and fairly easily achieved the control of important strategic places. As Nicola Cooper has noted, ‘for France, the newly-acquired colony functioned as an empty space in which to create a new society: an empty space to be built upon, moulded, developed, populated, imagined and represented’, a place where French scientific knowledge could develop thanks to an ambitious plan of exploratory expeditions.⁶⁹ Decades later, well into the nineteenth century, the years of the expedition to Cochinchina still remained in the French imperial imaginary as a glorious moment. General Cousin de Montauban, who published in the 1930s his grandfather’s memories of Cochinchina, highlighted the general’s ‘prescience de l’avenir, acuité de

⁶⁹ Cooper, *France in Indochina*, pp. 1, 18.

vue, sûreté de jugement' with which he 'préconisait les méthodes qui, appliqués plus tard par d'autres, devaient nous assurer *notre merveilleux domaine indochinois*'.⁷⁰ All in all, these words tell us not only about the way in which the Cochinchina venture was viewed by one of its main protagonists but also about the way in which the venture was reinterpreted in the 1930s as a major, key colonial project.

Back in the metropole, Cochinchina became a matter of debate which, beyond the interest it raised for public opinion, gave rise to passionate and harsh parliamentary disputes. Yet beyond this strictly political environment, Cochinchina became the central issue of many publications addressed to a wide range of publics. The expedition to Cochinchina was appealing to publishers, as long as it represented the ideal of 'romantic' colonisation, the discovery of new exotic and faraway lands, products, animals and peoples.⁷¹ During the 1860s, editors such as Challamel Ainé and Pierre Dentu published many works by military men, missionaries and diplomats, who explained their personal experiences in the field.⁷² They mostly referred to their difficulties with Cochinchina's hot and humid climate, commonly described as 'l'un des plus malsains du globe'.⁷³ French soldiers had to face such a hard environment, not always successfully, since

[c]ette chaleur mortelle, inconnue à nous autres Européens, était l'ennemi le plus redoutable à combattre. C'était un triste spectacle de voir tomber ainsi sur la terre

⁷⁰ Comte de Palikao, *L'expédition de Chine de 1860. Souvenirs du général Cousin de Montauban, Comte de Palikao* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1932), p. vii [my emphasis].

⁷¹ Examples of the sort of publications which contributed to depict Cochinchina as a rich place worth conquering, including detailed descriptions of all its regions, are L. de Coincy, *Quelques mots sur la Cochinchine en 1866* (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1866), especially pp. 8-49; Gia-Dinh-Thung-Chi, *Histoire et description de la Basse Cochinchine* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1864), especially chapters 1 and 4; Charles Lemire, *Cochinchine française et Royaume de Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1869); and E. Muraour, *Campagnes glorieuses de Napoléon III. Cochinchine* (Paris: Lebigre-Duquesne Frères, 1863).

⁷² Cochinchina's colonisation rapidly occupied a place among the most trendy public issues. Examples of it were numerous and adopted varied ways of expression in the form of pamphlets, short publications or press articles. See, for instance, *The French in Indochina. With a Narrative of Garnier's Explorations in Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2000) originally published in Edinburgh, T. Nelson and Sons, 1884.

⁷³ *Souvenirs de l'expédition de Cochinchine (1861-1862) par un lieutenant de l'ex 101* (Paris: Librairie du Petit Journal, 1865), p. 13.

brûlante nos soldats anéantis, laissant échapper leurs armes, qu'ils ne pouvaient plus tenir.⁷⁴

Significantly, a lieutenant of the 101st regiment of the expeditionary corps in China, which was sent to pacify Cochinchina, after having described all negative aspects of Cochinchina's unhealthiness, warned that 'il ne faudrait pas se prévaloir de ce tableau peu attrayant, mais vrai, de la Basse-Cochinchine, comme d'un argument contre notre occupation définitive de ce pays'.⁷⁵ This fear was justified because, certainly, the more difficulties to conquer the territory, the more expensive the colonisation, which was used by the opposition to criticise the whole project because of its high human and economic costs. Yet, after all, descriptions like this came to create a subliminal message in favour of those brave military men who risked their lives to establish a colony in such a hostile land. Fighting against adversities conferred on them a higher patriotic commitment, which perfectly fit with the Empire's desire to become itself a sort of sacred value. Following the official mindset, it had to be taken into account that French troops were dealing with many difficulties, and that brave civil citizens were equally fighting committedly for the French domination of the territory, which was seen as a great example to follow. The lieutenant attempted to reassure those claiming to stop the expedition because of its high complexity and costs by pointing out that Cochinchina was a territory

...suffisamment peuplé et bien cultivé par sa population, il n'a nul besoin de colons européens pour prospérer. Quelques administrateurs pour organiser, un petit nombre de militaires et de marins pour garder et défendre au besoin le territoire, les représentants des maisons de commerce, voilà tout le personnel colonial nécessaire à la Cochinchine française. Et ce personnel se mettra facilement à l'abri des influences pernicieuses du climat par une bonne hygiène et une installation confortable.⁷⁶

Yet, apart from these attempts, the best way to create public sympathy towards the new colony was to describe it as a rich, idyllic land. Pamphlets and books on the new colony

⁷⁴ Baron de Bazancourt, *Les expéditions de Chine et de Cochinchine d'après les documents officiels. Première partie 1857-1858* (Paris: Amyot éditeur, 1861), p. 283.

⁷⁵ *Souvenirs de l'expédition de Cochinchine*, p. 14.

⁷⁶ *Souvenirs de l'expédition de Cochinchine*, p. 14.

systematically incorporated a section on Cochinchina's natural characteristics, including both its fauna and flora. Cochinchina was commonly depicted as an opulent country, full of natural resources, possessing abundant and splendid forests, plants, minerals, fruits and animals such as buffalos, cows, small horses, bullocks and tigers. Rice, betel nuts, sugar cane, corn, cotton, indigo, bamboo and tropical fruits were the most appreciated raw materials. The Second Empire's government promoted the launching of publications containing such descriptions, aware of the great fascination that they created among the public.

5. MEXICO: 'LA GRANDE PENSÉE DU RÈGNE'?

Among the Second Empire's foreign ventures, the expedition and later intervention in Mexico was one of the most striking and contested. Ernest Picard recognised that 'la guerre du Mexique émeut l'opinion publique'.⁷⁷ Michelle Cunningham has stressed the idea that 'the intervention in Mexico attracted more criticism in France than earlier foreign ventures, although it is not probably surprising when one considers at what stage in the developing of the Second Empire the campaign took place'.⁷⁸ Mexico was the first foreign venture susceptible to be discussed by the opposition at the Corps législatif after the liberal measures undertaken by the Second Empire in the 1860s. Given the importance that Napoleon III gave to the project, one of his closest ministers, Ernest Rouher, referred to it as 'la plus grande pensée du règne'. More than a sign of flattering commitment to the emperor, this expression has since rather been used as evidence of criticism about his abilities to lead France's worldwide expansion. Christian Schefer used this expression to title one of his most celebrated books on the motivations and consequences of the expedition.⁷⁹ Yet, either viewed as a resounding failure or as a pertinent opportunity to reinforce the Second Empire's power in the world, the truth is that the expedition and later intervention in Mexico remains one of the most significant—not to say the most significant—imperial ventures in the 1860s.

⁷⁷ Papiers Ernest Picard, BNF, DM, NAF 24372.

⁷⁸ Cunningham, *Mexico and the Foreign Policy of Napoleon III*, p. 5.

⁷⁹ Christian Schefer, *La grande pensée de Napoléon III: Les origines de l'expédition du Mexique (1858-1862)* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1939).

As later chapters will demonstrate, Mexico was definitely not the Second Empire's 'greatest project', but rather the contrary.

In their book on the French intervention in Mexico, Hanna and Hanna argue that Napoleon III, like many other contemporary European monarchs, feared that American republican ideas would subvert his political system and tradition.⁸⁰ By that time, Europe and the United States were certainly building different, competing pathways. Their struggle for global pre-eminence found in the Americas a controversial area to develop. Old European empires, mostly Spain and Portugal, had begun to experience a strong decline of their effective power since the beginning of the independence processes of the early decades of the nineteenth century. Newer empires such as France and Great Britain, although on their way to consolidating vast imperial powers in Africa and Asia, were by no means alien to the American continent and therefore tried hard to play their part in the distribution of power balance in the region. A major, decisive actor in this process were the United States of America, a young nation with, at the time, an impressive prospective for growth and power. Aware of the need to protect themselves and their 'natural' area of influence—that is, the entire Americas—from European imperialist ambitions, the United States began building conceptual strategies which could justify their political defensive and offensive actions. One of these concepts was the Monroe Doctrine, elaborated in the 1820s in order to protect the continent from any sort of European intervention or interference, which would immediately be seen as an act of aggression towards the United States.

All these variables came to converge in Mexico in the early 1860s, when the United States plunged into its worst national crisis: a civil war that could have ended with their unity and strength destroyed. France, initially together with Great Britain and Spain, saw in the American Civil War the perfect moment to perform what contemporaries already had coined as Napoleon III's 'greatest thought' in the Americas, that is, to make France a truly imperial power on the continent. Many issues were actually at stake. First, the form of government of the new nations appeared after the Spanish

⁸⁰ Alfred Jackson Hanna and Kathryn Abbey Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico. American Triumph over Monarchy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), p. xiii.

decolonisation, which had mainly adopted the form of a republic. Napoleon III dreamed that the entire continent—where both France and Britain had been active since the escalation of national independence movements began in the early 1800s—would be ruled under monarchies similar to that which he had established in France, which could serve as a barrier to the expansion of the United States.⁸¹ This project rapidly proved controversial for the US republic, which from the beginning defined itself in opposition to the old European kingdoms. Second, there was a civilisational component, closely related to religion, which opposed Latin and Anglo-Saxon, Catholic and Protestant power.⁸² The extent to which these variables really mattered in the strategic planning of the intervention in Mexico has not been duly addressed by historians. As this thesis aims to demonstrate, liberal thinking in France contributed to generating the idea that Mexico was a resounding failure of the Second Empire; a reckless, badly-organised venture which jeopardised the good international image of France.

In general accounts of French imperialism, Mexico is rarely considered an expansionist endeavour. Certainly, its characteristics make it different from other colonial projects. First and foremost, Mexico was always considered as a sovereign and well-established old nation by French political elites in the 1860s. In their minds, Mexico was a very different case from Algeria or Cochinchina, so the aim was never to establish a colony or a protectorate there.⁸³ Napoleon III's plans for the *azteca* country, as will be shown later, included the possibility of controlling its government by installing a subservient head of state, but not to place the whole country under direct French rule. The Second Empire sought to expand its economic and geostrategic influence in America through Mexico, taking advantage of the weak situation into which the United States were

⁸¹ See Hanna and Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico*, pp. 182–98. The importance of Mexico for France in the nineteenth century, as well as the goals that Napoleon III was pursuing when he decided to intervene militarily and politically in the country in the 1860s are well summarised in Lise Andries and Laura Suárez de la Torre (eds.), *Impressions du Mexique et de France. Impresiones de México y Francia* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2009), foreword, especially p. 13.

⁸² See Michel Chevalier, *Le Mexique, ancien et moderne* (Paris: Hachette, 1863).

⁸³ Respect for Mexico as a truly independent nation and not as a territory susceptible of being dominated and colonised was expressed in declarations like the following: 'Le peuple Mexicain a une histoire qui lui est propre, il a son histoire et sa nationalité', Anonymous author, *Que ferons-nous à Mexico* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1863), p. 16.

plunged because of the Civil War. That Mexico was not seen as a backward, uncivilised country was an accepted idea in virtually all political circles at the time. An example of this shared mindset are the following words:

Le Mexique n'était pas une de ces contrées sauvages que nous rencontrons, hélas ! trop souvent dans l'Amérique septentrionale. On se heurte à chaque instant, au milieu de ses grandes villes, à des preuves irrécusables d'une civilisation très avancée.⁸⁴

The Expedition

The Treaty of London signed in October 1861 by France, Great Britain and Spain was the first milestone for an expedition of these three European powers to Mexico. The *azteca* country was *de facto* independent from Spain since 1821 and was suffering from great political, social and economic instability. European powers took advantage of this situation. Since captain Agustín de Iturbide had entered Mexico DF on 27 September 1821 and the war of independence had come to an end, Mexico was plunged into an extremely unstable period defined by the struggle of its two main ideological sides. On the one hand were the *conservatives*, representatives of the clergy, landowners and military officers. On the other hand were the *liberals*, representative of popular and indigenous classes.⁸⁵ Euphoria for independence soon turned into discomfort and political instability. National consolidation experienced truly difficult and weak moments. In 1861, Mexico had eight million inhabitants, five of them in the vicinity of the capital. Ninety per cent of the population lived in thousands of little villages, often very poorly connected to each other, and the rest lived in twenty-five little cities. Mexico City had around 200,000 inhabitants followed by Puebla and Guanajuato, with around 5,000 inhabitants each. At this time, London had almost 3,000,000 inhabitants.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ L. Enduran, *France et Mexique. Histoire de l'expédition des français au Mexique* (Limoges: Eugène Ardant et C. Thibaut, 1866), p. 6.

⁸⁵ Belenki, *La intervención extranjera de 1861-1867 en México* (México: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1972), p. 32–3.

⁸⁶ Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004), p. 206.

Mexico's economy was based on agriculture, industry was almost non-existent and communications were very scarce. Eight out of ten Mexicans were peasants. Middle and higher classes, as well as political and social élites, formed the rest.⁸⁷ After decades of political and ideological struggle between liberals and conservatives, Benito Juárez, the first indigenous president of Mexico, came to power and started an ambitious plan of liberalisation for the country. Mexican conservative groups representing the interests of landowners and the clergy disliked the fact that an indigenous liberal politician had seized power for the first time in Mexico's history. Representatives of this conservative group began a campaign to topple the Juárez government, which implied having contacts with French conservatives in Paris. The Catholic Church in Mexico was against the liberal government. Juárez redistributed property and undertook political and economic measures which angered those with power and wealth. These privileged groups turned to finding a monarchic solution which would ensure the re-establishment of order.

Because of the great political instability and extremely delicate economic and social situation, Mexico entered a period of harsh internal conflicts, which strongly weakened national government, already burdened by interest payments on the external debt as a result of the civil war's impact on national finances. The total debt stood at 82 million pesos by 1861. In July 1861, the Juárez administration attempted to recover federal-government control over all revenues appropriated by state governors by a decree. This decree also included the suspension of payments on the external debts for two years. The European powers took this as a pretext for a demonstration of force, and decided to send a military expedition to Mexico.⁸⁸ France's commissioners were Vice Amiral Jean Jurien de la Gravière and Count Dubois de Saligny; and those for England were Sir Charles Lennox Wyke and Commodore Hugh Dunlop. The chairman of the whole expedition was the Spanish General Juan Prim.

⁸⁷ Antònia Pi-Suñer, *El general Prim i la 'qüestió de Mèxic'* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1992), pp. 23–4.

⁸⁸ Brian R. Hammet, *A Concise History of Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 162–3.

CHAPTER 2
Overseas Ventures and Imperial Languages

The first troops arrived in Veracruz, one of Mexico's most important harbours from both an economic and geostrategic point of view. As the initial idea was to pressure the Juárez administration as fast as possible, the Europeans decided to put such a pivotal Mexican source of economic revenue under their control. The tripartite expedition's calculations, however, proved inadequate, since they did not contemplate other factors, mainly climate-related, which made things much more complicated than initially expected. High temperatures and humidity, together with the existence of tropical flora and fauna, caused a huge number of casualties among the European soldiers. This fact put the European powers in a weaker position to pressure the Mexican government or to start any sort of negotiation, since the change of location became a priority for their armies. To do so, the Tripartite Alliance needed the collaboration of the Mexican government, which authorised the movement of troops to a safer place after an agreement signed at La Soledad by Manuel Doblado, Mexico's minister of foreign affairs; and Juan Prim, Spanish general and representative of the European powers. These agreements, also known as the Convention of La Soledad, annoyed the French government as they were seen as treason to the unity of action of the tripartite coalition. At La Soledad, Prim insisted that the European powers would never intervene in Mexico's domestic affairs, as their sole goal was the mere collection of claims and grievances allegedly committed by the Juárez administration. Doblado asked the European powers for the recognition of the Juárez government as the legitimate representative of the Mexican people and asked for their willingness to negotiate with it in exchange for allowing the expeditionary troops to leave the disease-infected coast and to move to healthier locations. Although he finally signed the agreement, the French commissioner made evident the angered reaction that it produced within Napoleon III's government.

The Mexican flag regained its preponderant position in Veracruz and negotiations began. The inability of the three European invading powers to agree soon became evident, which led to the dissolution of the tripartite expedition in April 1862 at Orizaba. The Spanish and British troops withdrew from the country. At this point, the French immediately began making their way towards Puebla and Mexico City, proving that their aims went beyond the mere achievement of debts and that what they wanted

was to ‘regenerate’ the country. France’s creditors were not the most harmed by Juárez’s decision, yet Napoleon III’s government used social unrest and some cases of violence against French nationals to present Mexico’s situation as chaotic and dangerous. The Second Empire’s propaganda machinery found a way to blow these grievances out of proportion and create the image that the permanence of the French on Mexico’s territory was an unavoidable, urgent need. The decision to remain in Mexico after both the British and the Spanish had decided to leave was soon presented as a visionary tactical manoeuvre by the emperor, Napoleon III. However, when the French troops arrived in Mexico, the government kept telling the public that the Mexico was not more than a diplomatic affair with a clear objective and by no means would lead to a direct conflict with Juárez. They maintained that a declaration made by the representatives of the tripartite expedition in 1862 was valid:

Nous venons ici pour être les témoins et, au besoin, les protecteurs de la régénération du Mexique. Nous venons assister à son organisation définitive, sans vouloir intervenir en aucune façon dans la forme de son gouvernement ni de son administration intérieure. C’est au Mexique seul qu’il appartient de juger quelles sont les institutions qui lui conviennent. [...] Nous pouvons montrer au peuple mexicain quelle est la route qui lui conduira à la prospérité.⁸⁹

Despite the ambiguity of these words, some already saw in them at the time an implicit invitation to pursue a greater intervention in the country, inasmuch as they suggested to ‘show’ the Mexican people the best way to achieve prosperity.⁹⁰ Although the official accounts kept claiming that the Second Empire would never work to alter Mexico’s political system and turn it into a monarchy, liberal thinkers clearly saw the intervention’s real motivations. Prévost-Paradol suggested that

[dans l’expédition au Mexique] se joignaient d’autres rêves plus vagues encore, mais par cela même plus propres à séduire et revêtues d’une indistincte grandeur : régénération de la race latine dans le Nouveau Monde, création d’un équilibre, barrière opposée à

⁸⁹ Official declaration signed by the representatives of the tripartite expedition, Lennox Wyke, Hugh Dunlop, Jurien de la Gravière, Dubois de Saligny and Juan Prim. Anonymous author, *Que ferons-nous à Mexico* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1863), p. 16.

⁹⁰ *Que ferons-nous à Mexico*, p. 17.

CHAPTER 2
Overseas Ventures and Imperial Languages

l'envahissement de la race anglo-saxonne, mines de métaux précieux inépuisables, percement d'un isthme.⁹¹

Napoleon III's government had to face great military difficulties from the very beginning. Contrary to what the Bonapartists probably believed, the Mexicans showed no proof of esteem for the French, who were seen, as the Spaniards had been seen in earlier times, as an invading army, dangerous for the country's independence and sovereignty. The French troops suffered from important military shortcomings and had to face a resounding defeat against the Mexicans in Puebla in May 1862. Seeing the difficulties to control the territory with the military forces sent in an early stage, the French government decided to increase the number of soldiers and weaponry to deal with the unexpectedly strong Mexican enemy. Not only French but also Austrian, Belgian and Egyptian troops, as well as soldiers from Sudan and Crimea, took part in the second attempt to conquer Puebla just one year later. This time, the troops led by marshal Forey were able to overcome the Mexicans after some sixty days of cruel confrontation.

Their way to Mexico City was opened and the establishment of the Mexican Second Empire, under the reign of Maximilian of Austria, was much closer to becoming a reality.⁹² It is perhaps a coincidence that the founder of the Second Empire in France intended to emulate the same process in a country like Mexico, which had already experienced a rather unsuccessful imperial experience in the early nineteenth century. Presumably persuaded by a powerful lobby of Mexican conservatives in Paris, closely related to Empress Eugenia, Napoleon III came to the conclusion that the establishment of a new imperial regime substituting the revolutionary government of Juárez would be a perfect starting point for the development of his geostrategic plans in the country and, hence, the entire continent. Napoleon III's design in Mexico included the increase of French presence in the country by sending new settlers from the metropole. French authorities argued that some 600,000 people would have to be

⁹¹ Prologue of Prévost-Paradol to E. de Kératry, *L'élévation et la chute de l'Empereur Maximilien. Intervention française au Mexique 1861-1867* (Paris, 1867), p. xii.

⁹² For the details of the operation to appoint Archduke Maximilian of Austria as emperor of a renewed Mexican empire, see Hanna and Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico*, pp. 96-102.

CHAPTER 2
Overseas Ventures and Imperial Languages

drawn to Mexico in four years in order to pacify the country, stimulate the economy and increase its living standards; in this, they were probably following Michel Chevalier's idea of strengthening the Americas with European immigration, as suggested in his *Le Mexique, ancien et moderne*.⁹³



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

FIG. 4. Map of Mexico. Alexandre Vuillemin, *Nouvelle carte physique et politique du Mexique pour servir à l'intelligence des opérations militaires de l'armée française* (Paris: Garnier frères, 1863). BNF.

Chevalier

In everything related to the expedition to Mexico, Michel Chevalier played an important role. He wrote profusely on the expedition, arguing that France needed to remain in Mexico in order to defend its greatness by ensuring Latin and Catholic power on the entire American continent, thus protecting it from the Protestant and Anglo-

⁹³ Emmanuel Domenech, *Le Mexique tel qu'il est, la vérité sur son climat, ses habitants et son gouvernement* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1867) cited in Hanna and Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico*, p. 199; and Chevalier, *Le Mexique, ancien et moderne*. See also Anonymous author, *México, el imperio y la intervención* (Mexico, 1867). A French version of this pamphlet was published two years later as *Le Mexique, l'empire et l'intervention* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1869).

Saxon influence coming from the increasingly powerful United States. His deep knowledge of the country's industry and economy and his ideological ascendancy over Napoleon III made him a respectable voice in all issues related to the venture, especially among the Bonapartists. Chevalier visited Mexico in the 1830s at the request of the then-Minister of the Interior, Adolphe Thiers, who was particularly interested in knowing how the recently emancipated colony was doing in industrial and economic terms. From the beginning, Chevalier enthusiastically praised the benefits that France could obtain from having a proactive role in Mexico and, more generally, the entire Americas. His interest in the topic resulted in the publication of several works which made the country known among political and intellectual elites in Paris and surely influenced the French political activities on the continent. As a supporter of Napoleon III and his regime, Chevalier defended the French intervention in Mexico as a necessary step to promote France's influence in the region. The reason behind his enthusiasm for intervening in the country seemed clear:

Le Mexique est aujourd'hui parmi les peuples civilisés ce qu'on appelle une non-valeur. Excepté par la production des mines d'argent, qui fournissent à l'orfèvrerie une matière première qu'autrement elle paierait plus cher, c'est une nation inutile au reste du genre humain.⁹⁴

Chevalier's words are certainly harsh regarding a country for which he seems to profess as much respect as disdain. First, it is telling that Chevalier refers to Mexico as a 'civilised people', placing it in a clearly different position than other territories where France deployed its power, such as Algeria or Cochinchina. These latter cases were rather seen as places where France was called to implement its 'civilising mission', thus implying that their local population was by no means at the level of the French people. Mexico, however, was different. Yet, although being a theoretically civilised nation, Mexico suffered from serious economic limitations, according to Chevalier. In his opinion, 'il serait dans la nature des choses' that Mexico could play an important role internationally. The lack of organisation and skills of the Mexican people, however, had

⁹⁴ Michel Chevalier, 'Des ressources et de l'avenir du pays. Des motifs et des chances de l'expédition', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. xxxviii (Paris: April 1862), p. 879.

made it impossible for the country to succeed. It is hard to believe that Chevalier's words were innocent. One might rather consider that there was a clear intention in depicting a civilised, splendid country like Mexico as non-value and useless to humanity, precisely when France was fully engaged in controlling it. The purpose was thus to present France as the needed 'added-value' to improve such a misused nation.

It was following this logic that the government intervened in Mexico in 1862. The venture's ideological underpinnings smoothly matched the Bonapartist idea of bringing prosperity to backward countries and, all in all, were rooted in Napoleon III's great design for the Americas. Although liberal in his approach to economic issues, Chevalier rarely demonstrated any sort of sympathy for the postulates of liberal politicians, namely in relation to the Mexican affair, and indeed helped articulate a specific vision of Mexico's past and present which suggested that France was in the position to turn the rudder around and fix the situation. This would then take the form of a project of 'regeneration' rather than 'civilisation'. Chevalier was surely not the first to defend this idea of regeneration, nor were his arguments for doing so strikingly novel, but he was nonetheless among its most passionate advocates. As the following chapters will show, the opposition's liberal deputies struggled to make sure that France got involved in no political or military adventures whose aim was from the beginning to break the principle of non-intervention and therefore to alter the domestic political life of any country.

Given the increasing pressure of the United States for France to leave Mexico, and seeing that the maintenance of troops in such a hostile environment was becoming rather unsustainable, Napoleon III decided to withdraw from the country and to leave Maximilian on his own. Empress Charlotte's desperate trip to Paris in search of economic and logistic help for her husband was not fruitful and, much to the French imperial couple's regret, the French Second Empire was not in the position to continue supporting its Mexican counterpart. Émile Ollivier wrote once that 'placed between catastrophe if he persisted, and humiliation if he retreated [Napoleon III] resigned

himself to humiliation'.⁹⁵ His great design for the Americas ended as his uncle's project for Europe had, in disaster. French liberals had already foreseen the outcome of such a venture from the very moment it was planned and implemented.

Mexico was indeed acknowledged as a truly Hispanic matter, and its political and economic troubles as the direct result of centuries of Spanish colonisation in the Americas. A non-authored 1863 pamphlet suggested that Mexico's political situation was inherited from almost three centuries of Spanish oppression and misrule, which made the Spaniards not really well-appreciated by the Mexicans.⁹⁶ The French, who played a significant role in the country with the establishment of important investors and capitals, however, would be much more respected. This idea, repeated by a substantial number of publications, surely influenced the instigators and leaders of the intervention, who were convinced that the French would not find strong resistance in their aim to control the country and allegedly help its stabilisation from the side of the Mexicans.

Favre and Quinet

The Mexican venture is relevant because it was an affair of huge controversy among the Bonapartists and liberals. Both in parliament and in the press, liberal deputies and publicists, with the special example of Jules Favre, took advantage of this venture to undermine the government and to associate it with irresponsibility and misrule. Unlike in the case of Algeria and Cochinchina, the Mexican affair began and ended with the Second Empire. It can be considered a truly Bonapartist project to which liberals reacted in a particular way. Jules Favre's celebrated claim at the Corps législatif, rhetorically asking the chamber 'qu'allons-nous faire au Mexique' shortly after the beginning of the intervention, left its mark on the French political culture of the 1860s. Certainly, Favre was known as one of the liberal deputies and thinkers who dared the most to challenge the Bonapartist government's enthusiasm about the Mexican affair. His numerous writings and parliamentary speeches contributed to making the French

⁹⁵ Émile Ollivier, *L'Empire libéral: études, récits, souvenirs*, 17 vols. (Paris: 1895-1915), VII, p. 546, cited in Hanna and Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico*, p. 274.

⁹⁶ *Que ferons-nous à Mexico*, p. 10.

people much more aware and concerned about the issue. As a geopolitical issue, Mexico had not occupied a remarkable place within France's political preoccupations until the Second Empire decided to send its troops to the country. Once the issue became a reason for harsh, passionate political debate, both at the parliamentary and public levels, French public opinion began showing deeper interest for a country which was seen as rather alien to France's interests.

Other important republican figures, such as Edgar Quinet, also blamed the government for their improvised, erratic performance in Mexico and for being responsible for so much pain and bloodshed in the American country.⁹⁷ Quinet significantly related the expedition to the Second Empire's deep inner authoritarian roots, for he considered that in Mexico, Napoleon III wanted to counteract the people's demands for political change and revolution, whereas in France, he was precisely working to the contrary. Without underestimating the importance of recovering the lost debts, Quinet described the military intervention as a truly disproportionate act, as long as the government had no clear information about the quantity of money to recover and as it seemed clear that the final goal was not economic gain, but rather a forced political change in the country through the installation of a new monarchy under the rule of an Austrian prince. As Favre and other liberal deputies had done in parliament, Quinet also considered that the government was moved by 'hidden motivations' to undertake the Mexican venture, thus also contributing to the idea that the Bonapartists were not honest, reliable leaders.⁹⁸ Indeed, Quinet describes the intervention as a truly Bonapartist project whose main aim is not to deliver the American continent from any despotic power—as he thought was the goal of Lafayette and Rochambeau in the eighteenth century—but rather to subjugate it under the new Napoleonic rule, and take it as a starting point from which to spread France's influence.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Edgar Quinet, *L'expédition du Mexique* (London: Jeffs, 1862).

⁹⁸ He wrote: '[Il y a des] motifs cachés qui sont les vrais [...] et dont personne ne parle'. Quinet, *L'expédition du Mexique*, p. 4.

⁹⁹ According to him, 'si elle [l'intervention] se développait, telle qu'elle a été conçue, aurait pour résultat tout un continent esclave, ou du moins asservi'. Quinet, *L'expédition du Mexique*, p. 5.

Significantly, Quinet related the Mexican adventure to the Bonapartist mindset, thus deepening the distance between two different intellectual underpinnings when it came to evaluating imperialist policy. In Quinet's eyes, Bonapartism was not a mere political option, but a cult, an adoration, a superstition. Consequently, its natural project was to accomplish the 'chimère du grand empire napoléonien'. Since implementing this dream in Europe had become far more difficult than in Napoleon I's times, the Second Empire had to focus on America, the place where the French already had found in the past a way to deploy their global ambitions. As Quinet ironically pointed out to the Bonapartists, 'il faut aller chercher un Rhin dans le nouveau monde'; at the same time, he mocked the naïveté of those who thought that the French would be welcomed in Mexico with open arms.¹⁰⁰ This last remark focuses much of Quinet's argument against the way in which Napoleon III's government managed the situation.

For Quinet, the greatest mistake of the French was to believe that the Mexicans would immediately appreciate their leadership, excellence and prestige. To illustrate the idea with an image from Spanish colonialism in early modern times, the Bonapartists saw in Mexico 'les anciens adorateurs du *soleil*, se prosterner devant le *soleil couchant* de la fortune napoléonienne'. He also shows sarcasm when he states that the French soldier had gone to Mexico to 'recueillir des couronnes de fleurs, d'aloès et de bananiers', when in reality 'nous ramassons tout ce que nous pouvons rencontrer d'éléments rétrogrades, oppressifs, obscurantins, jésuitiques'.¹⁰¹ As a revolutionary republican, Quinet expressed his criticism to the Bonapartists in a tougher way than the liberals. Although both shared their mistrust towards Napoleon III's imperialist policies, notably when they implied the violation of the consolidated state's domestic politics, liberals always tended to defend their postulates in a more moderate way. As members of the opposition, though, they equally tried to erode the image of the government and therefore used the Mexican affair as a pretext for their claims. Among these claims was the defence of the United States as an example to follow regarding the protection and promotion of individual liberties. As the 'espérance de tous les amis de la liberté dans les deux mondes', according to Quinet, the United States represented the feasibility of

¹⁰⁰ Quinet, *L'expédition du Mexique*, p. 6.

¹⁰¹ Quinet, *L'expédition du Mexique*, pp. 7-8.

building a political regime based on the ideals of democracy and respect for the people's will. His vision of the United States aimed at establishing a direct parallelism with Napoleon III's regime. As he wrote,

Tant qu'elle existe [la république américaine], tant qu'elle rayonne, elle attire les yeux, elle entretient l'espoir de tout ce qui n'a pas renoncé à vivre libre ! [...] Pour que le mensonge soit établi, il faut que la vérité disparaisse. Pour que le mensonge d'une démocratie esclave puisse s'enraciner en Europe, il est nécessaire que la démocratie vraie soit anéantie en Amérique.¹⁰²

Designed by the Bonapartists to be their major geopolitical enterprise in the 1860s, the Mexican affair ended as a major disaster from which the Second Empire would never recover. The Mexican Empire collapsed violently in 1867, representing what has been recently defined as 'one of the most spectacular personal tragedies and political failures of the nineteenth century.'¹⁰³ Napoleon III's will to put limits to the United States' increasing power in Latin America came to an end with the execution of Emperor Maximilian at Cerro de las Campanas, Querétaro. Prévost-Paradol pointed out:

Jamais spectacle plus émouvant ne fut donné au monde ; jamais la France ne reçut de plus vive et de plus claire leçon ; puisse cette leçon du moins n'être pas inutile ! Qu'elle contribue, s'il se peut, à nous préserver d'aussi grandes fautes et de plus grands malheurs.¹⁰⁴

6. CONCLUSION

France in the 1860s behaved as a true imperial power. Despite the doubts expressed by A. J. P. Taylor in the sense that 'Napoleon III had nothing imperial except the name',¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Quinet, *L'expédition du Mexique*, pp. 16–7.

¹⁰³ M. M. McAllen, *Maximilian and Carlota. Europe's Last Empire in Mexico* (San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University Press, 2014), p. xi.

¹⁰⁴ Prologue of Prévost-Paradol to Kératry, *L'élévation et la chute de l'Empereur Maximilien*, p. xix.

¹⁰⁵ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. xix.

the large number of military expeditions in the context of an ambitious foreign policy shows a clear interest for spreading power and influence abroad. It is worth noting that ‘influence’ does not mean ‘supremacy’ or ‘pre-eminence’. There is no historical evidence to state, for instance, that Napoleon III wanted to overcome British power, but he did want to put France in an outstanding place internationally.

This chapter has argued for the importance of Algeria, Cochinchina and Mexico as telling examples of French expansionism in the 1860s. To tackle them jointly provides an excellent opportunity to evaluate, from a comparative perspective, France’s expansionist project in the 1860s on three different continents. Both in parliament and the press, politicians and publicists from different ideological groups (namely liberals and Bonapartists) took advantage of them to elaborate narrative discourses through which they aimed to express their notions on the French nation and, therefore, to influence public opinion. When it came to evaluating the role of France in the world (as the chapters in Part II will develop in more depth), liberals and Bonapartists deployed a rich, varied range of rhetoric narratives. France’s expansionism in the 1860s in general, and with regard to the cases of Algeria, Cochinchina and Mexico more specifically, needs to be framed within a particular political imaginary—shared to a great extent by both liberals and Bonapartists—which depicted France as an abstract entity inseparable from concepts such as civilisation, glory and greatness. These terms have shaped French political language at least from the times of the Revolution, determining the intellectual context in which French imperialist policy developed, and were certainly present in contemporaries’ minds. The three expansionist ventures under study tell us about the 1860s’ inter-imperial competition and the close relationship between the French and British empires, with regard to both imperialist policies and the field of the political imaginary.

The Bonapartists believed that France needed to recover on the international stage the prestige and splendour lost after the fall of the First Empire. Napoleon III’s statements that the Empire needed to ‘avenge its honour’, as the quote opening this chapter suggests, were but the verbalisation of a deep-rooted vision about the country, a vision which portrayed France as one of the most important nations in the world, deserving

CHAPTER 2
Overseas Ventures and Imperial Languages

of visibility and presence at all levels. Unlike liberals, the Bonapartists often put the defence of the nation's honour before any other consideration of efficiency or economic opportunity. For their part, liberals also shared the vision of France as a superior entity provided with a particular civilising mission aiming at spreading the nation's good deeds. The difference with respect to the Bonapartists is that liberals tended to prioritise practical achievements over the vague defence of honour. In fact, they believed that France's honour and prestige could only be properly defended by showing the world the effective defence of its own interests. Or, in other words, that France would recover its role at the level of the main powers by making itself respected and not feared, as next chapter will show. These are two similar visions of France which are based, however, on distinct ways to see the nation and the world and on different systems of values informed by dissimilar priorities.

Part II

LIBERALS FACE THE EMPIRE

Chapter 3

Liberals and the Role of France in the World

*Et toi, grand Souverain, dont le monde révère / le ferme et sage esprit, le loyal caractère
Magnanime sauveur du peuple mexicain / bienfaiteur acclamé sur le sol africain
Ce riche et beau pays, cette France nouvelle
Que tu veux nous créer et plus riche et plus belle.*

— Alexandre Bardenet, 1866¹

*Établir une colonie, c'est tout un gouvernement à fonder ;
que dis-je ? C'est toute une société à créer.*

— Édouard Laboulaye, 1877²

1. INTRODUCTION

A few months before Mexico's Emperor Maximilian was dramatically executed in June 1867—making evident that Napoleon III's dream in America had become a political and military nightmare—Jules Duval defined France as a 'pays célèbre entre tous pour son grand rôle, aussi bien dans l'histoire ancienne [...] que dans l'histoire moderne, où elle éclaira toujours et dirigea souvent la civilisation'.³ By the time he wrote these lines, Duval probably could not foresee the way in which later historical events, as the aforementioned in Mexico, would contradict this optimistic notion of France's role in the world, a role often far away from 'shining' and 'spreading civilisation' everywhere. Duval's words, published in his book *Notre pays* in early 1867, were welcomed and applauded in liberal milieus, which branded the book as the first thorough, good

¹ Alexandre Bardenet, *Épître à Napoléon III, empereur des Français* (Vesoul: Suchaux, 1866), p. 11.

² Laboulaye's preface of Jules Duval, *L'Algérie et les colonies françaises* (Paris: Guillaumin et Cie., 1877), p. xxv.

³ Jules Duval, *Notre pays* (Paris: Hachette, 1867), p. 3.

description of ‘notre patrie [...], un pays digne d’offrir un exemple aux autres nations’, as the liberal *Le Temps* proudly pointed out. The article’s author even claimed to have experienced ‘un vrai sentiment d’orgueil national’ when the book was launched.⁴

Duval’s book was indeed filled with references to France’s glory and greatness and expressed a clear idea of the global role of a nation that, ‘en même temps que l’on redoute ses armes, l’on aime son génie sociable et doux, l’on admire en elle l’éclat des lettres et des arts, l’essor de l’industrie et du commerce’. Any Bonapartist could have embraced such statements. However, a careful reading of the work reveals that, according to Duval, the nation’s greatness was not the result of any teleological pathway, inherited from glorious past times linked to a particular lineage, but rather the common work of the French people over time; that is, an evolutionary process driven by the voluntary adherence of the French to the ‘expression suprême’ of a social state, its traditions and unity.⁵ Whether based on the idea of social support or on more essentialist foundations, the fact remains that liberal understandings of the French nation were informed by a strong belief in the nation’s moral superiority. Édouard Laboulaye proudly stated in his crucial work on the French liberal party that ‘ce qui distingue la France entre toutes les nations de la terre, c’est moins la hardiesse et la nouveauté des inventions que la forme parfaite qu’elle donne à tout ce qu’elle touche’.⁶ Such a statement can be understood in many different ways, the most plausible being that Laboulaye wanted to relate the idea of the French nation to the notions of distinction and perfection, and also to its ability to improve itself and the peoples it encountered.

Thus, according to Laboulaye, France was not as good at ‘inventing’ new things as it was at making them better, once they came into contact with France. This perception has a direct application to imperialist projects. Laboulaye’s standpoint acted as a powerful justification for French expansionism, as it presented it as a means to improve overseas peoples who would benefit from their interaction with France’s social, political

⁴ Louis Vivian de Saint-Martin, *Le Temps*, 25 January 1867.

⁵ Duval, *Notre pays*, pp. 3-4.

⁶ Édouard Laboulaye, *Le parti libéral, son programme et son avenir*, 6 ed., (Paris: Charpentier, 1863), p. 8.

and cultural values. Thus, Laboulaye's words tell us much about the liberal vision of France's role in the world, the system of values on which it was founded, and the difficulty for the historian to differentiate this vision from the Bonapartist mainstream.

In this chapter, I argue that French liberals deployed a rhetorical discourse defining France as a superior moral entity with the right and duty to be influential in the world. Liberals' standpoint opposed that of the Bonapartists, which they considered to be immoral and damaging for the French nation. The Bonapartist imperial rhetoric, liberals argued, was against the notions of good government, respect for international rule, and an appropriate geopolitical strategy. While debating these issues, liberals raised important reflections concerning domestic topics such as nation and citizenship, as well as values such as moderation, openness and transparency. Liberal debates on France's role in the world in the 1860s made it clear that foreign and domestic dimensions of French expansionism were inextricably connected.

Furthermore, the chapter interrogates liberal approaches to the global context of the 1860s and its guiding principles, especially considering liberal views on international law and the principle of non-intervention. In what follows, I present three specific cases regarding each of the imperial ventures under study: Algeria, Cochinchina and Mexico. Liberal visions of France's political role on the global stage were expressed through a wide and diverse range of topics. Indeed, each of these ventures inspired more than one topic of debate whether in parliament or in the press, although there was always a predominant issue that shows what the main liberal concerns were. Regarding Algeria's colonisation, liberals were politically preoccupied with both the process of assimilation of indigenous peoples into the French nation and the rights of political representation of French (and European) settlers. In the case of Cochinchina, the expedition and later colonisation of this Asian location brought out a rich variety of thoughts and debates on the strategic step that France was taking in the international arena. The importance of Cochinchina as a colonial settlement was not only political, but also economic and cultural, and is revealing of the way in which liberals conceived the role of France in the world. Liberal debates on the intervention in Mexico were mainly focused on the legitimacy to intervene politically in a foreign country and thus to alter its internal

institutional scheme. Napoleon III's will to institute a monarchy in the country was vigorously contested by the liberal group of opposition in the chamber, and by most liberal publicists and thinkers, too. When arguing their opinions, liberals mainly referred to the principle of non-intervention and the general rule of international law. As it will be shown, liberals embraced respect for foreign institutional structures as a fundamental pillar of international relations. As a major global power, France was expected to be careful and diligent in defending and ensuring its political prestige.

The role of France in the world is an expression that can refer not only to political, but also to economic, religious and cultural issues. In this chapter, I seek to explore two different approaches to the way in which French liberals perceived and reacted to French imperialism in the 1860s. On the one hand, I will consider the most relevant debates on the application of French power in colonial, imperialist contexts. On the other hand, I will tackle the making of a particular imperial imaginary, a sort of fascination with imperialist endeavours. Indeed, these perspectives were two sides of the same coin: the desire to make France a leading nation in the world. Economic and religious issues will be tackled in the two following chapters.

2. THE NATION ABROAD: ALGERIA, POLITICS OF ASSIMILATION AND RIGHTS OF REPRESENTATION

Among the liberal notions of France's role in the world, the most salient issues were those related to the administrative organisation of the colonies and their place within the French institutional framework, the settlers' political rights and, as a result, the notion of assimilation of indigenous populations. These debates were common during the Second Empire, both in parliament and the press, and are important for tracing the origins of some key aspects of mid- and late-nineteenth-century French political culture. The concept of assimilation and all related topics of nationalism, citizenship, colonial expansion, government, universalism, plurality, to name but the most significant, found in Algeria's colonisation a particular area to develop. As noted in Chapter 2, Algeria was during the Second Empire a major colonial endeavour which dramatically focused the attention of Napoleon III's regime. To liberals, the affair was

not less appealing, so they devoted to it much of their energies. Institutional and political affairs in the colony deserved full attention from the side of both Bonapartists and liberals. Their political and dialectic struggle tells us much about liberal visions of France's role in the world and the way in which domestic and foreign (national and imperial) dimensions were intimately linked.

'Entre toutes les questions de politique nationale agitées depuis trente ans', wrote Jules Duval in April 1859, 'il en est peu [...] qui ait pris dans le coeur et l'esprit de la France une aussi large place que la question algérienne'.⁷ These words by one of the most renowned French economic liberal thinkers illustrate how deep Algeria's colonisation was in the minds and hearts of contemporary policymakers, intellectuals and public opinion. After years and years of battles and suffering, death and endless economic sacrifices, Algeria had become more a nightmare than a cause to rejoice. Social turmoil remained constant and the difficulties to reach acceptable levels of stability in the colony seemed to increase every day. There was wide agreement between liberals and the Bonapartists in considering the conquest of the colony as a successful enterprise, with doubtless benefits for the metropole. But no one could ignore how difficult it was for the country to introduce its rule and power, to an extent that, as some contemporaries pointed out, France was giving signs of being able to conquer much more than to colonise. Significantly, an English writer and traveller declared in *The Times* that

[t]he French may not see their way to colonise Africa, and I do not think they do—I find fresh proofs, every step I take in the country, that they do not; but to conquer, and to hold a conquest, there is no system like that I see in action around me.⁸

The efforts made by the government to solve these difficulties by fostering timid administrative reforms did not satisfy most liberals, who continued to be very reluctant regarding the efficiency of these reforms, since 'la nouvelle administration de l'Algérie

⁷ Jules Duval, 'Politique coloniale de la France. L'Algérie. I. Gouvernement et administration', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. XX (April 1859), p. 891.

⁸ George Wingrove Cooke, *Conquest and Colonisation in North Africa* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1860), p. 48.

ne présenterait à notre avis aucun résultat acquis, mais seulement des tentatives suivies de peu d'effet.⁹ Duval supported this vision and recognised the need for improving the colony's economic situation by consolidating Algeria's colonisation, which in practice meant to 'traduire la victoire en une bonne administration'.¹⁰ In other words, Duval was implying that, once the conquest was achieved, all efforts would be required to establish a beneficial system of government to foster economic development. Administration and governance were issues of special importance to liberals when tackling the colonisation of Algeria, a territory that some among them saw as a colony and others as a province; Duval himself considered that *colony* 'c'est un mot qui porte l'esprit vers des horizons lointains'. Since Algeria was so close to the metropole, he claimed, it should rather be considered as one of France's provinces, placed on the other side of the Mediterranean.¹¹

During the 1860s, liberals and the Bonapartists considered Algeria a colonial enterprise worth continuing, although their approaches on how to dominate the country differed: whereas liberals were in favour of colonisation in the sense of encouraging settlement, the Bonapartists—especially those who shared the Emperor's postulates the most—increasingly favoured the implementation of the Arab Kingdom policy, and therefore turned against actual colonisation.¹² For almost thirty years, Algeria had served as an experiment to prove the scope and effectiveness of French domination, having to deal with very controversial racial and social problems. As on many other occasions, the differences between the government and the liberal opposition lay not so much in the diagnosis of the origin of problems as in the practical way to face them. The discussions of Algeria's political role within the French institutional scheme, as well as of Algerian settlers' and natives' rights of political representation, became a central issue in 1860s French politics. They invite us, moreover, to reflect on the liberal notions of assimilation and France's political—and civilising—role in the world.

⁹ Albert de Broglie, 'Une réforme administrative en Afrique, 1858-1859. III. Devoirs nouveaux du gouvernement colonial', *Revue des Deux Mondes* (May 1860), p. 84.

¹⁰ Duval, 'Politique coloniale de la France. L'Algérie', p. 891.

¹¹ Duval, 'Politique coloniale de la France. L'Algérie', p. 894.

¹² As an example of liberal enthusiasm for Algeria's colonisation, see the debates at the Corps législatif on 23 January 1864, CRCL 1864, vol. 1, p. 966.

As part of their political and rhetorical strategy, liberals strove to depict the Bonapartists as authoritarian, eager partisans of violence and social control. In relation to a colonial context like Algeria, liberal deputies found tempting elements to deploy their harsh criticism towards the ruling regime. One of those elements was surely the Bureaux Arabes. The establishment of this institution was disputed from the beginning, although it became more controversial as time went by. With the arrival of Napoleon III to power, the Bureaux Arabes became the image of the Second Empire's 'indigenous policy', which many European settlers viewed as rather hostile towards their own interests. In the 1860s, liberals proclaimed themselves as committed defenders of these interests.

With the advent of the Second Republic in 1848, Algeria was officially recognised as a 'component part of France' and was allowed to send its own representatives to the National Assembly. The inclusive republican spirit certainly had much to do with this decision, which did not fit the early Second Empire's conservative and authoritarian tendencies. After several serious upheavals, the new imperial regime revoked the decision. Algeria no longer received the same treatment as the rest of the French departments and specific measures were taken to control the region in both civil and military ways. The settlers lost their right to send representatives to Paris, and Algeria returned to the tutelage of the Ministry of War.¹³ Liberals never approved this change, inasmuch as it ended the possibility for Algerian settlers to channel their political needs in an effective fashion. Political representation of settlers, as they were persuaded, only had advantages.¹⁴ In their eyes, Algeria had to be considered as a part of France, a sort of extension of the French nation. Jules Favre vehemently expressed that 'l'Algérie et les colonies sont françaises' and wondered

...pourquoi les tenir en dehors du droit commun ? On répond a cela qu'elles ont des mœurs, des besoins, un climat, un régime différents des nôtres, et qu'il est

¹³ Kay Adamson, *Political and Economic Thought and Practice in Nineteenth-Century France and the Colonization of Algeria* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002) pp. 211–2.

¹⁴ Jules Favre, CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 19 March, p. 297.

CHAPTER 3
Liberals and the Role of France in the World

indispensable même, pour leur tranquillité, de les soumettre à une loi exceptionnelle.
Ces raisons me semblent frivoles, surtout pour l'Algérie.¹⁵

According to the liberal theoretical spirit of equality and fraternity among citizens, such a distinction was senseless. It was indeed contrary to the principle of justice. All French citizens, liberals argued, had the inalienable right to assign their political representatives, no matter where they were born or where they lived within the French territory. The fact that French settlers in France's greatest colony were deprived of the most basic political rights was something that, in liberals' opinion, could no longer be tolerated. At this point, it is important to clarify that liberals, in making such a statement, were not thinking of Muslim and Jewish Algerian populations. Muslim and Jewish Algerians could not become French citizens until 1865,¹⁶ when a *senatus-consulte* allowed them to, providing that they first abandoned their Muslim and Israelite 'personal status', that is, their right to use religious law rather than the French Civil Code.

Liberals were deeply concerned about settlers in the colony, their rights of political representation and their capacities to develop economically. They considered that the establishment of private property for French settlers was hindered by the Bonapartist policies of differentiation between different racial communities. Liberals believed that the implementation of different systems of government (civil and military) and the geographical division of the territory, with different laws applying on each side, was an obstacle to the proper economic development of the colony.

In early 1861, social turmoil and turbulent upheavals in the colony led the government to reinforce military order and security. The difficulties in managing the situation and the feeling that the colonial authorities were losing control over the local population became a focus of political controversy. The government's tendency to apply military solutions to colonial problems served as a perfect starting point for a profound debate

¹⁵ Jules Favre, CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 19 March, p. 296.

¹⁶ The issue of citizenship in colonial Algeria has produced a number of scholarly works. For a good bibliographical account, see Emmanuelle Saada, *Empire's Children. Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), originally published in French as *Les enfants de la colonie: les métis de l'Empire français entre sujétion et citoyenneté* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007).

on the colony and its administration. These issues were the reason for great disagreement between the Bonapartists and liberals, who, loyal to their theoretical principles of freedom and equality, had been fighting for a long time to place Algeria under a civil regime and to provide the colony with proper representative institutions for its European settlers.¹⁷

From the liberal standpoint, the Bureaux Arabes no longer appeared to be a valid tool to fulfil the aims of colonisation, for they considered that a long history of ‘enormous outrages’ and limitless authority had led the colony towards political and economic stagnation. The omnipresence of the Bureaux in all domains of life, including property, taxes, religion and justice, had much to do with this stagnation. Although recognising that the Bureaux played a fundamental role during colonisation’s first steps—as a ‘puissant instrument de conquête et puissant agent de pacification’, as Favre noted—,¹⁸ by the 1860s, liberals came to seriously question the need for maintaining the functioning of an institution that, as it seemed to be obvious to them, had become a real burden for the colony’s prosperity. Liberals considered that, after thirty years of rather successful colonisation, Algeria was languishing because of the obstruction of entrepreneurship and property.¹⁹ They suggested to overcome this situation as soon as possible. Military and civil powers, they argued, must continue coexisting, but never at the same level. Otherwise, the colony would irremediably fall to despotism.²⁰ Civil power had to prevail, and political rights for all French citizens in Algeria had to be recognised. As Favre said,

[n]ous demandons que l’on replace l’Algérie et les colonies sous l’empire du droit commun. Il faut que ceux de nos concitoyens qui ont quitté la France trouvent la récompense de leurs efforts, loin de la mère patrie, dans le droit de se plaindre, et que

¹⁷ See the amendment to the Adresse presented by the Group of Five on 19 March 1861 and the debate that emerged around it in CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 19 March, pp. 296-300.

¹⁸ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 19 March, p. 298.

¹⁹ Jules Favre made it clear that, in Algeria, ‘l’agriculture languit, les capitaux sont rares, l’esprit d’entreprise est étouffé. La propriété est presque toute entière à reconstituer. Il y a découragement parmi les colons et les capitalistes de l’Algérie. Telle est la situation vraie’, CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 19 March, p. 299.

²⁰ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 19 March, p. 300.

cette terre, qui ne peut être fécondée que par la liberté, envoie, elle aussi, des représentants parmi nous.²¹

The Bonapartists saw things differently. The government defended without reservation the right functioning of the Bureaux, which it considered ‘an extremely useful institution’ in Algeria. The government did not deny the fact that outrages might have been committed, but it detached them from the existence of that institution and related them to particular actions of the men in charge. As they argued, injustice can be stopped without making the institution disappear. The need to reinforce civil power was, however, a claim also shared among the Bonapartists.²² Nevertheless, the government wanted to stop this pessimistic and critical tendency as soon as possible by proudly showing all the goals achieved in terms of infrastructure (roads, lighthouses, land drainages). Muslims, the official reports claimed, were on their way to recognising ‘l’ascendance de notre civilisation’.²³

The government was persuaded that the indigenous population did not complain about the Bureaux Arabes as much as Favre seemed to believe, since they knew that their habits and culture would be much worse treated and less respected under a civil regime.²⁴ Settlers in the colony tended to despise their indigenous neighbours, who were seen as less developed and barbarian, backward people. The dichotomy between white settlers and local populations needs to be framed in the context of the creation of structures of racial exclusion in most of the European colonies by the mid-nineteenth century. Such structures were, as Bill Schwarz has noted in reference to British settler colonies, ‘Manichean in inspiration alive with all manner of psychic anxiety and controversial politically’.²⁵ To most European settlers in Algeria, Napoleon III’s Arab

²¹ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 19 March, p. 300.

²² General Allard significantly supported the liberals’ proposal of giving more power to civil authorities, but recognised that the application of this measure would take some time, given all the unexpected difficulties of governing the colony, CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 20 March, pp. 304-7.

²³ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 20 March, p. 307.

²⁴ In spite of the at times difficult relationship between settlers and governments, the settler assumed a privileged position in the public narratives of the metropole. See Bill Schwarz, *The White Man’s World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), especially p. 113.

²⁵ Schwarz, *The White Man’s World*, p. 109.

policy was giving the Muslims too much importance. However, the emperor continued to state publically:

En Algérie, malgré l'anomalie qui soumet les mêmes populations, les unes au pouvoir civil, les autres au pouvoir militaire, les Arabes ont compris combien la domination française était réparatrice et équitable, sans que les Européens aient moins de confiance dans la protection du Gouvernement.²⁶

Liberals blamed the Bureaux for having exercised an excessive, absolute power in Algeria. Exceeding their original functions had been negative for the colony, not only in economic, but also in social terms. From the liberal standpoint, the Bureaux had gone too far in preserving the local population's individuality, instead of working for its complete assimilation.²⁷ Favre asked himself:

Quel procédé adopter vis-à-vis de cette race ? Faut-il la faire disparaître du sol, ou faut-il chercher à établir entre les deux races une fusion sincère ? La question a été longtemps débattue ; mais les Bureaux Arabes, loin de chercher le second des résultats, ont laissé la race arabe dans la même situation où elle était au moment de la conquête : ils ont dit qu'il n'y avait rien à faire avec les Arabes que de les dominer par le sabre.²⁸

The vision expressed by Favre encountered clear opposition from the government. The government's commissioner, General Allard, proudly defined the Bureaux Arabes as one of the most useful institutions for Algeria '[ayant] rendu d'immenses services par les relations pacifiques ou militaires qu'ils ont établies entre nous et les Arabes, par les reconnaissances qu'ils ont faites, par les expéditions qu'ils ont dirigées, par l'aide qu'ils ont prêtée à la perception de l'impôt'.²⁹ Allard made it clear that Favre's utterances had much to do with the inherent naiveté, and irresponsibility, of one who has never had responsibilities of government.

²⁶ ASCL 1864, vol. 1, session of 5 November 1863, p. 3.

²⁷ As Jules Favre pointed out: 'Ils [les Bureaux Arabes] ont pu faire régner sur le pays un pouvoir pour ainsi dire absolu. Ce pouvoir s'est perpétué, et il y a eu ce résultat funeste qu'au lieu de chercher à assimiler la race indigène, les Bureaux Arabes ont conservé autant que possible son individualité', CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 19 March, p. 298.

²⁸ Jules Favre, CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 19 March, p. 298.

²⁹ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 20 March, p. 307.

As for the idea that Algeria, and the rest of the colonies, should enjoy the same ‘common regime’ as the rest of France, Allard defined it as a ‘rêve inadmissible’. He justified the need to maintain different legal systems in the metropole and the colonies due to their unavoidably dissimilar habits, traditions, customs and even climate. The fact that three million Muslims were spread across the field ‘ignoring the most elementary notion of property’ did not help push for conceding further political rights in the colony. ‘Tant que cet état de choses existera, le droit commun en Algérie sera une chimère, et le régime du décret restera une nécessité’. At some point, Favre compared Algeria to Savoie and Nice, a comparison that, according to Allard, made no sense since these European territories were regularly administered before being annexed by France.³⁰ Favre’s statements, however, were well received by the liberal press, which expressed admiration for ‘l’orateur qui parle au nom de la justice et du droit’ and used to use ‘le langage le plus distingué, le plus coloré, le plus pur’ to express his ideas and projects for France and the principles of international law.³¹

Being the major liberal empire in the nineteenth century, Britain was usually considered a guiding reference for French liberals. When it came to debating issues related to political representation in the colonies, however, things seemed to be different. If British colonies had no representation in London’s parliament, their settlers began by that time to have autonomous institutions. The Bonapartists seemed to prefer the system of the British, which whilst providing their colonies with local governments, avoided assimilating their colonies into the national community. References to Britain and its colonial policy began to be common among the Bonapartist deputies.³² So insistent were these statements that the liberals reacted. ‘Nous sommes Français, nous ne sommes pas Anglais. Voilà ma réponse’, Favre claimed significantly when asked

³⁰ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 20 March, pp. 308–11.

³¹ *La Presse*, 23 March 1861.

³² As an example of these claims, see the words by the Bonapartist deputy Granier de Casagnac referring to Britain during the parliamentary session on 20 March 1861: ‘Je prendrais l’exemple d’un pays voisin. Les colonies anglaises, qui ont bien une autre importance que les colonies françaises, ne sont pas représentées au Parlement. J’approuve cette pratique de l’Angleterre. Je préférerais dans nos colonies des gouvernements locaux à l’assimilation avec la France’, CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 20 March, pp. 311, 312.

about this issue.³³ His answer speaks for itself. French liberals wanted France to counterbalance the British model of (non)assimilation, and thus contributed to shaping a particular version of French nationalism based on the idea of a homogenous, united nation.

Allard claimed that the civilian regime had increasingly been improved, contrary to what liberals said. He stressed that the government had a clear roadmap to follow: to develop civil administration, to end the time of expeditions and to foster colonisation by developing public works and great infrastructures.³⁴ And Favre insisted: the Bureaux Arabes were not a negative institution *per se*, and their achievements were important at the beginning of colonisation, but the way in which they were managed perverted their initial purpose. Consequently, he disagreed with the idea that outrages were exclusively a matter of individual malpractice, but rather saw them as the result of unsolved structural problems. Officials, according to him, had been provided with too much power from the beginning, which in the end turned out to be damaging for the colony.³⁵

By 1864, the Group of Five insisted upon the necessity of providing Algeria with truly liberal institutions, which in their opinion would bring the colony only prosperity and splendour. Liberals made these claims with deep regret. Convinced as they were that economic and institutional development had to go tightly hand in hand, they presented an amendment together with other opposition deputies, which went as follows:

L'Algérie et nos autres colonies seraient depuis longtemps florissantes, si elles avaient été dotées d'institutions libérales. Qu'elles soient du moins assimilées à la France et que leurs intérêts puissent être défendus dans cette enceinte par des représentants de leur choix.³⁶

Ernest Picard justified the amendment in a determined fashion:

³³ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 20 March, p. 312.

³⁴ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 20 March, p. 308.

³⁵ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 20 March, p. 310.

³⁶ CRCL 1864, vol. 1, session of 23 January, p. 968.

CHAPTER 3
Liberals and the Role of France in the World

En présentant cet amendement sur l'Algérie et les colonies, Messieurs, nous n'avons pas seulement écouté les vœux de nos compatriotes d'outre-mer et des milliers de colons de l'Algérie qui tournent les yeux vers cette enceinte où ils ne sont pas représentés ; mais nous nous sommes aussi préoccupés, au point de vue français, des intérêts de nos finances et de notre politique. [...] Depuis trente-trois ans nous possédons l'Algérie, depuis longtemps la période de guerre est terminée, la conquête est accomplie. La période de la colonisation est donc venue.³⁷

Picard put a special emphasis on the fact that this situation was creating a dangerous general sentiment of despondency regarding the colony. He warned about the risks of projecting a false image of France's capacity of implementing a serious plan of colonisation, as it was only capable of pursuing military conquest and not a well-organised domination of the territory. Such a vision was promoted by some French authorities in the colony, which created perplexity among liberals, who saw in Algeria a colony that 'malgré toutes les entraves, [a] montré une vitalité qui mérite toutes nos sympathies'.³⁸ Picard reminded the chamber of the good state of Algeria's commerce, in spite of all difficulties created by the military regime.³⁹ The way to stabilise Algeria's splendour required, according to liberals, a modification in the colony's political and institutional structure in order to tie it closer to the metropole.

Napoleon III's government, however, remained opposed to both Algeria's total assimilation into the French institutional scheme and the establishment of autonomous representative institutions in the colonies. This time, Britain was seen by the liberals as a good example to follow. 'L'Angleterre s'en trouve bien', pointed out Ernest Picard, 'parce que ses colonies l'enrichissent au lieu de l'appauvrir'. While the example of Britain sometimes was used by the Bonapartist to justify their positions towards the colony, other times it was liberals who claimed their admiration for a country which allowed its colonies to have their own bodies of representation. Although these visions

³⁷ CRCL 1864, vol. 1, session of 23 January, p. 968.

³⁸ CRCL 1864, vol. 1, session of 23 January, p. 969.

³⁹ Picard noted that, whereas imports had averaged some 110 million francs since 1855, in 1861, they rose up to 171 million francs. Exports had increased up to 45 million francs. CRCL 1864, vol. 1, session of 23 January, p. 969.

could coincide in some aspects, the regime preferred to keep a position of ‘sage réserve’ and not to open the parliament’s doors to colonial deputies.⁴⁰

Liberals were persuaded that the lack of functional institutions in Algeria made it very difficult to tackle the colony’s real problems and to solve them appropriately. What began as a theoretical statement in favour of individual political rights ended as a claim to avoid the colony’s commercial and industrial stagnation. Fewer liberties for settlers and natives and a poorly-efficient relationship with them was seen as a real obstacle to Algeria’s prosperity.⁴¹ Official reports claimed that by the 1860s, the situation was far more complicated and dangerous than it had been in earlier periods. The idea that the indigenous population gave no proof of real integration and had always preferred the use of violence to a peaceful coexistence in the colony began to gain currency among the Bonapartist circles. In these conditions, they argued, the Bureaux Arabes still remained an indispensable institution to keep order and ensure security. Some Bonapartists, however, seemed to believe that Napoleon III’s so-called Arab policy was one of the reasons for the problem. As Baron David defiantly pointed out, this policy fostered among the Muslims ‘la conscience de leur valeur et de leur force’ when they were divided and unaware of their power.⁴²

Given the government’s inactivity and the scarce will among the Bonapartists to tackle the problem, another attempt was made to put the issue of political representation in the spotlight. Shortly before the emperor undertook his second trip to the colony, in spring 1865, a number of deputies once again came to demand the establishment of a new system of administration in Algeria. The colony increasingly became a major problem for the Empire; social turmoil made it difficult to maintain order and control in the area and the army had serious problems exercising authority due to the strength of indigenous populations and the fact that many troops had been sent to Mexico. The Corps législatif reflected their concerns in the following terms:

⁴⁰ CRCL 1864, vol. 1, session of 23 January, p. 994.

⁴¹ Ernest Picard, CRCL 1864, vol. 1, session of 23 January, p. 972.

⁴² CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 20 March, pp. 312–3.

CHAPTER 3
Liberals and the Role of France in the World

L'insurrection imprévue qui a éclaté en Afrique a été rapidement vaincue. Nous avons l'espoir que les populations arabes, trop longtemps aveuglées par le fanatisme religieux, ne méconnaîtront plus désormais la puissance de nos armes ni les intentions bienveillantes de notre gouvernement, et que des efforts persévérants assureront le développement et la prospérité de la civilisation.⁴³

In view of this situation, there was a claim to make Algeria the thriving colony it could have been, had it implemented a proper liberal legislation. In any case, liberals considered repression a useless measure against disorder. Instead, peace and prosperity were to be achieved by making evident in Algeria the French 'power and civilisation'. It seems that liberals aimed to link the notions of power and civilisation to civil political and economic guarantees.⁴⁴

In his role as defender of the government's standpoint, General Allard insisted that the situation in Algeria was extremely complicated, and highlighted the great differences that separated the Europeans and the indigenous population. Allard insisted that the Europeans had to be governed under the same administration as the rest of the French in France, and envisaged the creation of liberal institutions. Regarding the indigenous population, he confirmed the need to place them under a military government, 'le seul qui les Arabes puissent comprendre', in order to facilitate the establishment of individual property and the dismantlement of the tribal system. Yet the president of the Council of State recommended patience, time and an avoidance of premature measures.

To tear down the walls that separated European and Muslims was seen by liberals as a necessary step to reach progress and development. This ambitious wish had a clear-cut roadmap: establishing civil institutions, applying ordinary law, promulgating protective laws for properties and individuals, and placing all indigenous populations under French law. Yet, these beliefs were founded upon the conviction that they would help

⁴³ CRCL 1865, vol. 1, session of 11 April, p. 603.

⁴⁴ Amendment presented by the Group of Five and other opposition deputies: 'L'Algérie appelle un système nouveau d'administration. Les intérêts de cette grande colonie exigent que les colons trouvent des terres à acquérir, que la propriété individuelle soit enfin constituée chez les Arabes, et qu'une législation libérale assure à nos compatriotes la représentation et les garanties qui leur font actuellement défaut'. CRCL 1865, vol. 1, session of 11 April, , pp. 603–4.

eliminate ‘ce chaos de *coutumes barbares* dont le maintien est une *honte* pour la métropole’.⁴⁵ Once this was accomplished, Algeria’s colonisation would get its proper ‘coronation’ and the colony would maintain forever the links with the metropole, since, as Jules Favre pointed out,

[l]a France a toujours voulu s’attacher à l’Algérie et elle a parfaitement compris que ces deux terres qui n’avaient que le lac français pour séparation devaient être unies, [...] et qu’il y avait pour elles un germe, *un principe de grandeur*, d’éclat et de prospérité, auquel la France ne pouvait pas renoncer sans faillir à son devoir. Elle avait aussi le secret instinct que [...] dans ce pays elle avait *une grande mission* à accomplir en y apportant non pas l’ignorance et la mort, mais au contraire, la lumière et la fraternité.⁴⁶

Algeria would thus be governed rather than commanded, and this would reinforce the moral justification of French colonisation.

Certainly, if French colonisation gained great momentum after 1871, so did all matters related to the government of the colonies, their political representation and the integration of their populations in the French national scheme.⁴⁷ As it has been shown, forces of liberal opposition tried hard to place this debate at the core of their political claims and to force a recognition of the colonies as part of the French national territory. Their struggle for achieving full political recognition for the settlers was indeed a way to articulate a specific project of assimilation and to foster a particular understanding of French nationalism. Republican universal values of equality and freedom, which the liberals sorely evoked, were indeed used to hide a mistrust of difference.

France’s glory and greatness were directly linked to the nation’s ability to defend the rule of law always and everywhere, and to guarantee for all French citizens equal treatment before justice. The extent to which the close defence of these rather ‘sacred’ values of uniformity was compatible with respect to plurality and diversity is something

⁴⁵ Jules Favre, ASCL 1868, vol. 15, session of 16 July, p. 45 [my emphasis].

⁴⁶ ASCL 1868, vol. 15, session of 16 July, p. 46 [my emphasis].

⁴⁷ Abderrahmane Bouchène, Jean-Pierre Peyroulou, Ouanassa Siari Tengour, Sylvie Thénault (eds.), *Histoire de l’Algérie à la période coloniale 1830-1962* (Paris: La Découverte, 2012), pp. 38–9.

to be discussed. In fact, it seems to be a double-edged sword whose consequences can be traced in later times through the form of state that France has constituted. At any rate, politics of assimilation, which aimed at a homogeneous French national community, was an outstanding feature of French liberals in the 1860s. Their approach does not mean they had a more inclusive conception of nationality and citizenship than the Bonapartists. Sometimes it was the opposite. It was the opponents of assimilation, such as Ismaïl Urbain, who inspired the *Senatus Consulte* of 1865 which extended the civil rights of indigenous Algerians, whereas the liberal advocates of assimilation, such as Auguste Warnier, often fantasised about the complete disappearance of the indigenous population.⁴⁸ Moreover, the debate on the proposed Constitution for Algeria in 1869–70 saw the Bonapartist regime propose extending voting rights to indigenous Algerians living in civilian territories at local and national elections, whereas the liberals opposed the project.

3. 'BASE DU GÉNIE RAYONNANT DE LA FRANCE': COCHINCHINA AND FASCINATION WITH THE EMPIRE

From the very beginning, the colonisation of Cochinchina was imbued with the romantic ideal of exploration of new lands, languages and cultures. When the French first decided to head to these faraway lands, they knew they were facing 'the unknown'. Beyond the political and geostrategic motivations that impelled Napoleon III's government to pursue such an undertaking, the expedition to Cochinchina caught the interest of many adventurous men who saw it as an opportunity to participate in the discovery of the 'Asian mystery'. The appeal of Cochinchina's vast forests, unspoilt rivers and intricate maze of mountains rich in raw materials rapidly gave birth to an economic and political vision which informed France's military actions in the colony.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *Coloniser, exterminer : sur la guerre et l'État colonial* (Paris: Fayard, 2005).

⁴⁹ Examples of such a vision include Francis Garnier, *The French in Indochina. With a Narrative of Garnier's Explorations in Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2000) originally published in Edingburgh, T. Nelson and Sons, 1884; Adolf Bastian, *A Journey in Cambodia and Cochinchina (1864)* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2005), originally published as *Reise durch Kambodja nach Cochinchina* (Jena: Hermann Costenoble, 1868); and G. Francis, *La Cochinchine française en 1864* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1864).

From a geopolitical point of view, the Second Empire's attempts to expand its power across continents in the 1860s were part of a carefully planned strategy to counteract British colonial power worldwide, especially because of its dominion of India.⁵⁰ A contemporary pamphlet clearly stated that:

À côté de ces situations, la France ne peut rester en arrière et se borner [...] à profiter des avantages obtenus par les autres nations, sans participer à leur conquête. À moins de vouloir abdiquer à l'extérieur toute prépondérance digne de sa grandeur, nos gouvernements devaient se préoccuper de revendiquer dans ces mers la part qui nous revient de droit.⁵¹

Yet not only Bonapartist publications or official Bonapartist accounts defended this idea. Liberal thinkers also recognised it:

La Cochinchine française, interposée entre le monde indien et le monde malais, *oppose une barrière à l'extension de la puissance britannique*, qui, déjà maîtresse d'une partie de l'Indochine, avance vers Siam et le Cambodge. Nos traités avec les maîtres de ces états les rallieront à notre action, et, réunis en Cochinchine, ils formeront un groupe solide qui arrêtera toute nouvelle invasion de ce côté.⁵²

Napoleon III's regime, the self-proclaimed heir of the previous splendid Napoleonic times and imbued with a messianic mission to bring France back to its former glory, pursued with vehemence the domination of a key spot in south Asia. In the context of the Franco-British competition for global power and influence, Cochinchina was called to remain in the French imperial imaginary as French India, 'the last unclaimed prize in the global contest which France had to seize in order to remain great in the "Anglo-

⁵⁰ See Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

⁵¹ M. H. Abel, *Solution pratique de la question de Cochinchine ou fondation de la politique française dans l'Extrême-Orient* (Paris: Challamel Aîné, 1864), p. 4.

⁵² Jules Duval, *Les colonies et la politique coloniale de la France* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1864), p. 370 [my emphasis].

Saxon world of the future”⁵³. Deputy Taillefer could not express this idea more clearly: ‘[c]hacun de nous sait que la France a manqué une fois l’occasion de fonder un empire des Indes. Ne manquons pas la seconde occasion. Faisons quelque chose pour un pays qu’on appellera un jour la France asiatique, le nouvel empire des Indes’.⁵⁴ References to India were not an accident. They need to be seen as a clear response to the British glorious imperial narrative, which would continuously act as a reminder of France’s political marginalisation on the global scene.⁵⁵ Unlike their attitude to other imperialist ventures, such as to some extent Mexico and Algeria, liberals naturally acknowledged Cochinchina’s colonisation as a good opportunity to enhance France’s power in many ways. Jules Duval highlighted in his celebrated book on French colonial policy the important geostrategic role of the new colony, as well as its great political and economic value:

L’opinion publique doit ses sympathies à une entreprise de colonisation qui contient de grandes promesses pour la politique et pour le commerce de la France. Fortement assise en Cochinchine, la politique française observera de près la marche des événements qui dissolvent le Cambodge, son voisin ; qui fortifient le Siam, son allié ; qui ébranlent la Chine, hier son ennemie ; qui agitent le Japon, son ennemi peut-être de demain, qui agrandissent l’Angleterre, sa rivale.⁵⁶

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, France’s role in the world is a category of analysis that embraces many aspects of French international relations and foreign policy. In the cases of Algeria and Mexico, liberal visions of this role centred their attention on analysing the legal, structural and institutional strength of the French state when it came into contact with other political realities, either as pure colonies (as in the case of Algeria), or as independent political units in which or from which to exercise a particular political influence (the case of Mexico). From the very beginning, Cochinchina belonged undoubtedly to the first category. The Kingdom of Annam was

⁵³ Robert Tombs, *France 1814-1914* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 201. See also Nicola Frith, *The French Colonial Imagination. Writing the Indian Uprisings, 1857-1858, from Second Empire to Third Republic* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 2.

⁵⁴ ASCL 1866, vol. 2, session of 6 March, pp. 146–7.

⁵⁵ Frith, *The French Colonial Imagination*, p. 8.

⁵⁶ Duval, *Les colonies et la politique coloniale de la France*, p. 369.

always depicted as a colony by both the Bonapartists—the colony’s political promoters—and liberals—its co-inspiring ideologists. Thus, liberals barely questioned the way in which colonisation of Cochinchina took place, at least from the institutional point of view. They fully agreed with the Bonapartists in seeing Cochinchina as an urgent, necessary step to enlarge French economic and political influence in the region.

Just at the time the French troops reached Annam from China in 1858, the press in France, including liberal newspapers and journals, echoed massively what Prévost-Paradol described as ‘excellentes nouvelles de notre expédition contre la Cochinchine’.⁵⁷ His was by no means an isolated outlook, but rather another example of a widespread current of opinion, expressed through a number of press articles.⁵⁸ In virtually all these accounts, Cochinchina was depicted as an idyllic, flourishing spot, valuable for its natural wealth, as the following paragraph shows:

La baie de Tourane est un des plus beaux ports naturels qui existent, elle est presque entièrement abritée par de hautes montagnes qui la préservent de la fureur des moussons, et sa passe est si bien dissimulée par les pointes verdoyantes qu’elle baigne, qu’on s’imagineraît être au milieu d’un lac. Les vastes forêts qui comme un immense tapis se déroulent sur les flancs onduleux des montagnes attestent une végétation des plus vigoureuses. Mais, dit un voyageur, l’aspect de cette nature se mirant dans les eaux bleues et calmes de cette baie a quelque chose de sévère, de sombre même qui ne permet pas au regard de s’y reposer avec satisfaction.⁵⁹

Such words repeated once and again in the French press contributed decisively to shaping popular notions of faraway lands, the outer world and France’s role therein. Although very critical of other expansionist projects, liberals never came to show strong disagreement with Cochinchina’s colonisation. Rather, not only in parliament

⁵⁷ *Journal des Débats*, 9 November 1858.

⁵⁸ As mentioned, the quantity of articles in the liberal press praising the occupation of Cochinchina was significant. To name but a few examples, both Xavier Raymond and Louis Alloury showed in *Le Journal des Débats* their joy for the ‘importantes nouvelles de Cochinchine, qui mentionnent un succès significatif remporté par nos armes’ or ‘les nouvelles de Saïgon qui [...] font espérer le dénouement prochain et satisfaisant de notre expédition’ on 15 January 1858 and 16 July 1862, respectively.

⁵⁹ *Journal des Débats*, 15 November 1858.

but also—and especially—in the press, they supported the idea that putting this Asian spot under French control was a truly worthy enterprise and tried to generate a positive social disposition towards it. One way to do so was to present Cochinchina's colonisation as part of a wider, more ambitious geostrategic plan: to reinforce France's presence in Asia. In this regard, the liberal voice can be heard in the journalist Xavier Raymond's words:

[...] nous avons forcé les portes du Japon, et enfin nous avons fondé en Cochinchine un établissement qui ne demande qu'un peu de bonne volonté de notre part, un peu de modération dans l'exercice de nos passions centralisatrices et administratives pour devenir une colonie des plus florissantes.

It is worth noting the way in which Raymond deployed all his rhetoric ability to make his message more convincing. By appealing to his personal experience, the journalist tried, and probably succeeded, to present his opinion as a valid one:

Si l'expérience personnelle que j'ai acquise dans ces contrées, si l'intérêt avec lequel je n'ai pas cessé de suivre tous les événements qui s'y sont accomplis depuis vingt ans me donnent le droit d'avoir une opinion, je dirai qu'à tous les points de vue il faut applaudir à cette nouvelle entreprise de notre marine.⁶⁰

Hardly a year later, a book entitled *Tableau de la Cochinchine* was published. By 1863, Cochinchina's colonisation was an issue in the limelight. The book made everything that was happening in Cochinchina much more accessible to Parisian readers, thus making Cochinchina much closer to French public opinion in general. The launching of this sort of publication was generally well received by thinkers and intellectuals in the metropole, inasmuch as they saw it as a valuable means to broaden general knowledge on rather unknown aspects of faraway lands, their culture, society or economy. Moreover, these books were perceived as useful tools to spread a particular (political) vision on colonisation and the empire. In Duval's eyes, *Tableau de la Cochinchine* was expected to 'faire connaître ce théâtre de nos lointains et nouveaux exploits'; as such, he did not hesitate to define the task of the book's authors as 'patriotic', since they 'nous

⁶⁰ *Journal des Débats*, 30 December 1862.

montr[ent] l'occupation française, [et nous donne] toutes les informations quelque peu authentiques sur une contrée que *nous aimons* à inscrire déjà parmi nos colonies'. It seems clear that Duval's utterances need to be framed in the liberal conception of colonial policy, not so much as a means to pursue the vague Bonapartist notion of glory and prestige, but as a way to achieve real benefits for France, including a decisive strategic, political and commercial position in the world, as Duval clearly noted:

La France, déshéritée depuis cent ans de son vaste empire de l'Inde, essaie de le reconstituer un peu plus loin [...], reprend de la valeur en se reliant à un nouveau et vaste foyer de domination; au lieu d'être des postes perdus dans l'isolement, nos antiques établissements deviennent des jalons d'un réseau d'influences politiques et de relations commerciales en Asie.⁶¹

All in all, he stated solemnly that 'la Cochinchine offre dans l'extrême Orient une base d'opérations au génie expansif et rayonnant de la France'. This kind of assertion connected to the widespread liberal faith in progress and expansionism as a way to achieve further material and political advantages for European nations, and, indeed, it was a way to express hostility towards Britain.

In the case of Cochinchina, liberal ideas and attitudes towards colonisation found other voices than those of politicians or deputies. It was more in the realm of the press and intellectual milieus, to a certain extent linked to economic thinking or the business world, where fascination with the empire in Asia deployed all its discursive power. Institutional, political liberalism did not make of Cochinchina's colonisation a particularly important issue.

⁶¹ *Journal des Débats*, 20 May 1863 [my emphasis].



FIG. 5. Pacification of CochinChina. *L'Illustration*, vol. 40, 9 August 1862. The picture shows the ceremonial aspects of (victorious) peace-making and represents the global dimension of the Second Empire's imperial project, with many non-European figures and an emphasis on France's naval power.

In this case, the very lack of purely political debates on the issue is telling *per se* since one can legitimately consider that the group of liberal deputies in the chamber, normally very critical of the government's way to manage colonial ventures, agreed with the general aims of the Asian enterprise.

Liberal thinkers such as Duval praised this colonial venture as a great source of global prestige for France, as an unavoidable opportunity to bring the nation further both politically and economically. The language used to persuade public opinion of the goodness of the enterprise was imbued with a mixture of tenderness and epic, military power and fascination for conquest of such a rich land. The image above clearly represents this epic. According to what these accounts transmit, liberals never presented Cochinchina's enterprise in negative terms:

La jeune colonie de la Cochinchine est plus vivace, comme l'enfant qui grandit. Elle a autour d'elle l'espace, au-dessus d'elle la faveur officielle. Ses progrès répondent aux espérances et aux sacrifices. Population, commerce, industrie, navigation, tout se développe d'année en année, non sans quelques mécomptes et beaucoup d'efforts; mais toute colonisation, et l'on peut dire toute création, est à ce prix.⁶²

An editorialist advocated defending 'les grands intérêts de la France par delà des mers'.⁶³ As his argument went, France needed to overcome all of its problems in Europe and at home and to continue its successful colonial career. Some months later, Duval picked up the thread of this idea and suggested that even Great Britain acknowledged France's 'colonising aptitudes'. The reference to the British in Duval's words is not coincidental, but the result of a mental parameter placing Britain as a direct model of comparison in France's political culture at the time, and especially for French liberals. Jules Duval expresses with clarity and fineness most of the key ideas of this chapter:

⁶² *Journal des Débats*, 26 December 1866.

⁶³ *Journal des Débats*, 2 October 1868.

CHAPTER 3
Liberals and the Role of France in the World

En toute colonie anglo-saxonne se reconnaît la vitalité d'un établissement : que la Cochinchine ait l'honneur de donner *enfin* sur un point du globe cet exemple de l'*aptitude colonisatrice* de l'administration française ! Nulle autre part le terrain serait mieux préparé. Ici les indigènes soumis, laborieux, peu redoutables quoique nombreux, sont initiés déjà au régime municipal, et leurs intérêts se concilient facilement avec ceux d'une *civilisation plus avancée*, pour lesquels la liberté d'action et discussion est une condition indispensable de prospérité.⁶⁴

As a matter of fact, Duval's statements do not differ that much from those by the members of the Bonapartist government, eager to present the venture as a fruitful, necessary and shining enterprise. In March 1862, Adolphe Billault, minister without portfolio, explained in the chamber the reasons for which the Empire had succeeded in putting Cochinchina at the centre of its colonial agenda in a way that can be seen as a good example of the Bonapartist rhetoric:

Notre occupation de Saïgon est une des meilleures entreprises coloniales et politiques qui aient pu se réaliser. Saïgon est un delta magnifique, enfermé dans les bouches du fleuve Cambodge, offrant une fertilité merveilleuse sur toutes les parties de son sol, une sécurité et une facilité d'abordage pour les plus grands navires jusqu'à Saïgon même, à plusieurs lieux en remontant le fleuve. C'est, de plus, une admirable position entre l'Asie occidentale et toutes les régions de l'extrême Orient ; et, par une circonstance heureuse, les populations du pays, douces et gouvernables sous la direction de leurs autorités indigènes qu'on leur a laissées, se laissent conduire par la France avec la plus grande facilité. Nous avons donc là réunis tous les éléments d'une prospérité solide ; nous pouvons y faire produire en abondance les trois choses qui dans ces contrées lointaines importent le plus à notre commerce : le riz, la soie, et le coton. Cette occupation est donc, je le répète, une grande et fructueuse entreprise.⁶⁵

Cochinchina's colonisation opened a large space for the development of a rich political imaginary. Unlike Algeria or Mexico, where liberals projected both their admiration and their criticism towards the government for the way in which it was leading such ventures, Cochinchina was not the focus of harsh political debates among liberals and

⁶⁴ *Journal des Débats*, 23 June 1869 [my emphasis].

⁶⁵ CRCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 167.

Bonapartists. Rather, it contributed to the development of a ‘fascination with the empire’. Contrary to what one could expect, this fascination was not only built by the leading Bonapartist majority, but also by the liberal opposition. The colonisation of Cochinchina stimulated a wide range of imperial images, since, as Nicola Cooper has noted, ‘the empty space of the colony often becomes in the imperial imagination a repository for unconscious desires and yearnings’.⁶⁶ Liberals saw Cochinchina as a good opportunity to pursue their economic interests and to project their imperial dreams.

The reasons for the different treatment that liberals gave to the two colonial projects might be related to racial and religious issues. As sons of one of the religions of the Book, and given the long history of confrontation between them and Christians in Europe, Muslims were broadly speaking both feared and respected. Racial, religious issues were thus tackled in Algeria differently than in Cochinchina, where—according to the visions from the metropole—Christian communities and missionaries had been outraged by an insolent regime in the name of a local faith, far beyond what the nineteenth-century French perceived as serious and respectable. The Annamite Empire’s institutions and religion were much less valued from the point of view of those who, like the French liberals, were convinced of France’s moral superiority.

Geographic proximity may have played a role in the different ways to see the two colonies from the metropole. Whereas Algeria was a neighbouring territory for France, placed just on the other side of the Mediterranean, Cochinchina was seen as a truly faraway land; a new place where everything was to be discovered. A brand-new colonial project had the chance to be developed, and to this endeavour, both liberals and the Bonapartists were new. The colony was not completely established, for some institutional and economic steps to ensure its domination and profitable development were still to be taken. In view of this situation, liberals had little to criticise the government for and rather encouraged it to not make the same mistakes as in other colonies, especially Algeria. Liberal approaches to the Mexican affair, as the following section will show, responded to different logics.

⁶⁶ Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters*, p. 2.

The rhetoric of imperial fascination lasted, and indeed grew, in the years after the fall of the Empire. In the second edition of his celebrated work on French colonisation, liberal thinker Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, educated and trained as an economist during Napoleon III's regime, defined Cochinchina as 'le noyau d'un empire qui, pour ne pas atteindre à l'importance des Indes, sera une des plus belles dépendances qu'une puissance européenne possède sur le vieux continent asiatique'.⁶⁷ The more the French domination of Cochinchina was proving to be a fruitful enterprise for France's economic and geostrategic interests, the more liberal thinkers came to praise it as a successful political movement. In the early years of the Third Republic, once liberals did not feel the need to question the government as they did over the course of the 1860s, utterances in favour of colonisation became naturally and openly part of the liberal political language. Proof of this is the uninhibited way in which most liberals referred to France's presence overseas. The following words by Leroy-Beaulieu are in this sense paradigmatic:

Nous croyons, quant à nous, à la vocation civilisatrice de la France et à ses facultés colonisatrices : la France ne manque pas d'esprits entreprenants. Les plus grandes œuvres de ce temps, en fait de travaux publics extra-européens, ce sont des Français qui les ont accomplies ou qui les accomplissent.⁶⁸

Not only the central case of Algeria, but also Cochinchina spurred liberal thinking on what the role of France in the world had to be from the perspective of colonial and imperial expansion in order to avoid for the nation a secondary role both at the European and global levels. The reason, again in Leroy-Beaulieu's words, was rather straightforward: 'Nous ambitionnons pour notre patrie des destinées plus hautes : que la France devienne résolument une nation colonisatrice, alors se rouvrent devant elle les longs espoirs et les vastes pensées'.⁶⁹ The new colonisers would be engineers and doctors, and not conquistadors.

⁶⁷ Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes* (Paris: Guillaumin et Cie., 1882), p. vi.

⁶⁸ Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*, pp. vi-vii.

⁶⁹ Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*, p. ix.

4. MEXICO, THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-INTERVENTION AND THE 'RIGHT OF NATIONS'

The range of ideas and notions on France's role in the world, as diverse and varied as they might have been, found in the Mexican affair a prolific breeding-ground. The expedition to Mexico was one of the major political ventures of the Second Empire, specifically designed according to the emperor's global pretensions. The length of the Mexican adventure was inversely proportional to its expected political, geostrategic and economic importance. As dreamt by Napoleon III, Mexico was projected as a never-ending source of power and prestige. Nevertheless, it became the origin of his Empire's decline. From the beginning controversial and turbulent, the expedition to Mexico was a contested one, especially from the side of liberals, who always saw it as an affront to France's image abroad.

As will be shown in what follows, liberals never denied the need of assisting the French nationals settled in Mexico against the outrages perpetrated by the Mexican government. Yet they never supported the idea of interfering in Mexico's internal affairs for the sake of enlarging France's influence in the Americas. Liberals, faithful to their ideological postulates, employed all their rhetorical capacities to position themselves as moderate, trustful defenders of the nation's needs and wills. To do so, they used the Mexican affair as a pretext to build their political discourse, linking the affair to the notions of political transparency and fair-play, and to the more theoretical frameworks of international law and the principle of non-intervention.

International Law and Non-Intervention

In the 1860s, among the greatest concerns of liberal thinkers were the issues related to international relations and the mechanisms by which to guarantee the peaceful coexistence of nations. It was Jeremy Bentham who coined the term 'international law', which came to substitute the former 'law of nations' and immediately was adopted as a valuable framework to deal with conflict and peace among different countries on the

global stage.⁷⁰ Moreover, liberal thinking on international relations was significantly shaped by John Stuart Mill's celebrated 1859 article on the principle of non-intervention, published at a moment in which debates on non-intervention were especially flourishing in France.⁷¹ To French liberals, as to many of their European counterparts, liberal intellectual contributions made by British thinkers became a sort of fundamental ideological cornerstone for their own visions. The French liberals' adherence to a dichotomy between the civilised and non-civilised world, propounded by international lawyers, might explain their support of intervention in Cochinchina, as well as their rejection of intervention in Mexico.

The principle of non-intervention appeared to be a major claim of the Bonapartist regime from its restoration in 1852. From the very beginning, Napoleon III manifested publically his aim to make of Europe a place whose international relations were based on the principles of peace and mutual respect. However, France's diplomatic and military interventions in many domestic European affairs would not precisely fit this pacifist, respectful claim. Most of the emperor's official discourse, however, was informed by his personal sympathy and support for a principle that was to allow all European countries to be 'maître de ses destinées, localise[r] les questions et les empêche[r] de dégénérer en conflits européens'.⁷² This claim, following the vision of most mid-nineteenth-century policymakers, mainly referred to the European context. In making this assertion, Napoleon III was surely thinking of the 'Pax Europeana' that he had theoretically encouraged with his celebrated 'the Empire means peace', some months before the advent of the Empire. The emperor indeed felt enthusiastic about the idea of being the guarantor of Europe's international relations, and knew that France, a nation midway between revolutionary and conservative forces, had to follow its own way. As he claimed, none of these 'antagonistic excitations' (revolution and conservatism) would distract him from leading the country on the right track, since 'il

⁷⁰ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (edited by J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart, with a new introduction by F. Rosen, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 6, 296–7. See also Jeremy Bentham, *Principles of International Law*, in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (II vols., edited by John Browning, Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843), vol. II, pp. 535–60.

⁷¹ John Stuart Mill 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention', *Foreign Policy Perspectives*, 8, Libertarian Alliance (first published in *Fraser's Magazine*, 1859).

⁷² CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 4 February, p. 5.

suffit à la grandeur du pays de maintenir son droit là où il est incontestable, de défendre son honneur là où il est attaqué, de prêter son appui là où il est imploré en faveur d'une juste cause'.⁷³ In this respect, consciously or not, he also implied that France would intervene wherever and whenever the French government decided, either in Europe or abroad.

The emperor always succeeded in keeping an ambiguous discourse regarding the Empire's foreign policy. Whereas he sought to increase the number of military and colonial expeditions abroad, he publically stated that the main aim of France's foreign policy was to ensure peaceful relations with other nations. This ambiguity was expressed through rather pompous claims such as that France would only intervene abroad when justice was threatened. His alleged commitment to the principle of non-intervention sometimes found direct support among most of the Bonapartists, who, like Baron de Beauvergier, considered that 'la politique de non-intervention est pleine de sagesse, parce qu'elle empêche l'effusion du sang'.⁷⁴ However, other deputies of the same political family were more sceptical. This was the case of Adolphe Guérault, a diplomat attached to Saint-Simonism who in the earlier years of the Empire was considered a member of the left wing of Bonapartism. As he pointed out:

Une nation comme la France ne se propose pas de faire la paix ou de faire la guerre ; elle a de certaines nécessités de situation en Europe, qu'elle est appelée à faire respecter. Non seulement elle a des intérêts, mais elle a des idées. La France, qui fait la guerre pour une idée ; la France, qui a un rôle civilisateur dans le monde, a des devoirs particuliers vis-à-vis les idées qu'elle a produites. Il ne suffit pas qu'elle les mette au monde. Il en est des idées comme des enfants : il faut les nourrir, les soutenir, les installer dans le monde.⁷⁵

This statement is a good example of what was indeed common thinking among French political elites in the 1860s. In their opinion, France was by no means an ordinary nation in the world. On the contrary, they acknowledged that France had a particular mission to accomplish among the greatest powers; something remarkable to offer to

⁷³ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 4 February, pp. 4-5.

⁷⁴ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 18 March, p. 295.

⁷⁵ CRCL 1864, vol. 1, session of 9 January, p. 291.

the rest of the world, much more related to intellectual and moral values than to military conquests. Under particular circumstances, however, the spreading of these values could require the application of coercive measures and the use of force wherever necessary. Indeed, this reasoning opened the door to the justification of a wide range of military interventions abroad and clearly contributed to creating a hierarchy among countries. France's interests appeared to be above any other consideration.

Liberals reacted to these claims with relative mistrust. Although they shared the notion that France was a superior nation that needed to be heard in the world, when it came to evaluating Napoleon III's political behaviour, they were perfectly aware that his public utterances and political actions did not always dovetail nicely. Most liberals' parliamentary efforts aimed therefore to highlight the emperor's inconsistencies. Prominent liberal deputy Jules Favre expressed vigorously that consistency needed to be the driving principle of France's foreign policy when he pointed out that '[j]e veux que la France reste fidèle à ses principes. Il n'est pas possible qu'on puisse approuver une puissance qui dirait "je ne veux pas d'intervention politique, mais je me la réserve pour moi-même."⁷⁶

However, he was aware that keeping to a strict defence of non-intervention in any international conflict or place could have a price for France and lead it irremediably to a weak position on the global context. On several occasions, he expressed deep concern regarding this issue, and indeed recognised that it was neither possible nor desirable for France to keep absolute neutrality vis-à-vis the world's diplomatic challenges. France, such a 'great country', had in his opinion the huge responsibility of facing both 'immediate and general' interests. He recognised that focusing on immediate interests would probably be the most convenient strategy, so that the country could work intensively for its own development, its *grandeur* and the consolidation of liberal sacred values of liberty and progress. To follow this path, however, would not be the most positive for France, since, as he himself asserted, 'bien que je fusse disposé par beaucoup de raisons à incliner vers cette politique, ce n'est jamais celle que je conseillerais à mon pays'. He added:

⁷⁶ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 21 March, p. 343.

[cette politique] est contraire à son génie, c'est que la France est avant tout *un pays d'expansion*, c'est qu'il lui est impossible de ne pas sentir avec son esprit, avec son âme, avec son cœur, tout ce qui se passe en Europe et même dans le monde entier. [...] Suivant moi, aucune querelle ne doit lui être indifférente.⁷⁷

No one remained indifferent to Favre's claims, especially Émile Ollivier, who at the time represented another distinguished faction among liberals, much closer to Napoleon III's personal entourage. Both liberal leaders shared most of their political claims and visions, and their close relationship was hard to forget. In some cases, however, they manifested total opposition towards each other. 'Mon principe à moi est diamétralement opposé', Ollivier even said when commenting on Favre's visions on French foreign politics. 'Je crois que si la France doit surveiller ce qui se passe autour d'elle, elle ne doit se mêler des querelles étrangères que le moins que possible'. The reasons for that, he insisted, were the close defence of the principle of non-intervention, the true principle that should drive foreign policy worldwide, 'précisément parce que c'est le principe pacifique'.⁷⁸ With a touch of irony he stressed the inconsistency of defending a policy of expansion abroad and freedom at home. With this sentence, Ollivier came to illustrate one of the greatest incoherencies of nineteenth-century liberal thinking: the aim to defend freedom and individual rights at home and the need to expand abroad. Ollivier represented a faction among liberals that sought to minimise this inconsistency. As he pointed out, 'quand nos intérêts sont menacés, défendons-les avec énergie, mais ne les croyons pas compromis à tout instant'.⁷⁹ He indeed sought to strengthen the idea that liberalism should equal moderation and the implementation of a policy detached from unleashed passions, especially regarding foreign affairs.

⁷⁷ ASCL 1865, vol. 3, session of 10 April, p. 105 [my emphasis].

⁷⁸ ASCL 1865, vol. 3, session of 10 April, p. 111.

⁷⁹ ASCL 1865, vol. 3, session of 10 April, p. 112.

On Mexico

By mid September 1861, the press all over Europe brought to light that Spain, Britain and France were about to launch a joint military expedition to Mexico. The first published news made neither the reasons nor the procedures of this venture clear. In France, indeed, most believed that it was about a project led by Spain counting on timely support from the British and the French. In the following weeks, new details on the expedition rapidly came to light, and therefore the French public opinion could have a broader picture of what at the time was labelled as a true ‘diplomatic *imbroglio*’.⁸⁰ Columnists and editorialists expressed their astonishment about an issue that Napoleon III’s imperial government had apparently kept secret. Once it was clear that France would not only assist Spain in the venture, but that it was indeed one of its major organisers, the editorialist of the *Journal des Débats* could not hide his surprise about the fact that such important news came to be known in France through an English newspaper.⁸¹ Among liberal milieus, this situation produced anger:

Si le traité dont il s’agit est à la veille d’être signé, si les trois gouvernements sont déjà tombés d’accord non seulement sur le principe, mais sur le plan et sur les détails de l’expédition, ainsi que le prétend le journal anglais, comment se fait-il que nous en recevions la première nouvelle de Londres ? Comment, à l’heure qu’il est, en sommes-nous réduits aux renseignements qui nous sont fournis par la presse anglaise ?⁸²

These words are important because they stand for defending political transparency and the right of information, both major concerns for liberal thinkers and politicians since the advent of the Second Empire. The expedition to Mexico was an affair that irritated liberals from the beginning, as they saw in it the expression of the way in which France should never behave internationally. Most of the political debates on the principle of

⁸⁰ We owe this expression to Charles de Mazade, historian, professor and journalist, known for his moderate, thorough analysis and press articles on political affairs. See Charles de Mazade, ‘La guerre du Mexique et les puissances européennes’, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. XL (July 1862), pp. 733–61.

⁸¹ The editorial went as follows: ‘Nos lecteurs auront sans doute été *quelque peu surpris, comme nous*, de la confiance que le “Morning Post” vient de nous faire au sujet du traité que la France, l’Angleterre et l’Espagne seraient sur le point de conclure en vue d’une expédition combinée contre le Mexique’. *Journal des Débats*, 27 September 1861 [my emphasis].

⁸² *Journal des Débats*, 27 September 1861.

non-intervention in 1860s France were indeed focused on Mexico. As already suggested in the introductory chapters, the Second Empire engaged in an ambitious imperialist plan in order to spread its influence and power all around the world. Apart from launching several expansionist ventures on virtually all continents, France participated rather proactively in a number of European diplomatic affairs. All the issues related to France's foreign policy served as a pretext for the liberals to confront the Bonapartists. The intervention in Mexico gave rise to the harshest debates between them.

Although the Mexican affair can be seen as a truly imperialist venture, it was undeniably different from other colonial projects. As suggested in previous chapters, French political elites, whether Bonapartist or liberal, never considered Mexico as a regular colony, but instead as a sovereign state with well-established institutions founded on a deep historical legitimacy. When the French government decided to break the Treaty of London, they never aimed at either 'colonising' Mexico or establishing a political regime there based on economic and bureaucratic domination. The plan was rather different and sought to 'intervene' in the country's internal politics by forcing the establishment of a monarchy under the figure of a foreign prince chosen by Napoleon III. The project was therefore to alter the development of Mexico's politics and to place the country under French influence.

Despite all the efforts made to justify the military expedition and later political intervention in Mexico, the government's official explanations convinced neither the liberals nor even some of the Bonapartist deputies. Achille Jubinal—one of the Bonapartists who probably dared the most to express his disagreement with the government in the Corps législatif—was from the beginning very critical of the French political intervention in Mexico, although he never questioned the pertinence of sending to Mexico a military expedition. According to him, the economic interests of the French settled in Mexico (*nos nationaux*) deserved to be resolutely defended by the government. Jubinal considered, however, that sending French troops to a faraway territory was not justified...

...pour y renverser un gouvernement libre, pour y renverser une puissance indépendante et pour imposer à une nation qui ne dépend que d'elle-même une forme de gouvernement quelconque. Alors je me permettrai de demander au gouvernement ce que devient ce grand principe de non-intervention qu'il a proclamé lui-même ailleurs et qu'il fait si bien respecter.⁸³

Significantly, Jubinal appealed to the principle of non-intervention, assuming that the government had to respect it fully, as the emperor had so many times claimed. Dialectic discussions between Jubinal and the members of the Group of Five, especially Favre, show the extent to which Bonapartism and liberalism could find, more often than expected, points of ideological convergence. Napoleon III's regime was less robust than the official propaganda proclaimed, and concerning particularly sensitive issues such as the Mexican affair, differences between the Bonapartists flourished. Agreement between some Bonapartists and liberals was rather common, too. For instance, Jubinal and Favre fully agreed in considering the Mexican political situation as disastrous, and Mexico as a country where the absence of minimal levels of stability was not only seriously damaging its social and economic development, but also risking important foreign investments in the region. Notwithstanding this fact, they differed in describing the causes of such a situation.

According to the Bonapartists, President Juárez was ultimately responsible for Mexico's chaos and decline. Liberals, however, defended Juárez's political legitimacy against any attempt to subvert Mexico's political regime to establish a new monarchy. Liberals thought of such a project as a serious offence to the Mexican people and as an intolerable interference in Mexico's internal affairs. Respect for international legality was constantly evoked as an argument against the establishment of a monarchy in Mexico, a political project that liberals, notably Favre, resisted with full vigour. 'Il est dangereux que la France', he noted, 'multipliant ses œuvres de propagande, aille établir sur tous les points du globe des pouvoirs qui ne subsisteraient qu'à l'aide de ses baïonnettes et qui lui coûteraient bon an mal an une cinquantaine de millions à

⁸³ CRCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 156.

dépenser, sans aucun profit pour elle-même'. According to him, playing the role of 'saviours of the world' could only bring France more problems than joys.⁸⁴

Jules Favre made explicit the liberals' support for any foreign expedition only if there were compelling reasons to launch it and never 'si elle annonce un but apparent pour marcher vers un but caché'. Clarity and fairness were thus required, since, as he noted:

Nous nous associons à la pensée d'une expédition si cette expédition est nécessaire, si elle est justifiée par des griefs suffisants. M. le ministre nous a fait entendre un magnifique langage. Il a dit que partout où un Français était en péril, le drapeau français devait aller le protéger. Jamais nous n'avons combattu cette maxime. Mais nous voulons que ni le sang ni l'or de la France ne soient prodigués pour une entreprise derrière laquelle peut se cacher une intrigue.⁸⁵

Liberals knew perfectly what they were expressing and why. They used the Mexican affair to question the government, and as a way to reinforce their own discursive parameters. Continuous references to fair play, respect for foreign institutions and political systems and non-intervention in foreign countries' internal affairs gave them legitimacy as defenders of common sense in opposition to the alleged Bonapartist tendency towards outrage. Liberals tried to gain electoral support by warning French citizens that '[l]es forces de la France ne doivent pas être engagées dans des expéditions mal définies, aventureuses, et ni nos principes ni nos intérêts ne nous conseillaient d'aller voir quel gouvernement désire le peuple mexicain'. They also showed their recognition to the French soldiers who were perishing and suffering the consequences of war in Mexico. 'Nous admirons l'héroïsme de nos soldats combattant au Mexique sous un climat meurtrier, et nous leur envoyons nos vœux les plus sympathiques ; mais le soin de l'honneur national ne dispense pas une assemblée politique de juger une entreprise dont elle peut aujourd'hui connaître les causes et prévoir les suites'.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ CRCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 158.

⁸⁵ CRCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, pp. 156–7.

⁸⁶ *Les cinq députés de l'opposition (Alfred Darimon, Jules Favre, Émile Ollivier, Ernest Picard, Hénon) à leurs électeurs de Paris et de Lyon. Compte-rendu de leurs travaux* (Paris: Dubuisson, 1863), p. 12.

From the decades prior to the intervention, the political situation in Mexico had been disastrous and unstable. This was a major claim shared by both the government and the liberal opposition. The succession of dictatorial regimes, an excess of military intervention in public affairs, as well as insecurity in developing business in safe conditions was a major concern for liberals, which the Bonapartists also shared, although with nuances. In any case, according to the liberal mindset, all these problems could never be solved by imposing a political regime, and even less a monarchy, to a sovereign country like Mexico. Such an interference, especially when the final goal sought to install a monarchical regime under the figure of an European prince, was not solely ‘criminel’ but ‘aussi inopportune que contraire au droit’. This was also seen as an inappropriate measure due to its high economic costs, which by no means would have helped balance France’s indebted accounts (which had an annual chronic deficit of more than 300 million francs at the time). In liberals’ opinion, the intervention would be an extremely heavy burden for the nation’s finances. Yet the most important reason to question such a project was related to international law, whose main goal was to protect ‘les faibles contre les forts’. Favre expressed this idea with clarity:

Est-il possible d’accorder à une grande nation comme la France [...] la faculté de déclarer la guerre à une nation qui refuse de payer ses dettes ? J’avoue que je n’éprouve aucun embarras à répondre hardiment par la négative. Il ne me paraît pas possible que le droit de guerre ressorte nécessairement [...] de la mauvaise foi ou du retard des débiteurs. Il y aurait, en effet, quelque chose de bien excessif, de bien cruel, de bien barbare, dans cette doctrine qui permettrait au créancier de tuer son débiteur pour en avoir payement. Ceci est écrit dans les lois barbares.⁸⁷

In the end, though, it was all a matter of numbers. According to official statistics, Mexico was indebted to French creditors by a sum of around four million francs, and by a much lesser quantity to Britain and Spain. To recover these four million, the government proposed to involve the army in a project that would cost, at least, around thirty million, so the investment was everything but economically sound. As the next chapter will show, liberals saw in this situation a powerful reason to reject the intervention. In fact, they could not understand why these clear, obvious calculations

⁸⁷ CRCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 158.

did not convince the government to stop their plans, or at least to modify them considerably. At the same time, this fact was precisely what led them to think that other motivations might be behind the official ones. Other political, geostrategic or commercial interests had been on the table. This was a reason for Favre's rather desperate claim 'qu'allons-nous faire au Mexique?'⁸⁸

The Mexican question brought to the surface certain disagreements between the two liberal leaders. Whilst Favre saw in this affair an efficient weapon to erode the government by highlighting its inconsistencies and mistakes, Ollivier preferred to keep a more moderate position. The dissensions between them on this particular issue, however, did not create huge tensions within the liberal group. Favre was in charge of presenting and defending most of the amendments to the throne, which made of him the visible liberal face in relation to the Mexican affair. From the very beginning, Favre employed a rather aggressive language to attack the Bonapartists on this issue, which he took as a practically personal matter. His vehemence in defending his positions often came to exasperate his opponents. More than once, the Bonapartist authorities accused Favre of lack of patriotism when he asked for the immediate withdrawal of troops. Not in vain, the Bonapartists were used to deploying all their nationalistic rhetoric to defend their positions and attack the opposition.

Leaving aside the convenience of staying in the Mexican territory or not, the government considered it totally imprudent to abandon the French citizens to their fate without having the situation under control. With this specific issue, and showing strong coincidence with the government, Ollivier considered that the values of France's honour and prestige should be above those political divides. 'Jules Favre', wrote in his personal diary, 'ne connaissait pas assez la question de Mexique ou tout ou moins n'avait-il pas eu le temps d'y réfléchir suffisamment. Si j'avais parlé [...] je n'eusse pas

⁸⁸ CRCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 158. The expedition's costs were a recurrent issue in parliament in the following years. By 1865, further information was provided to the deputies, and the numbers changed. New accounts said that Mexico was indebted between five and twelve million, and that France had already invested 400 million in the expedition. As for the debate on this issue, see ASCL 1865, vol. 6, p. 236 and following.

demandé le retrait immédiat des troupes, j'aurais concédé la nécessité de relever l'honneur du drapeau'.⁸⁹

Whereas the Bonapartists tended to consider any criticism of the government as being a non-patriotic reaction, liberals saw things the other way around. As Favre duly noted, liberals stood for keeping national dignity in high esteem and for not getting involved in dangerous endeavours:

Quant à nous [les libéraux], messieurs, nous voulons dans la direction des choses humaines, des idées nettes et précises ; il ne nous plaît pas de nous engager dans la suite de l'incertitude dans une aventure qui pourrait compromettre si gravement la dignité du pays. [...] Tant que le Gouvernement ne se sera pas expliqué, je crois que les défiances de la Chambre sont des défiances patriotiques.⁹⁰

A strong sense of patriotism was indeed a defining feature of the mid-nineteenth-century French liberals. Émile Ollivier was probably the one who best expressed the fact that liberal criticism of the Empire's irresponsible foreign policy was perfectly compatible with the fact of respecting and defending the nation. When discussing the Mexican affair and the dangers of France getting involved in such a risky diplomatic situation, liberals strongly expressed their reservations. Yet when it came to defending the safety and dignity of French soldiers overseas, Ollivier made it clear that liberals would always be in favour of supporting the servants of the nation, no matter where and why they were engaged. 'C'est que là où nos soldats sont engagés et souffrent, peu importe pour quelles raisons et dans quelles circonstances ils ont été engagés, il faut les secourir', he proclaimed, gaining the support of most of the chamber.⁹¹ With such utterances, liberals reinforced their image of 'gens de bon sens', reasonable people far away from any revolutionary intention. In supporting the government when required, as was the case with the approval of a new credit for assisting the French troops in Veracruz, liberals linked themselves to the value of responsibility.

⁸⁹ Ollivier's personal diary, entry 1 July 1862, AN 542AP/5.

⁹⁰ CRCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March 1862, p. 163.

⁹¹ ASCL 1862, vol. 4, session of 14 March, p. 93.

By the time liberals were pressing the government to recognise the unsuitability of undertaking the Mexican affair, the liberal press did not show such determination. Few months after the European armies arrived in Veracruz, Charles de Mazade, a historian, journalist and political editor of the liberal *Revue des Deux Mondes*, recognised that ‘[l]a France, l’Angleterre et l’Espagne [...] allaient au Mexique pour chercher des réparations *malheureusement trop légitimes*, pour imposer à des pouvoirs malvenus le respect de la vie et des intérêts de leurs nationaux et de tous les étrangers’.⁹² Although showing his reservations concerning the desirability of embarking on a new military expedition, Mazade recognised the legitimacy of the government to defend the French interests in the country. In doing so, he implicitly accepted the need for the European powers’ intervention in Mexico to amend a situation that, in his opinion, should have never developed.

As liberal deputies constantly argued—and the Bonapartists always denied—Mazade also pointed out that the project of establishing a new monarchic system in Mexico was from the beginning on the three European powers’ agenda. On many occasions, the Bonapartist government claimed the contrary and defended the idea that no political intervention in Mexico was planned, as the Treaty signed in London made clear. However, liberals always showed their mistrust towards this claim. Mazade recognised that ‘[e]lles [Britain, France and Spain] ne cachaient point d’ailleurs leur désir de voir l’intervention européenne servir à l’établissement au Mexique d’un gouvernement plus régulier’ and pointed out the fact that ‘on entrevoyait au but de l’expédition européenne la possibilité de l’établissement d’une monarchie, le nom même du chef de la future monarchie n’était plus un mystère’.⁹³

Mazade justified the desire of the French to increase the number of troops in the region because of malpractice in the Spanish army. As he suggested, the Spaniards rushed in undertaking some initiatives that were understood as an affront by both the Mexicans and the other European allies. In Mazade’s opinion, Spain wanted to lead the

⁹² Charles de Mazade, ‘L’expédition du Mexique’, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. XXXIX (May-June 1862), p. 497 [my emphasis].

⁹³ Mazade, ‘L’expédition du Mexique’, p. 498.

process at any price, so that the French had to strengthen their military presence to keep a balance of forces. In any case, he wondered whether the expedition to Mexico was a good idea as a whole or whether the French should have rather stood for a much more precise, short military action.⁹⁴ In any case, he considered that, once the decision of intervening in Mexico was made, it was rather naïf to believe that the expedition could have been avoided. Once the French put themselves in the position to negotiate with a government (the Mexican) ‘qui a cent fois violé tous ces engagements’, it was clear that diplomatic methods were not going to be enough to solve the conflict. ‘Croire qu’on pourrait éluder la guerre, que toutes les questions pourraient se résoudre pacifiquement’, he claimed, ‘c’était une chimère’.⁹⁵

According to Mazade, Mexico’s political system and economy were languishing due to the incompetence of its political class and the inability of its political parties to agree on fundamental issues. Neither liberals nor conservatives were able to put the national interest above their own partisan concerns, which led the country to a situation of decadence and ‘indescriptible anarchie’. In Mazade’s opinion, the country’s dignity and governance was what really was at stake in Mexico, and not the triumph of liberalism. As he noted,

...il y des publicistes, de politiques, qui ne voient dans M. Juarez que le représentant des idées libérales, et dans le gouvernement actuel du Mexique qu’une personnification de l’esprit de progrès injustement assailli. Ils ne devraient pas, je pense, mêler ici ce grand mot de libéralisme, qui a certes une autre signification. Ce n’est pas de libéralisme qu’il s’agit au Mexique.⁹⁶

Mazade was very critical of Mexico’s political situation, which he saw as being unstable and paralysed by its leaders’ behaviour. So harsh was his criticism that he even dared to define the country as ‘le règne universel de la dictature errante des chefs des bandes’, either liberal or conservative, both unable to come to any advantageous agreement for

⁹⁴ Mazade, ‘L’expédition du Mexique’, p. 500.

⁹⁵ Mazade, ‘L’expédition du Mexique’, p. 500.

⁹⁶ Charles de Mazade, ‘La guerre du Mexique et les puissances européennes’, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. XL (July 1862), p. 738.

the nation.⁹⁷ This lack of patriotism is what Mazade highlighted as one of the greatest weaknesses of the Mexican political class. Mazade thus refused to express his personal support to Juárez's alleged liberal government, which, in more practical terms, promoted the confiscation and plundering of goods. No matter whether they affected foreign or national subjects, these kinds of initiatives could never be branded as liberal. The first victim of this turbulent situation was the country and its citizens, who had to suffer the devastating consequences of such a 'cruel, violent, bleeding, deadly' war.⁹⁸

However, Mazade supported the idea that all grievances and injuries committed against the French nationals had to be contested. Although pointing out that this damage was committed also by the conservatives, Mazade surprisingly put the accent on blaming Juárez's liberal government of making these outrages widespread and 'systematic'. The Mexican President's decision of suspending all foreign conventions in 1861 was thus a 'flagrant' and 'abusive' measure that came to confirm his belligerence against European creditors, in particular, and the European powers, in general. Such behaviour needed an appropriate response.⁹⁹ He also referred to the establishment of a new monarchy in Mexico as a project counting on the support of the three European powers. In Mazade's view, these powers were deeply interested in providing Mexico with a more stable government, less combative towards their own interests. In making these assumptions, Mazade openly recognised what the French government insistently denied: that the triple military coalition (a 'formidable machine') was formed to reach major goals rather than merely to ask the Mexicans for an economic compensation.¹⁰⁰

France's greatest mistake, Mazade argued, was to undertake the expedition with neither a proper evaluation of possible difficulties nor a clear, coordinated programme of action. He added:

Une autre faute qui ne serait plus maintenant que celle de la France, dont la France seule aurait la responsabilité et paierait le prix, serait d'accepter des solidarités qui pourraient

⁹⁷ Mazade, 'La guerre du Mexique et les puissances européennes', p. 734.

⁹⁸ Mazade, 'La guerre du Mexique et les puissances européennes', p. 736.

⁹⁹ Mazade, 'La guerre du Mexique et les puissances européennes', pp. 737–8.

¹⁰⁰ Mazade, 'La guerre du Mexique et les puissances européennes', p. 741.

l'affaiblir plus que servir son action, d'identifier sa cause avec celle d'une des factions qui se disputent depuis si longtemps le pouvoir dans cette malheureuse république. Au milieu des partis qui s'agitent, la France ne peut avoir qu'un rôle, celui de la *médiation*, de la *conciliation*.¹⁰¹

Et si on oppose encore que c'est là une entreprise contre le principe de l'indépendance des peuples, je ferai remarquer qu'en ce moment la France est justement en guerre au Mexique avec un pouvoir qui a songé tout d'abord à vendre une portion de son territoire aux États-Unis, pour soutenir la lutte contre une puissance qui veut au contraire sauver son intégrité. La France n'a point de passions de parti à soutenir, pas plus qu'elle n'a de conquête à faire au Mexique, et dans cette double condition cette entreprise, où une fatalité nous a entraînés, qui a ses côtés ingrats, qui irrite plus qu'elle ne séduit, est encore une œuvre où la pacification d'un pays peut jusqu'à un certain point compenser des sacrifices trop dangereux pour qu'ils puissent être souvent renouvelés, et pour qu'ils ne servent pas d'enseignement.¹⁰²

These paragraphs neatly sum up the attitude of moderate liberals towards a conflict that they saw as alien to their immediate interests. First, they denied the need for France to get so deeply involved in a foreign struggle and, second, to give clear support to one of the factions involved in the conflict. Rather, they saw France as being the voice of conciliation, moderate values that could always appease the situation.

A Central Issue

The whole Mexican affair soon became a major political issue for all ideological groups. Public opinion was deeply interested in a foreign venture that, as time went by, gained more and more strategic importance on the global stage. An editorialist of the *Journal* expressed this idea rather clearly:

L'expédition du Mexique, a mesure que nos succès se développent, crée par delà l'Océan un état de choses nouveau, extrêmement sérieux, qui commence à préoccuper [...] Ce fait grave et d'infiniment de conséquence dans l'histoire générale du monde, la France

¹⁰¹ Mazade, 'La guerre du Mexique et les puissances européennes', p. 761 [my emphasis].

¹⁰² Mazade, 'La guerre du Mexique et les puissances européennes', p. 761.

CHAPTER 3
Liberals and the Role of France in the World

venant disputer à la race anglo-saxonne l'héritage des républiques espagnoles en dissolution, ne laisse pas que de causer un peu de souci à l'Angleterre.¹⁰³

Liberals perceived the tripartite expedition to Mexico as a sort of renewed European attempt to monitor the New World. Furthermore, they contributed to building the image of Mexico as a truly crucial affair for the global balance of power:

C'est l'ancien monde qui essaie de reconquérir aujourd'hui des droits d'ingérence perdus dans les affaires du nouveau; et que ce soit là un bien ou un mal, on ne saurait nier que c'est du moins un des événements considérables de l'histoire contemporaine.¹⁰⁴

For better or worse, the 'noteworthy' event centred the attention of liberal deputies in later years. By 1865, they addressed the emperor in the following terms:

Au Mexique, nous déplorons plus que jamais le sang versé pour un prince étranger, la souveraineté nationale méconnue, l'avenir de notre politique mal engagé. Conformément aux déclarations du Gouvernement, nous attendons le rappel de nos troupes.¹⁰⁵

The return of troops began to be a central claim within the French liberals' political strategy. Once the government was in the weak position of having to recognise the great difficulties of managing the Mexican affair, something that they never did openly, liberals took advantage of the situation to take a firmer stance before the Bonapartists. They carefully chose their expressions in order to present themselves as both responsible political leaders towards the nation's needs (they began to continuously show their agreement with the fact that the threatened interests of French nationals had to be defended) and concerned, committed politicians towards France's role in the world (with constant references to the importance of keeping France's prestige in good position). Their strategy was meant to go far beyond the parliamentary struggles and therefore to reach and influence public opinion. As Ernest Picard suggested, 'l'opinion

¹⁰³ *Journal des Débats*, 3 July 1863.

¹⁰⁴ *Journal des Débats*, 20 July 1863.

¹⁰⁵ ASCL 1865, vol. 3, session of 11 April, p. 137.

publique est pressante et plus sévère que jamais quand il s'agit d'examiner notre conduite politique au Mexique'.¹⁰⁶ He added:

De toutes les questions politiques, celle qui nous intéresse le plus en France, c'est peut-être en ce moment la question du Mexique. De toutes les questions—j'excepte l'Algérie—celle pour laquelle il n'y a pas un seul document, c'est la question du Mexique. Pas un seul document, pas un seul !¹⁰⁷

Picard's vehemence in saying these words was not produced by an isolated incident. It was rather the result of what liberals considered an already too long series of mishaps in the government's international policy. One way to highlight their inconsistency was to relate the Mexican affair to Algeria's colonisation, where, by that time, the French government was experiencing much trouble to control and pacify the region:

Vous savez d'ailleurs s'il est de bonne et sage politique de tenir trente à quarante mille soldats français, une partie de notre flotte, engagés pensant des années dans l'expédition du Mexique, et de réaliser à 3,000 lieues de distance une guerre d'Algérie. Est-ce là une politique sensée ? Est-ce une politique patriotique ? Est-ce une politique qu'une chambre française puisse accepter ? Non, mille fois non !¹⁰⁸

Once again, it is worth noting the way in which liberals strove to link the notions of good judgement and patriotism, making of them the very cornerstones of their discourse. In the same line of reasoning, Jules Favre stressed the need of keeping the country's finances in good condition, avoiding at all costs an excessive budgetary expenditure. More than compromising the financial strength of the country in a faraway, senseless venture, the real patriotic behaviour was rather the opposite. Favre also criticised the government for their use of chauvinistic statements and turns of phrase to describe, justify and defend their conduct in Mexico. His was indeed a severe discourse against the government's international policy, which he saw much more based on improvisation than on serious strategic planning. As for their accountability,

¹⁰⁶ ASCL 1865, vol. 3, session of 11 April, p. 140.

¹⁰⁷ ASCL 1865, vol. 3, session of 11 April, p. 141.

¹⁰⁸ ASCL 1865, vol. 3, session of 11 April, p. 149.

Favre accused the government of either lying to the deputies when telling them that no 'political' intervention was planned beforehand, or acting without evaluating the consequences of their acts. Both equally negative possibilities, presented as truths, sought to leave the government in a bad position before public opinion.

To make their arguments more solid, liberals decided to base their criticism on verifiable facts from internal sources available to the deputies and, when published, also to the public. Diplomatic documents and past parliamentary debates were often recalled as a way to stress the government's inconsistency. In this sense, Favre succeeded in using this rhetorical strategy in his favour, making it seem as if the government's irresponsibility, even naïveté, had made it unable to envisage the Mexican failure. Significantly, he remembered the declaration of intent made by the Minister of State Billault in 1862, with which he gained the support and sympathy of the vast majority of the chamber. At the time, as Favre noted, Billault claimed:

Quand le drapeau français, ce qui arrivera prochainement, je l'espère, flottera sur les murs de Mexico, nous ne nous désisterons pas de cette politique généreuse et protectrice; tous, réactionnaires ou libéraux, violents ou modérés, seront également admis à cette grande expression de la volonté publique; la liberté sera pour tous à l'ombre du drapeau de la France, et ce ne sera pas la première fois qu'il aura abrité de son ombre tutélaire les justes manifestations nationales.¹⁰⁹

Liberals welcomed these moderate, inclusive words, from which one could foresee the government's aim to respect Mexico's national sovereignty and the Mexican people's will under France's protection. As already suggested, liberals did not feel uncomfortable with these paternalistic claims based on the conviction that France was a sort of superior moral unit. This was surely a field around which they could deepen their mutual understanding. Billault was indeed renowned for his oratorical skills, and Favre had on many occasions expressed his respect and consideration for him. As he noted:

¹⁰⁹ ASCL 1865, vol. 6, session of 8 June, p. 237.

CHAPTER 3
Liberals and the Role of France in the World

Je ne m'étonne pas de applaudissements avec lesquels vous accueillez ses paroles [celles de Billault], et si j'ai un regret, c'est de ne pouvoir m'y joindre. Seulement, qu'il me permette de le lui dire avec toute la déférence que j'ai pour lui : cette éloquence, je la trouve souvent dangereuse ; elle enflamme plus qu'elle n'éclaire ; elle jette sur les questions plus d'éclat que de lumière et, suivant moi, le ministre s'est trop laissé aller, sur cette question du Mexique, aux dangereux entraînements de la parole.¹¹⁰

One of Favre's greatest disappointments was finding that the government had not kept their word regarding the establishment of universal suffrage in Mexico. Liberals were very much in favour of such a project, even if it needed to be implemented by force. 'Si nos troupes sont allées au Mexique accomplir une œuvre rigoureuse, au moins, après avoir frappé par l'épée, elles consoleront par la civilisation et ses bienfaits, et le suffrage universel sera la conséquence de leur descente sur le territoire mexicain', he concluded, obtaining the support of most of the deputies.¹¹¹ According to liberals, the government had changed their promises as time went by, and asked themselves for the reason of defending something that afterwards, either deliberately or impelled by circumstances, was not going to be accomplished. Again, the use of these rhetorical questions was a powerful way to make their arguments stronger. Liberals took advantage of every opportunity to highlight the Bonapartists' weaknesses in leading, organising and managing France's foreign actions, and thus representing France's interests abroad.

To show that he was not alone in his claims, Favre recalled a speech by Thiers in which he outlined his concerns over the role of France in Mexico after Maximilian's coronation. Both deputies agreed to consider that engaging too much in Mexico's internal affairs was detrimental to the nation's interests. Would the French army abandon Mexico immediately or stay for a longer time? What would its mission be, in case it remained? How could such a decision be justified internally and, even more importantly, understood by the international community? These were certainly

¹¹⁰ ASCL 1865, vol. 6, session of 8 June, p. 237.

¹¹¹ ASCL 1865, vol. 6, session of 8 June, p. 245.

questions that concerned the liberals deeply. Thiers had insisted on the need for France to leave Mexico ‘in an honourable way’,¹¹² and Favre agreed with him:

Pour notre honneur, pour l'intérêt de nos nationaux, nous ne devons pas seulement protéger notre armée, nous devons protéger les résidants français que notre retraite peut exposer aux périls les plus horribles ; nous devons protéger les populations qui se sont compromises pour nous. Nous l'avons constamment annoncé ; vous n'avez qu'à relire nos discours des autres années, vous verrez que c'était là l'une de nos plus considérables préoccupations ; et si vous exécutez votre retraite autrement, vous manquerez au devoir qu'une grande nation civilisée a contracté vis-à-vis d'elle même.¹¹³

Despite the fact that the emperor himself had claimed several times that he would never promote a change of regime in Mexico without the Mexican people's consent, liberals always took this change for granted. As time went by, they not only criticised the project, but the way in which it was developed, without any clear strategy to follow. From the liberals' standpoint, this situation projected a very poor image of France internationally, while endangering French troops and citizens. To some extent, it can be considered that the Bonapartists were victims of their own mistakes and inconsistencies. And liberals did not hesitate to take profit from them by deploying a particular discourse whose main strength consisted in putting the Bonapartists to shame.

The official narrative claimed that Maximilian was duly received by the Mexican people upon his arrival in Veracruz, and that he was spontaneously cheered on his way to Mexico City. Jules Favre sarcastically suggested that, given that Maximilian was so appreciated in Mexico and thus in need of no specific protection, French troops should immediately come back home. By saying this, Favre aimed to pressure the government to explain the reason for which the situation in Mexico was so difficult and violent. To illustrate his reasoning, Favre mentioned the case of a small Mexican town, San Sebastián, in the state of Sinaloa, which was entirely burned down by a French general to ensure the area's pacification, and asked himself whether such disgraceful behaviour

¹¹² ASCL 1865, vol. 6, session of 8 June, p. 239.

¹¹³ ASCL 1866, vol. 7, session of 13 June, p. 46.

could be tolerated any longer. According to official accounts, these acts were justified in the name of re-establishing peace and the protection of private property. Favre wondered then whether the best way to protect private property was to burn an entire city, endangering all of its citizens' lives, including women and children. Favre considered that France should not interfere in Mexico's internal affairs, and, more importantly, that it should avoid telling the Mexicans how to properly defend their interests. In Favre's opinion, France could by no means simultaneously play the role of saviour of Mexico and spread suffering and devastation, even if it was only addressed to rebels. If the Bonapartist government was differentiating between political divides instead of seeing the Mexican people as a unity, this had to be changed, for it was an unjust, nonsensical approach: 'je vais vous demander s'il y a deux morales, l'une qui soit à l'usage de ceux qui triomphent, et l'autre qui soit défendue aux vaincus', he clearly said in the chamber.¹¹⁴

Favre's statements, especially when he compared the situation in Mexico with that of the defeat of Napoleonic troops in 1815, ended up irritating most of the Bonapartists, who accused him of defaming and despising the French army. Favre responded to these accusations with great strength and sense of duty: 'voilà ce que je dois dire et ce que je dis'. Nevertheless, the Bonapartists continued blaming him for his lack of patriotism: 'les braves de 1815 avaient versé leur sang pour la défense de son pays, et vous, vous n'avez jamais versé que des gouttes d'encre !', a deputy blurted out to him. Favre insisted on highlighting the contradiction between all that was happening in Mexico and the emperor's statement at the beginning of the expedition, when he declared—as everyone in the government also did—that the French people's will would be always be taken into account before pursuing any political action in the country, and that a monarchy would never be established there without the Mexican people's consent.¹¹⁵

Favre warned about the danger of dividing the country into good and bad citizens, depending on their positioning with regard to Maximilian's empire. Such behaviour not

¹¹⁴ ASCL 1865, vol. 6, session of 8 June, p. 241.

¹¹⁵ ASCL 1865, vol. 6, session of 8 June, p. 242.

only damaged France's prestige, but also was a direct attack on the law. As Favre significantly said:

Voilà qu'on déclare qu'il y a deux camps au Mexique ; le camp de ceux qui acceptent l'empire, et ceux-là on les protège... et le camp des Mexicains qui protestent contre l'empire, et ceux-là on les pille, on les fusille. Ces actes ont été commis contrairement au droit des gens, contrairement au droit de la guerre, qui ordonne de respecter les neutres, de ne pas détruire inutilement la propriété privée, de ne pas faire du sac des villes un moyen de coaction pour intimider les esprits et jeter une terreur salutaire pour le succès d'un prétendant. Voilà ce que disent tous les moralistes et tous ceux qui ont écrit au nom de droits des gens.¹¹⁶

After these statements were made, the president of the Corps législatif, Schneider, invited Favre to moderate his language, and to express himself in less aggressive terms in order to not offend the chamber, that is, the Bonapartist majority. As a matter of fact, Schneider seemed to be dismissing the criticism that was within his political ranks, for it was a Bonapartist deputy, Bartholoni, who also publically expressed his concerns about the image that France would project into the world with regard to Mexico, where it seemed to be fuelling 'une guerre injuste, contraire au droit des gens, comme promenant à travers le Mexique la fusillade et l'incendie'.¹¹⁷ Schneider also referred to Favre's statements, implying that he was defending 'his own cause'. Favre immediately made it clear that this was not his personal cause, but 'celle du droit des nations'.¹¹⁸ It is telling that the liberal deputy reacted so quickly by referring to the rights of nations, showing that his was an internationalist concern that expressed a specific way to understand the world. This understanding was fully shared by the rest of the liberal deputies in the chamber, namely Favre's colleagues of the Group of Five. When President Schneider continued saying that the issue they were discussing was Favre's personal cause, Ollivier reacted vigorously: 'ce n'est pas la cause de M. Jules Favre, c'est une question qui appartient à tout le monde !'¹¹⁹ According to liberals, France's role in

¹¹⁶ ASCL 1865, vol. 6, session of 8 June, p. 242.

¹¹⁷ ASCL 1865, vol. 7, session of 9 June, p. 22.

¹¹⁸ ASCL 1865, vol. 6, session of 8 June, p. 242.

¹¹⁹ ASCL 1865, vol. 6, session of 8 June, p. 245.

the world needed to be related to the idea of respect between equal political entities, however much they also believed in a hierarchy of nations depending on their moral value and historical tradition. The right of nations was a general claim that incorporated the defence of liberal values such as private property, the rule of law and the principle of proportionality.

On several occasions, liberals reminded the rest of the deputies that numerous warnings had been made to the government about the dangers of remaining in Mexico, warnings that were always ignored. Liberals wanted the troops to come back. Yet, beyond this ultimate wish, they cared about how to practically implement such a measure. They did not aim at a rapid, improvised withdrawal that could put the French soldiers in danger. Rather, they stood for an organised, safe process: 'Je consentirais très-volontiers à ce que nos troupes restassent encore non seulement quelques mois, mais même un an, pourvu que, au but de cette année, la promesse de leur retour ne fût plus un vain mot', even claimed Favre.¹²⁰

Liberals argued that the country's pacification would last much longer, and consume much more economic and human resources, than the Bonapartists had anticipated. They knew that a number of expected complications would appear while Maximilian consolidated his power. This was, liberals argued, too demanding a task, which France could not, and should not, afford. To illustrate their point of view, Favre recalled Napoleon's self-proclaimed mission during the Peninsular War to regenerate the Spanish people by imposing a new monarch on them, and, therefore, to alter the country's internal politics. History showed, Favre noted, that the Spanish people reacted vigorously to these pretensions and that the French, even if they finally managed to establish their rule, found huge difficulties to keep it. After a few years, they were forced to leave the country. Favre linked the situation in Spain at the beginning of the century to recent events in Mexico, and suggested leaving aside any project of regeneration solely promoted by a charismatic leader. As he pointed out:

¹²⁰ ASCL 1865, vol. 6, session of 8 June, p. 243.

CHAPTER 3
Liberals and the Role of France in the World

Je me défie des missions qui s'imposent elles-mêmes, et quant à moi, je crois que la providence est de faire qu'il n'y ait plus d'hommes providentiels, mais des nations qui se gouvernent elles-mêmes et qui soient maîtresses de leurs destinées.¹²¹

A powerful reason to carry on this political philosophy was mainly strategic. Once a nation claims for itself a moral superiority to intercede in another country in order to 'regenerate' or 'protect' it, chances are that this behaviour provokes hatred and mistrust towards the nation which promoted the alleged process of regeneration. Following this reasoning, liberals saw no convincing reasons to continue the Mexican affair; therefore they wanted the strategy in Mexico to be redressed. Liberals were clear that Maximilian would remain in power only as long as the French provided him with direct military support. Thus, his consolidation as Mexico's monarch always would imply the permanence of the French army in the country. In any case, this monarchy would always be based on the principle of force and not on respect for the rule of law. As long as the news coming from Mexico confirmed this vision, the government felt more pressured into giving explanations of what was actually happening on the other side of the ocean. When Maximilian seized power, it became more and more difficult for the Bonapartists to hide their—initial—plans for Mexico once they decided to participate, rather lead, the expedition. This is what explains the change in the official discourse, which can be traced through public utterances of several members of the government. The liberal opposition strategically used this change of discourse as an asset to present themselves as more transparent politicians than the Bonapartists. Jules Favre made it clear when, with his characteristically sarcastic style, he claimed that:

...ces déclarations, auxquelles tant de fois vous avez donné l'hommage des applaudissements, vous vous rappelez de quelle fierté elles étaient empreintes ; combien les paroles qui étaient prononcées dans cette enceinte étaient pleines de fastueuses promesses ; comment ceux qui osaient contester les espérances de MM. les ministres étaient les éditeurs non responsables... étaient traités de pessimistes, d'esprits chagrins, de cerveaux étroits, ne comprenant rien aux vastes desseins ni aux généreuses

¹²¹ ASCL 1865, vol. 6, session of 8 June, p. 243.

CHAPTER 3
Liberals and the Role of France in the World

conceptions. Hélas ! messieurs, la réalité que le Gouvernement nous révèle vient détruire ces tristes fictions.¹²²

Importantly, he defined the government's promises and statements as 'fictions', a term which has a strong semantic connotation and placed the Bonapartists in the realm of untruths. Immediately afterwards, Favre positioned himself, and liberals as a whole, on the side of those who anticipated the consequences of political actions and, consequently, were more prepared to lead the country. Not only did he try to discredit the government publically, but he also accused it of lying to the chamber and society as a whole:

En effet, messieurs, et vous vous le rappelez, depuis que l'expédition est commencée, on n'a cessé de vous prédire, non-seulement le succès de nos armes, mais encore la réussite complète de l'entreprise au point de vue politique. Cependant, ce que je puis affirmer, en étant sûr que ma conscience ne me trompe pas, c'est que si on a obtenu l'adhésion de la Chambre, ce que je regrette profondément, c'est en ne lui disant jamais la vérité.¹²³

Favre's criticism was not exclusively addressed to the government, but also to the whole Bonapartist majority, who always acted as a loyal supporter of the former. In their attempt to gain political reputation, liberals tried to highlight the barely critical behaviour, and lack of consistency, of a vast majority of deputies who always agreed with official decisions, although they sometimes were contradictory. Favre was pretty clear when he addressed the Bonapartists and told them:

Nous disions ces choses l'année dernière et les années précédentes, et vous les interrompiez de vos murmures. Aujourd'hui vous les écoutez, parce que c'est le ministre qui malheureusement est venu à nous.¹²⁴

By the same token, Favre summarised government action regarding the expedition in a way that delivered liberals from any responsibility in the Mexican strategic failure, since

¹²² ASCL 1866, vol. 7, session of 13 June, p. 39.

¹²³ ASCL 1866, vol. 7, session of 13 June, p. 39.

¹²⁴ ASCL 1866, vol. 7, session of 13 June, p. 43.

he pointed out how the alleged naïveté with which they dared to question the expedition soon proved to be rather a sign of clairvoyance. As in most of his speeches, a touch of irony can be noticed:

Eh bien, à cette époque, quand nous nous permettions d'exprimer notre blâme et notre défiance, on nous répondait de très-haut que la politique que nous attaquions était bien supérieure à nos visées [...], que la gloire de la France, rayonnant jusque sur l'Amérique, allait établir sur ces lointains rivages une civilisation dont nous aurions le droit d'être fiers.¹²⁵

Shortly after, the government seemed to make a step forwards in their close defence of the expedition to Mexico. Although Emperor Maximilian had been able to establish the basis and rules of the new monarchy, the political situation in the country had become much worse. He succeeded in gathering around him a loyal group of supporters, but was not able to appease the rage of those who saw in him the expression of both a conservative and a foreign power. The ideological struggle between liberals and conservatives that had been centring Mexican politics for decades saw itself aggravated by the rise of nationalistic sentiment against the French invader. As a result of this, social turmoil and violence grew considerably, to the point of becoming one of the major problems with which the Mexican government had to deal. Maximilian's closest entourage were aware that their rule could not be guaranteed much longer without the explicit support of the French army deployed in the country, and so did the Bonapartists in France. As the next chapter will point out, this situation became highly demanding in terms of economic and human resources, whose maintenance was extremely expensive. French liberals knew that France was not in a position to carry on this burden, and put pressure on the government to find a prompt solution. In this sense, the words by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in January 1866 recognising the difficult situation were generally well received by the liberals, although Jules Favre used them to attack the government, which provoked the anger of many Bonapartist deputies who defined Favre's words as intolerable, hateful and insulting. The Foreign Affairs minister Drouyn de Lhuys had said that:

¹²⁵ ASCL 1866, vol. 7, session of 13 June, p. 39.

Le Mexique ne pouvant pas payer les troupes que nous entretenons sur son territoire, il nous deviendrait impossible de les y maintenir ; quant à demander à notre pays de nouveaux crédits pour cet objet, je m'en suis déjà expliqué avec vous ; comme je vous l'ai dit, l'opinion publique a prononcé avec une irrévocable autorité que la limite des sacrifices était atteinte.¹²⁶

Favre found the minister's reference to public opinion rather insulting, since it came at a moment in which the government needed to justify their change of opinion regarding the Mexican affair. When the situation in Mexico became unsustainable for France because of economic costs and US diplomatic pressure, the government decided to alter its strategy in the country, showing that the reason to do so was its loyalty to the will of the French people. Liberals could not tolerate that, after years and years of fighting for a more transparent government, they now wanted to appear as the most sensible, prudent entity. Favre congratulated the minister for his words, but made his annoyance clear.

The United States and the 'Latin Race'

Beyond the purely dialectic battle between deputies, the government and the opposition, liberal journals discussed the Mexican affair from different perspectives, for instance by highlighting its geopolitical importance, or the consequences it could have for French domestic politics. Significantly, a columnist of the *Journal des Débats*, the literary critic, historian and conservative-liberal politician Marc Girardin, pointed out a crucial issue that lay beneath the Mexican question and, indeed, informed Napoleon III's vision of the role of France in America. This issue was that of the confrontation of the so-called 'Latin race' with the Anglo-Saxon one, represented in this case by the United States, and their consequent struggle for supremacy. Without being officially stated, this was a rather common idea at different levels of society interested in political affairs. The Bonapartists believed in the need of broadening French power before what was seen as a menacing increase of British influence in the world; so did most liberals,

¹²⁶ ASCL 1866, vol. 7, session of 13 June, p. 43.

members of influential, bourgeois families, committed defenders of the French nation and its interests. However, not everyone among these milieus shared this view, as Girardin made it very clear:

Les races latines doivent-elles surveiller avec jalousie l'expansion des races germaniques dans l'Amérique ? Doivent-elles chercher à la contra-balancer à tout prix ? Est-ce à nous, à la France, qui est d'origine moitié latine et moitié germanique de maintenir par la force ce difficile équilibre ? Si les races latines ont cette puissance d'expansion qu'ont les races germaniques, qu'elles le montrent par leurs efforts individuels ! Qu'elles émigrent ! Qu'elles colonisent !¹²⁷

These problems of 'political ethnology', using Girardin's words, were serious issues with which France had to deal:

Si les races latines, au contraire, n'ont pas le don d'expansion, si elles sont plus casanières et moins aventureuses, sont-ce leurs expéditions armées qui remplaceront leurs émigrations ? Feront-elles des conquêtes au lieu de faire des colonies ? Sont-elles appelées à soumettre les peuples parce qu'elles ne savent pas en faire de nouveaux ? Est-ce à la France d'être les instruments de cette brutale vocation ? En vérité, nous valons mieux que cela, et nous ne pouvons pas nous condamner à n'être que les janissaires du latinisme.¹²⁸

The promotion of the 'Latin race' in America was a topic that was broadly discussed at the time. It was considered indeed a plausible anthropologic, strategic reason to explain why France had insisted on prolonging a military expedition whose alleged sole aim was to recover some debts. Still by the end of the 1860s, there were different visions of the intervention's real motivation. After Maximilian's execution in 1867, Adolphe Thiers voiced the liberals' annoyance vis-à-vis the explanations the government wanted to impose as an official truth. 'On nous dit que l'expédition a eu lieu pour nos nationaux ... Ah ! Je répondrai: non ! Les nationaux en ont été l'occasion !', he vehemently pointed

¹²⁷ *Journal des Débats*, 12 January 1866.

¹²⁸ *Journal des Débats*, 12 January 1866.

out in parliament.¹²⁹ Thiers forged ahead with his criticism, and enumerated the difficulties that the French would find upon their arrival in the country, such as:

...résistances faciles à prévoir de la part des Mexicains, difficultés insurmontables pour le prince Maximilien dès son arrivée au Mexique, très-peu de résultats commerciaux et financiers, et même pour obtenir ces résultats, nécessité d'une longue persévérance et, si l'on voulait persévérer, danger de l'intervention des Américains.¹³⁰

Indeed, the whole affair could not be summarised better. Thiers blamed the government for having ignored his warnings and recommendations to not allow Prince Maximilian to travel to Mexico after the Battle of Puebla. As he already noted, in undertaking such a risky endeavour in Mexico, France could provoke a diplomatic clash with the United States, which were never going to accept the presence of an European army in America to found a new monarchy. This project directly contradicted the so-called 'Monroe Doctrine', according to which 'America was for the Americans'. In Thiers' opinion, the expedition could at the most have aimed to redress the grievances committed by the Mexican government but, since the French authorities insisted upon the pursuit of further goals, things turned complicated. In expressing himself in these terms, Thiers sought to make clear that the liberal opposition was exempt from any responsibility in the issue. Therefore, liberals were against the petition of increasing the budget to facilitate the return of French troops. And, more significantly, he lamented the loss of France's international prestige in terms that counted on the express support of Favre:

Je sais bien que la grandeur de la France pèse toujours dans le monde malgré ces récents malheurs : mais dans ces régions-là, aujourd'hui, depuis l'expédition du Mexique, la force de la France n'inspire plus la crainte qu'elle inspirait !¹³¹

¹²⁹ ASCL 1867, vol. 9, session of 9 July, p. 78.

¹³⁰ ASCL 1867, vol. 9, session of 9 July, p. 81.

¹³¹ As the parliamentary proceedings show, immediately after Thiers pronounced these words, Favre exclaimed: 'C'est malheureusement vrai !' ASCL 1867, vol. 9, session of 9 July, p. 89.

In addition to this, Thiers made an explicit reference to the project of counteracting the increasing expansion of American power on the continent. According to the government, Mexico was supposed to be an excellent opportunity for the French to gain power of influence and spread the values of the ‘race latine’.

Mais cette grande pensée qu’on admirait tant, qui faisait qu’on se récriait si fort sur la grandeur, sur la beauté de l’entreprise, cette pensée de la race latine à réorganiser, à opposer aux invasions de la race anglo-saxonne, cette grande pensée, qu’est-elle devenue? La race latine, aujourd’hui, vous voyez dans quel état elle est : excitée au plus haut point, elle se livre à des crimes odieux ; et cette race anglo-saxonne, qu’on voulait arrêter, elle est triomphante, et nous-mêmes nous sommes réduits à faire des vœux pour que cette race anglo-saxonne, qu’il fallait arrêter, déborde dans ce Mexique et aille aujourd’hui y venger ce que nous ne pouvons plus venger nous-mêmes, les malheurs de nos concitoyens.¹³²

Although the reference to the ‘Latin race’ and the need for it to regain power on the American continent after the fall of the Spanish Empire came from the Bonapartist ranks, the way in which Thiers referred to it is important. As the paragraph above shows, Thiers came to legitimise the dichotomy between the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon race as a unit of analysis to understand the distribution of power in the region. He accepted the mental scheme with which the government had wanted to justify the expedition to Mexico, which included, among other reasons, the defence of the allegedly outraged Latin race. Given that Spain was in decline as an imperial power and its image in its former colonies was rather negative after the independence processes of the beginning of the century—as Bonapartist political elites tended to think—, France assumed the role of guarantor of Latin values in the face of the rise of US power. Although criticising this Bonapartist policy, Thiers endorsed such a mental scheme and blamed the government for having allowed the ‘Anglo-Saxon race’ to ‘nous avoir fait, dans le nouveau monde, tout le mal qu’elle pouvait nous faire’.¹³³ The truth is that, once the American Civil War came to an end, rapid developments contributed to the collapse of Maximilian’s empire. Political turbulence grew considerably: the emperor

¹³² ASCL 1867, vol. 9, session of 9 July, p. 89.

¹³³ ASCL 1867, vol. 9, session of 9 July, p. 89.

was executed, his government was forced to resign and liberals returned to power before the astonished eyes of the French. Napoleon III's troops had to leave the country and head back to Europe under the pressure of the United States—something the government always denied. In any case, after just over five years of crisis and social tension, French citizens settled in Mexico were back in a delicate situation. Without the protection of their military forces, French nationals could remain in danger. Despite their harsh position against the government, when it came to defending their compatriots, liberals always saw a high sense of responsibility. This is an idea that has come up on several occasions and with regard to different contexts, and indeed marks one of main features of French liberals in the 1860s.

The defence of the nation was surely a feature of French liberals under the Second Empire. Probably to counteract the fierce Bonapartist discourse of them being the true representatives of the people's will and the only ones able to defend France's interests everywhere, liberals tried hard to present themselves as a much more moderate, rational political option before citizens. To do so, they managed to build a particular language filled with expressions that reaffirmed their commitment towards the country. By December 1867, debate on the Mexican affair was given a new impulse in parliament. The situation was not comfortable for the deputies of the dynastic majority and, most especially, for the members of the government. By then, Mexico was no longer the image of the Empire's glorious willingness to bring France further, but the evident proof of a resounding geopolitical failure. The Bonapartists were aware of that, even if they tried to dilute the consequences of such a failed enterprise behind all sorts of rhetorical justifications. Liberals took advantage of every possible opportunity to respond to these attempts, as Adolphe Thiers did when he incisively claimed:

Mais voyez quelle situation vous feriez à la France dans le monde ! Je suis, vous le savez, dans l'opposition, et ce n'est pas au secours du Gouvernement que j'entends venir, c'est au secours de mon pays, dont on détruit la politique.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ ASCL 1867, vol. 1, session of 9 December, p. 167.

The deputy of opposition artfully found a rhetoric way to draw a clear line between the government and the nation itself, a country that, according to his views, was suffering from years of harmful political practice. The Mexican affair as a whole was certainly an example of such malpractice, as it was the way in which the government aimed to withdraw the troops from Mexico. Not because Thiers thought that the troops did not have to be withdrawn but because it was not necessary to wait until the United States forced France to do so. As he clearly pointed out: ‘comment au Mexique nous sommes-nous retirés ? Nous avons bien fait, il ne fallait pas rester engagé dans une entreprise folle ; nous sommes retirés, tout le monde le sait, sur la sommation des Américains’.¹³⁵

With regard to the implementation of control measures for the government, Favre and the remaining members of the Group of Five stood for trying to pressure the government to follow the parliament’s advice. As he reminded, he himself had tried to warn the government about the dangers and disadvantages of undertaking the expedition to Mexico. Yet the Bonapartists’ tendency to present *faits accomplis* to be approved by the chamber made it difficult to engage in any fruitful debate. Control of the government became illusory. Thus, the opposition deputies could not avoid witnessing ‘l’un de ces spectacles douloureux et terribles sur lequel nous sommes forcés de jeter un regard impuissant et attristé’.¹³⁶ Favre insisted on the idea that, from the beginning, liberals agreed with the reasons employed by the government to justify the expedition, but they always distrusted its ‘parallel’ aims, such as establishing a monarchy in Mexico, and expanding France’s influence on the borders of the United States. As he recognised:

...le désir d’établir notre influence sur les limites de la république américaine, en la faisant reculer devant cette frontière qu’elle ambitionne, quant à toutes ces idées, elles sont non-seulement contraires à la raison, mais contraires au droit.¹³⁷

Once again, liberals managed to connect the notions of reasonable political behaviour and common sense, with the defence of the law. From the liberals’ standpoint,

¹³⁵ ASCL 1867, vol. 1, session of 9 December, p. 167.

¹³⁶ ASCL 1867, vol. 9, session of 9 July, p. 96.

¹³⁷ ASCL 1867, vol. 9, session of 9 July, p. 99.

[n]on, il n'est pas permis qu'une nation puissante, qui a entre ses mains des millions et des armées, et devant laquelle l'Europe tout entière s'incline, il ne lui est pas permis, parce qu'elle est forte, parce qu'elle peut disposer d'une grande influence, d'user cette influence pour aller au loin, au prix d'un torrent de larmes et de sang, faire prévaloir la politique qui lui paraît la meilleure.¹³⁸

Il faut enseigner que chaque peuple, sur chacun des points du globe où Dieu a réunie une de ces familles qu'on appelle les nations, a le droit primordial de se gouverner d'après ses propres inspirations, ses mœurs, ses habitudes et quand on vient lui en imposer d'autres par la force, eût-on les intentions les plus droites en apparence, et le flambeau du génie à la main, on viole un droit primordial, et par conséquent on entraîne son pays dans une entreprise qui doit être condamné.¹³⁹

Towards Failure

Maximilian's execution in 1867 was a tragic symbol and consequence of the failure of Napoleon III's Mexican dream. Significantly, the news of such a relevant event were barely commented on in French parliament. Only a short, concise declaration by the president of the chamber lamenting the unfortunate passing of the archduke opened a regular session in which the Bonapartists seemed in a hurry to turn the page. These were certainly bad days for the Empire. France's prestige suffered a serious setback, and Napoleon III's public image was damaged both at home and abroad. The press related the events more than the parliament. The liberal press commented extensively on the interventions of liberal leaders in the chamber, and indeed applauded their clairvoyance in describing the reasons for the failure in Mexico. As the editorialist of the *Journal* pointed out:

Le discours de Thiers ne pouvait ajouter que peu de chose à l'éloignement instinctif que l'expédition du Mexique n'a cessé d'inspirer, même à la partie le moins éclairée du public.

¹³⁸ ASCL 1867, vol. 9, session of 9 July, p. 99.

¹³⁹ ASCL 1867, vol. 9, session of 9 July, p. 99.

CHAPTER 3
Liberals and the Role of France in the World

[...] Grâce à ce lumineux résumé de toute l'affaire, il n'est pas de lecteur qui ne puisse se rendre compte de cette série d'erreurs dont nous venons de voir le triste dénouement.¹⁴⁰

The way in which he referred to Thiers' utterances is worth highlighting inasmuch as he proved the extent to which a considerable part of French public opinion began to feel the Mexican affair was something unimportant, alien to their personal interests. And also the extent to which France's strategic errors, so many times highlighted by liberals, were already *vox populi* among society: namely, the idea that any sort of resistance was going to be easily defeated, that the United States were going to remain indifferent before France's strategic movements and pretensions, and that the foundation of a monarchy in Mexico was going to be smoothly accepted by the majority of the Mexican people. These three big misconceptions of Mexico's real political and social situation, liberals argued, led the French to their greatest international breakdown. As the *Journal* remarked:

En effet, le Mexique n'était pas facile à soumettre, le parti clérical était impossible à satisfaire, et les États-Unis, ressuscités, se montraient disposés à en finir, même au prix d'une guerre, avec cet essai d'établissement monarchique dans le Nouveau-Monde. Il fallut donc se résigner à un départ pénible et, pour comble d'infortune, la maladie de l'impératrice Charlotte et la fin terrible de Maximilien ont ajouté de funèbres couleurs à ce tableau.¹⁴¹

The reasons for this 'funereal painting' were obviously varied and complex. It is undeniable that the Bonapartists, especially the emperor himself and his government, held most of the responsibility. One can argue whether the liberal opposition did their best to persuade the chamber to moderate the government's pretensions, or whether the parliament as such succeeded in accomplishing its duty to control the government. What seems proven is that the Bonapartist majority attempted to blame liberals for their lack of support for the government and their constant behaviour against the nation's general interest. The *Journal* pointed it out:

¹⁴⁰ *Journal des Débats*, 10 July 1867.

¹⁴¹ *Journal des Débats*, 11 July 1867.

D'ailleurs les journaux officieux, dans un excès de zèle maladroit, s'efforcent de rendre responsables de la mort de Maximilien non plus Lopez et Juarez mais les députés et les publicistes qui ont fait tous leurs efforts à la tribune ou dans la presse pour détourner le gouvernement français de sa tentative de restauration monarchique au Mexique.¹⁴²

From the editorialist's words, one can conclude that liberals were in fact the victims of a carefully-planned strategy seeking to highlight their lack of patriotism. This strategy made perfect sense for the Bonapartists, whose main goal after the Mexican fiasco was principally to move the spotlight to issues other than the Mexican expedition and Maximilian's execution. To do so, they strengthened their verbal attacks against the liberal opposition, accused constantly of being non-patriotic. For their part, liberals strove to present themselves as the sole political option, able both to defend France's interests abroad and to improve its international prestige. As they continuously repeated, respect for law was a fundamental way to achieve this goal. Thus, the role of France in the world had to be that of a nation respectful of other countries' sovereignty. This feature, liberals held, was essential to depict the nation's moral superiority; a value—as it has to be kept in mind—that always informed their deepest political convictions.

5. CONCLUSION

The production and circulation of liberal visions of imperialist ventures during the Second Empire emanated from diverse spheres, the most outstanding being those expressed in the parliamentary arena and the press. The distinction between these two spheres of political and intellectual action corresponds not only to two different, albeit complementary, types of sources, but also reveals some important dissimilarities as far as the very content of the messages expressed is concerned. On the one hand, it is true that parliamentary language plays according to rules and assumptions that are different from those of the language expressed in the press. Both can be political, but they are addressed to different audiences operating in different circumstances. The group of

¹⁴² *Journal des Débats*, 11 July 1867.

liberal deputies in opposition to Napoleon III's rule, either the Group of Five or other liberal voices such as Thiers, acted according to a clear political aim, which sought to undermine the political option in power. As this chapter has shown, even when they agreed on some basic postulates—like the need to undertake colonial expansion to make France's power visible in the world, the necessity of fostering industrial and commercial progress, or the importance of recovering the nation's prestige abroad especially in comparison to greater imperial powers such as Great Britain, to name but some examples—liberals and the Bonapartists needed to take a different stance in relation to each other. In rare cases, they could afford to express their agreement publically in the Corps législatif or to harmonise a text for the emperor's annual address. However, they had to take advantage of the slightest difference between them to deploy all their rhetorical artillery against the opponent. On the other hand, the range of individuals expressing their ideas in the press, a much more heterogeneous thus less clearly identifiable group, made their claims knowing that they were intended to be read by a more or less wide public, depending on the newspaper or journal. All in all, the parliamentary speeches needed to be more formally oppositional than press articles.

This chapter has shown how French liberals remained proactive in their defence of Algeria's colonisation (as they were in their criticism of the Bonapartist government for its erratic, ineffective way of managing it); ambivalent regarding Cochinchina (for they projected on this colonial venture all their economic and geostrategic dreams for France abroad); and were openly against the Mexican intervention. Thus, their approaches to French expansionism in the 1860s and their notions on the role of France in the world from a political, geostrategic point of view, varied depending on each particular venture.

In the 1860s, Algeria still remained France's greatest colonial project. The Bonapartists artfully placed it within their narrative on the Empire's greatness and tried hard to make it become the Second Empire's 'jewel in the crown' from which to expand France's influence across North Africa. Liberals agreed that Algeria was a colonial enterprise that was worth continuing, but proved to be much more ambitious with regard to its economic development. Liberals projected on the colony their visions on the French

nation as an ideal space for political and economic development, based on individual and social rights and freedoms. To liberals, Algeria was often seen as an extension of metropolitan France across the Mediterranean. Liberal voices, such as Jules Duval's, expressed on several occasions the difference between Algeria and the 'true' colonies (*les colonies proprement dites*), as the older colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Reunion were known. Thus, liberals and the Bonapartists differed in their visions on how the colony had to be ruled, and the civil rights that both settlers and local populations needed to be provided with. To most of liberals, all colonies, and especially Algeria, needed to be considered as part of the national territory, like any other province.

Liberals sought a deeper assimilation of indigenous populations into the French mores and customs. Whereas the Bonapartists defended the Bureaux Arabes as a useful institution to keep social peace in the colony, liberals blamed this institution for being the representative of military power, and, moreover, for having allowed the indigenous to develop as a separate community, when the real national aim should be their complete assimilation. They did not deny its importance as a key institution in the earlier years of colonisation, when a strong military power was needed to place the colony effectively under French control, but rejected the need to continue with such an institution three decades later, when the colony's real problems were, in liberals' eyes, the lack of economic progress and political rights. Colonisation, understood as the actual military domination of the territory, was already finished, liberals argued. The 1860s were thus a moment to worry about the role that Algeria had to be given within the French economic and political framework. The expression of 'the nation abroad' applies to this case much more than to others. The Bonapartists, conversely, always aimed at highlighting Algeria's importance as a source of the Empire's glory and prestige, but never sought to turn it into a fundamental part of France's territory or institutional scheme.

Liberals criticised the Second Empire's aim to expand over Cochinchina much less than they did with regard to Algeria and, surely, Mexico. Cochinchina entered more into their schemes of colonial expansion, seen as a place where liberals' fascination for economic and geostrategic progress found the perfect ground to develop. The French

nation, no matter how differently it could be understood by the different ideological divides at the metropole, was a powerful abstract concept which represented the fight against non-Western values. The Annamite regime was seen as very alien to these values and, moreover, its country happened to be a perfect starting point for achieving France's economic and geostrategic plans. As already suggested, France was broadly acknowledged as a superior moral entity by both liberals and the Bonapartists. Liberal thinkers such as Laboulaye and Duval expressed on several occasions their belief in this superiority and their confidence in the extent to which other peoples would benefit from their contact to France. Colonial expansion found in this standpoint a strong justification, for France's domination over foreign lands was understood as beneficial to both colonies and the metropole. In this respect, Duval was a fierce defender of the expansion of the French nation abroad, extending to the colonies—especially to Algeria—France's institutions and system of rights and duties. Consequently, he stood for projecting the French nation in the world based on its economic and civilisational power.

Having this thought in mind, liberals never saw the submission of the Annamite people as morally wrong or outrageous, unlike their attitude with regard to Mexico. Rather, liberals framed the Cochinchina venture within the context of France's civilising mission and united it to their fascination with the empire (related to trade expansion), seeing it as a natural continuation of the military campaign in China. In Mexico, however, liberals saw a futile, damaging attempt to expand France's influence in America. Based on lies and imprecisions, the Bonapartist government tried to present the Mexican expedition as a legal enterprise, respectful of the right of the Mexican people to decide upon their political future. France, the official accounts suggested, only wanted to protect its nationals and recover the money of the debt confiscated by Juárez. Later events showed that Napoleon III was from the very beginning implementing a plan to impose a monarchy in Mexico; a plan towards which liberals showed their determined disagreement because it was contrary to the right of nations and went against the necessary respect that all nations needed to profess to each other. Mexico, then, was never viewed as a territory able to be colonised, as Cochinchina or Algeria were. It was viewed as a country with a legitimate government which deserved

CHAPTER 3
Liberals and the Role of France in the World

to be considered as a political entity at the same level as other advanced, historically rooted nations. In the particular case of Mexico, this vision was surely informed by the fact that the country was led by liberal forces, which shared the same program of reforms and social progress as liberals in France.

Liberals imagined the French nation as an entity which citizens freely, actively join, contributing with their collective efforts to its greatness. Alternatively, the Bonapartists stood for a conception of the nation closely related to the Bonaparte family lineage. Whereas liberals understood that the nation was better represented through the various means of social progress that a democratic state could provide, the Bonapartists asserted that the nation could not be better promoted than through the idea of empire and the political legitimacy of the family Bonaparte. Each political faction struggled to present itself as the representative of 'good patriots'. Both seemed to be deeply worried by France's international prestige. Where the Bonapartists saw an intolerable criticism of the nation—the moments in which liberals dared to question the government's actions—, liberals claimed to be behaving as good citizens, concerned with their nation's good and best interest, making patriotism a pivotal axis of their dialectic struggle. It is in this struggle that the greatest differences between liberals and Bonapartists lay with regard to the role of France in the world during the 1860s, making a direct connection between imperialist ventures and domestic perceptions of politics and good government. Liberal attitudes to the Second Empire's colonial expansion informed and dramatically shaped the liberals' relationship to Napoleon III's regime.

Chapter 4

Liberals on Colonial Industry, Trade and Finances

*Par d'utiles travaux, la France, grande et fière,
au rang des nations deviendra la première.*

— Michel Clément, 1852¹

*Comment peut-on faire prospérer une colonie ?
En y amenant des colons et en y développant le commerce.
Mais le commerce ne vit que de liberté.*

— Ernest Picard, 1864²

1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the restoration of public order and the promotion of moral values, fostering economic development was one of the Second Empire's main aims. In France, the 1860s were years of urban development and economic prosperity, a period in which cities and villages were undergoing important changes, showcasing the country's commercial and industrial growth.³ Napoleon III was persuaded that the combination of order, morality and economy was crucial to achieve social harmony. As Roger Price has noted, the emperor was a fierce defender of France's material progress, which he saw as an indispensable step for his Empire's survival as a great global power.⁴

¹ Michel Clément, *Ave, César !* (Paris: Felix Malteste et Cie., 1852).

² CRCL 1864, vol. 1, session of 23 January, p. 970.

³ See a good synthesis of the importance that the 1860s had for France's economy in Quentin Deluermoz, *Le crépuscule des révolutions 1848-1871* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2012), pp. 139–66.

⁴ Roger Price, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 210.

Historians have recently praised the Second Empire as the first French regime that gave priority to economic growth, or at least that did so with an unprecedented intensity.⁵ In this sense, Price has pointed out that Napoleon III's regime was mainly characterised by 'the acceleration of structural changes in the economy' that led the country to undertake a truly ambitious project of modernisation of infrastructures, industry, banking system, engineering and metallurgy, in a process he has termed 'technocratic romanticism'.⁶

The ideal of material and economic growth was inherent to the Bonapartist conception of the French nation. As the regime began to adopt measures of economic and political liberalisation at the turn of the 1860s, commonalities between liberals and the Bonapartists became stronger. As the emperor told the deputies in 1861, 'c'est dans ce but [France's progress] que nous avons diminué les droits sur les matières premières, signé un Traité de commerce avec l'Angleterre, projeté de contracter d'autres avec les pays voisins, facilité partout les voies de communication et les transports'.⁷ Although the undertaking of this kind of policies was not exclusive to France, but common across Europe, the truth is that the impulse of infrastructures and economic development tells us much about a political regime that sought to present itself as the true representative of the French people's needs, as able to lead France to its highest level of progress.

The Empire's economic development not only had a domestic dimension, but was also directly connected to overseas ventures. In order to make its economy stronger, emulating what other European empires were doing at the time, the Empire's authorities believed that France needed to combine its internal development with the search for new economic opportunities abroad. Both liberals and Bonapartists expected

⁵ See among others the works by Eric Anceau, *Napoléon III: un Saint-Simon à cheval* (Paris: Talliander, 2008), *La France de 1848 à 1870: entre ordre et mouvement* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2002), *Comprendre le Second Empire* (Paris: Saint-Sulpice éditions, 1999); Alain Plessis, *La banque de France sous le Second Empire* (Genève: Droz, 1982); and Roger Price, *The French Second Empire*.

⁶ Price, *The French Second Empire*, pp. 215, 250. As for the Second Empire's politics of economic expansion and the construction of public infrastructures, see Louis Girard, *La politique des travaux publics du Second Empire* (Paris: A. Colin, 1952).

⁷ CRCL 1861, unique vol., opening legislative session on 4 February, p. 4.

overseas ventures to play an important part in the strengthening of France's economy and to bring new economic opportunities. In most cases, however, the debate on the Empire's expansionism was focused on the burden that it represented for the state's finances. The Bonapartists seemed to be unworried about the extraordinary amount of economic resources that these ventures demanded, as they linked these expansionist endeavours to the improvement of France's honour and prestige. Liberals, although they agreed to explore new and more profitable ways to expand France's economy and trade, showed deep concern about the state's budgetary balance and were reluctant to support excessive investments of public resources in military ventures. As the Group of Five declared in 1863, 'la règle que nous avons toujours suivie dans les discussions sur les finances, ç'a été de protester contre l'augmentation croissante des dépenses publiques, et de dégager la situation vraie des nuages d'optimisme dont l'enveloppent trop souvent les exposés du Conseil d'État et les rapports des commissions budgétaires'.⁸ As a matter of fact, liberals were more in favour of engaging the private sector in the funding of colonial projects. These utterances, however, did not mean that liberals were not also persuaded of the need to foster France's prestige in order to improve the nation's material growth. For them, foreign policy, diplomacy and colonial expansion were closely related to obtaining economic benefits. This is why they tried to tackle expansionist ventures and economy jointly, spreading in public opinion the idea that good government and the good management of colonial ventures had a direct impact on the people's everyday lives.

The domination of overseas places to enlarge territorial and economic power over purportedly less-cultivated, barbarian peoples was what European empires arguably had in mind when undertaking their projects of colonisation. Although not always openly stated by the official narratives, which tended to highlight the cultural and civilisational side of such enterprises, these projects had an evident economic component. As any imperialist venture was highly demanding in both human and economic terms, liberals considered it obvious to expect something tangible in exchange. Jules Duval suggested this idea in his celebrated work on France's colonisation:

⁸ *Les cinq députés de l'opposition (Alfred Darimon, Jules Favre, Émile Ollivier, Ernest Picard, Hénon) à leurs électeurs de Paris et de Lyon: compte-rendu de leurs travaux* (Paris: Dubuisson, 1863), p. 2.

CHAPTER 4
Liberals on Colonial Industry, Trade and Finances

À cette élévation morale répondent toujours des profits matériels. La fondation d'une colonie entraîne des dépenses considérables d'établissement, qui ouvrent des fructueux débouchés à la production, au commerce et à la navigation des métropoles. Les populations émigrées ont besoin de denrées, de vêtements, d'habitations, de semences, d'outils et de machines, de tous les éléments de la vie économique et sociale.⁹

Colonisation was indeed expected to provide the metropolis with material profits, directly or indirectly. In general terms, liberals were fierce defenders of colonialism insofar as it brought new opportunities for progress and development, both in Europe and abroad. However, we have to be careful about making generalisations and rather look for more contextualised statements. The aim of this chapter is to explore the way in which French liberals during the Second Empire reacted to different imperialist projects, focusing on their economic dimension. As it will be shown, economic debates on the three overseas ventures under study focused on different issues depending on each case. As suggested in previous chapters, liberals had no single response to different overseas ventures. Whereas Algeria's colonisation in the 1860s was vaunted by pro-settler propaganda as a good opportunity to foster production of cotton as a raw material given the turbulent global geopolitical context (with the American War as a key conflict), the expedition to Cochinchina opened real brand-new opportunities to create trade routes and profit from the until then not sufficiently explored Asian market.¹⁰ Liberals envisaged this 'first step' to Asia with great enthusiasm and therefore contributed to generating a narrative of fascination with the empire, as Chapter 3 has pointed out. In the case of Mexico, however, liberals' greatest concerns were related to the idea of state budgetary balance and the need to keep the nation's finances in good shape, suggesting that Mexico was seen as something completely different to the classical cases of formal imperialism such as Algeria and Cochinchina.

Whether nineteenth-century liberals were equally defenders of political and economic freedom is something that has fostered scholarly debate. From a theoretical point of

⁹ Jules Duval, *Les colonies et la politique coloniale de la France* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1864), p. 446.

¹⁰ As a matter of fact, cotton production in Algeria was never important despite heavy government subsidies, for which it needs to be rather seen as a case of colonial fantasy.

view, it could be argued that the connection between the two dimensions is obvious. However, the analysis of specific cases and contexts allows for a far different conclusion. Whereas in the British context, for instance, political and economic freedom was a claim that liberals perceived as two sides of the same coin, in France, at least from the 1840s onwards, liberals endorsed protectionism as the right way to defend the nation's interest. As a matter of fact, the defence of free trade was during the Second Empire a characteristic of a conservative minority. As David Todd has shown, free trade discourse did not succeed in being adopted by public opinion, whereas the defenders of protectionism succeeded in relating this concept to that of the nation, and the defence of the weakest against excessive competition—thus with a social, egalitarian dimension.¹¹ The Bonapartists' defence of free trade, especially after the signature of the Commercial Treaty with Great Britain, should rather be seen as an authoritarian project of economic modernisation whose main aim was to reinforce France's colonial and commercial power. However, liberals were also committed to this goal. Liberals' and Bonapartists' interests and aims were closer than expected, albeit kept alive in a dialectic struggle. Liberals sought to present the Bonapartists as unable to manage colonial ventures properly. In any case, liberals shaped their perceptions and visions of economic matters depending on each colonial venture. There were three general topics around which liberal approaches to the economy revolved in the 1860s: the urgency to foster industrial production as a sign of modernity and progress; the convenience of exploring new commercial routes and trade exchanges; and the need to maintain the balance of state finances.

The Academy of Political and Moral Sciences, which gathered a distinguished selection of academicians and intellectuals, hosted interesting debates during the 1860s on France's economic development, an issue that was very important among liberal circles. In 1858, for instance, the Academy sponsored a study on the effects on France's political and moral evolution of the commercial crisis that appeared in France, the rest of Europe and America over the course of the nineteenth century.¹² The Academy was

¹¹ David Todd, *L'identité économique de la France. Libre-échange et protectionnisme, 1814-1851* (Paris: Grasset & Frasnelle, 2008), pp. 395–6, 413–15.

¹² AASMP, Paris, 2D4.

indeed a pivotal centre for reflection on social and political events where economic matters, especially those related to colonisation, were particularly important. On May 1865, Michel Chevalier presented a report on Jules Duval's *Les colonies et la politique coloniale de la France*, which led to a discussion on the French colonies, their administration and economic value.¹³ In the early 1860s, new expansionist endeavours in Asia and America spurred the Second Empire's imperialist project. The government, in their aim to present its decisions as the result of the popular will, pushed the Bonapartist majority in parliament to vote in favour of an official statement declaring that the new expeditions in Cochinchina and Mexico were not only undertaken to defend France's international honour and prestige, but also to pursue specific economic goals:

Nous souhaitons que ces expéditions lointaines et coûteuses assurent le respect à notre pavillon et ouvrent à notre commerce des débouchés durables. L'établissement de Cochinchine, administré dans cet esprit, paraît devoir fournir une large compensation aux sacrifices dont il a été l'objet.¹⁴

Liberals supported the declaration, too, as long as it clearly expressed the principles that, according to their vision, should drive France's expansionist policies: first, to make the country prestigious and respected on the global stage and, second, to obtain economic benefits from the opening of new commercial routes and markets. The pursuit of both elements, prestige and money, was a defining feature of French liberals in the 1860s which, on many occasions, created spaces of understanding and agreement with the Bonapartists.

The Commercial Treaty

The beginning of the 1860s was characterised by the intensification of trade relations between France and Britain.¹⁵ The leaders of both empires came to understand that, beyond their legitimate differences and wishes to compete with each other, they needed

¹³ AASMP, Paris, 2D6.

¹⁴ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 168.

¹⁵ Deluermoz, *Le crépuscule des révolutions 1848-1871*, pp. 161–3.

to establish profitable relations based on mutual co-operation for the sake of their economic prosperity. 'En considérant les tendances libérales des deux gouvernements', Prévost-Paradol declared, 'les deux nations ne peuvent manquer d'apprendre avec la satisfaction la plus vive que des négociations sont en ce moment poursuivies dans le but de conclure un traité de commerce sur la large base de l'avantage mutuel des deux pays'.¹⁶ The signature of a commercial treaty with Britain was probably the most liberal decision taken by Napoleon III's government. The Treaty's prime mover and great defender, Michel Chevalier, jointly with free-trader British MP Richard Cobden, counted on the support of most of liberals on both sides of the English Channel, and his promotion of French trade was indeed very welcome among influential liberal economic milieus, including the deputies of the Group of Five:

Nous avons défendu les traités de commerce contre les attaques des protectionnistes. Sans doute, il nous paraissait humiliant que les représentants du pays n'eussent pas été appelés à en délibérer les bases ; nous avons fait à cet égard les réserves les plus formelles, mais le régime des prohibitions était à nos yeux un système suranné, aussi contraire aux intérêts du consommateur français que mortel pour le progrès de notre industrie.¹⁷

Alfred Darimon insisted on the same idea some years later:

Les traités de commerce constituent un progrès important ; c'est un acheminement vers la liberté de commerce, un moyen d'améliorer le sort des masses. À ce titre, les Cinq ne peuvent refuser leur adhésion aux réformes économiques. Mais, d'autre côté, il est un principe qu'ils ne doivent abandonner, c'est le droit pour le pays d'être consulté sur tout ce qui touche ses intérêts. Sur ce point, nous sommes avec les prohibitionnistes, qui reprochent au gouvernement d'avoir fait des traités avec l'Angleterre une sorte de coup d'État commercial.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Journal des Débats*, 14 January 1860.

¹⁷ *Les cinq députés de l'opposition à leurs électeurs de Paris et de Lyon*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁸ Alfred Darimon, *Histoire d'un parti: les Cinq sous l'Empire* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1885), p. 356.

The Treaty meant the abolition of prohibitions on manufactured goods and the removal of the sliding scale on cereal imports. The liberal press soon praised the signature of the Treaty, which was seen as an indispensable step towards economic progress. Columnist Louis Alloury wrote at the *Journal des Débats*:

Les nations se rapprochent pour leur bien mutuel ; elles secouent peu à peu les idées étroites, les préjugés et les haines qui les divisaient, non pour s'absorber les unes dans les autres, de manière à ne plus offrir qu'une uniformité monotone et stérile, mais afin d'échanger, pour l'avantage général, leurs sentiments et leurs idées, et les productions de leur labeur industriel, qui, après tout, elles aussi, sont beaucoup plus qu'on n'affecte de le dire les manifestations de l'esprit humain.¹⁹

There was a tension between those who sought to keep France's economy under self-governed rules and those who aimed to open it to global markets and free competition. Broadly speaking, liberals disliked the government's economic policy and the way in which it dealt with economic issues, for instance, by not discussing the content of the treaties signed with the people's representatives. Yet liberals feared much more the application of a 'regime of restrictions', which they considered totally out-dated, contrary to the interests of consumers and disadvantageous for French industry. Liberals supported the passing of laws that they considered beneficial for the reform of the customs and tax system, and indeed fostered the improvement of the Commercial Treaty.

Public Finances

The Second Empire engaged in a number of ambitious projects seeking to bring progress and wealth. The construction of an extensive network of railways across the country; the Suez Canal; important investments in mines and the metalworking industry; Haussmann's new urban planning in Paris; and the opening of several iconic department stores, as Émile Zola has immortalised in *Le Bonheur des Dames*, are but a

¹⁹ *Journal des Débats*, 12 February 1860.

few examples of the economic effervescence of the epoch.²⁰ These projects were also the result of a flourishing banking sphere, formed by wealthy, influential banking families. Most of them were related to great liberal names, such as Rothschild or Pinard.²¹ Paris shone as France's greatest economic city in the 1860s, as the main financial centre of continental Europe and France's biggest industrial metropolis.²²

On March 1862, the liberal opposition group presented a battery of amendments to warn the government about the dangers of increasing the state's public debt. The origin of their concern must be found in 1852, when the Bonapartists began to deploy an ambitious modernisation plan at all levels. This plan sought to improve all sorts of public infrastructures across the country, as well as to increase the intensity of France's colonial expansion. Liberals saw with mistrust the plan's consequent impact on public finances and the thoughtlessness with which the government increased taxes to fund their bombastic pretensions. In view of this dangerous tendency, liberals urged the government to enter 'dans la voie de la réduction progressive et permanente des dépenses publiques', and therefore to reduce the tax burden which was particularly damaging for the working class.²³ The deputy in charge of defending this claim before the Corps législatif was Alfred Darimon, who significantly connected the discussion on financial issues to the issue of press censorship. As he vehemently told the deputies, the fact that the press neither informed nor commented on the nation's finances was an intolerable interference of the government in a central, important matter for society. The reason for that, the liberal deputy argued, lay in the dangerous tendency of the government to see the mere criticism of a specific financial measure as an attack.²⁴

²⁰ Émile Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart. Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*, a series of twenty novels published between 1871 and 1893, remains a fundamental portrait of the Parisian everyday life during the 1860s. As for the economic, commercial blossom of France at the time, see Roger Price, *The Economic Modernisation of France* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1975), especially p. 36; and James McMillan, *Napoleon III* (London: Longman, 1991), pp. 137–8.

²¹ Nicolas Stoskopf, *Banquiers et financiers parisiens*, vol. 7, in Dominique Barjot (ed.), *Les patrons du Second Empire* (Paris: Picard, 2002). See also Alain Plessis, *Régents et gouverneurs de la Banque de France sous le Second Empire* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1985).

²² Stoskopf, *Banquiers et financiers parisiens*, p. 9.

²³ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 14 March, p. 168.

²⁴ As Darimon said: 'La presse n'a pas toujours joui de la latitude désirable pour exposer fidèlement la vérité sur la situation financière. C'est surtout dans ces matières, où sont pourtant engagés les

Darimon asked, too, to allow the press to discuss the budget in order to increase the interest of public opinion in economic matters. Liberals were deeply concerned with the correct functioning of public finances, and advocated introducing more and more efficient measures of accountability and social control over the government's economic decisions. Darimon praised the signature of the Commercial Treaty as a positive, necessary step to achieve full freedom of trade. However, he warned about the risks of not reducing taxes for entrepreneurs and producers, which indeed should be an urgent measure to make French industry more competitive both at home and abroad.²⁵

The Bonapartists, at least officially, considered the Empire's strong finances as one of the greatest assets of its power and influence in the world. 'Ce que le monde a le plus admiré après la valeur, l'intrépidité irrésistible de nos soldats', a minister declared, 'c'est incontestablement l'abondance de nos ressources sans cesse renaissantes'. The minister praised France's ability to save money and to undertake efficient, realistic investments. Seen from abroad, he said, the Second Empire's finances were a real proof of its prosperity and strength, which provoked astonishment in all its neighbours. Astonishment that, as he proudly declared, turned into respect and esteem towards France.²⁶ The minister's utterances thus entered into clear contradiction with liberals' visions on the same issue. Moreover, both tended to relate the concept of patriotism to their own perceptions of state public spending. Whereas liberals argued that controlling the nation's finances by reducing public spending and opening the floor to more private investment meant having the nation in high consideration, the Bonapartist believed instead that some of their initiatives, as expensive as they could be, were unavoidable to pursue the glory of the nation. An example of this were the military campaigns in China and Cochinchina, for which the government felt obliged to ask the parliament for a budget increase. The Corps législatif voted in favour, and the government praised it as a truly patriotic action. As suggested in earlier chapters, the

intérêts de tous, que l'administration s'est montrée chatouilleuse'. ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 14 March, p. 169.

²⁵ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 14 March, p. 172.

²⁶ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 14 March, p. 174.

Bonapartists considered that there were no economic limits when it came to defending the Empire's glory:

Le pays a voulu que la France fût grande, influente, glorieuse ; qu'elle reprît le rang que lui appartient. Pour cela, il ne faut pas qu'elle laisse faire sans elle les grands affaires qui peuvent l'intéresser dans le monde.²⁷

Bonapartist deputy Raymond Laraburre confessed to having voted in favour of that new budget with 'extrême répugnance' since, as he pointed out, the waste of economic and human resources could have been easily solved through 'l'appréciation mieux étudiée des besoins'. He defended the idea, widely shared among liberal deputies, that the excess in military expenses was very damaging for the country's development. Most of the almost 100,000 soldiers used in the military campaigns could have served, for example, as 'des bras précieux' for agriculture or industry.²⁸ For their part, liberals insisted on stressing that the nation's finances were seriously damaged by the increasing public debt. As Ernest Picard explained in the chamber, the government was damaging the private economy due to the high tax burden that penalised the consumption of middle-class families and created the highest population decline in decades.²⁹ He demonstrated his liberal values by warning the government that

...[v]otre budget, tel qu'il est établi, ne peut pas être surchargé, ses assises ne sont pas assez solides ; vous n'y pouvez rien. Vous êtes condamnés à obéir à l'esprit de ce siècle qui sera un jour, à un jour prochain, la liberté, la décentralisation, les petits budgets et le gouvernement à bon marché.³⁰

Liberals supported the idea of reducing public spending and the national debt, and fostering growth through an economic policy based on tax reduction. The Group of Five presented to parliament several proposals in order to achieve these goals, and were

²⁷ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 14 March, p. 176.

²⁸ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 11 June, p. 703.

²⁹ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 14 March, p. 104.

³⁰ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 14 March, p. 107.

very critical of the Bonapartist government's tendency to increase taxes to fund their projects, which liberals defined as pretentious and unproductive.

2. ALGERIA, INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION AND ECONOMIC STRENGTH

The liberals' inclination for improving France's economy through the proper exploitation of colonial resources found in Algeria an illustrating example. Political instability had a great impact on France's economic development over the course of France's troubled nineteenth century. A succession of revolutions, changes of government and forms of state, together with great difficulties in consolidating an expanding imperialist dominion, made it difficult for all governments to chart a clear path towards economic progress. Under the Second Empire, Algeria came intensively into the spotlight as a needed solution for the country's economic stagnation and, at the same time, as an essential tool to reinvigorate France's power in the world.³¹ It is not surprising that Édouard Laboulaye referred to the cause of Algeria as being 'celle même de la grandeur française', praising the courage and determination demonstrated by his friend Jules Duval in defining Algeria as the driving force of France's economic splendour.³² Liberal intellectual and political elites were therefore fully committed to the promotion of Algeria's economic role.

Both the Bonapartists and liberals believed in the value that Algeria had for France's economy, although some among the latter expressed serious doubts about the way in which this value needed to be exploited. This was an important theme of contemporary settler propaganda which somewhat contradicted the real situation. Algeria cost France's budget circa 50 million francs per year in the 1860s, and represented only between 2 and 3 per cent of its imports, making a negligible contribution to French economic development. However, all French regimes and governments incorporated

³¹ Kay Adamson, *Political and Economic Thought and Practice in Nineteenth-Century France and the Colonization of Algeria* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. 155.

³² Laboulaye's preface to Duval, *L'Algérie et les colonies françaises* (Paris: Guillaumin et Cie., 1877), p. xxiv.

Algeria into their set of priorities from the beginning, for all considered it a key piece within their plans of obtaining for France a decisive strategic role in the Mediterranean.³³ As already suggested, the colonisation never represented an ethical or moral problem to liberals, who normally saw expansionist ventures as an opportunity to broaden France's economic power and give a boost to their own particular businesses. Intellectual liberals were indeed well connected to the French business world in the 1860s. A powerful, influential group of traders, bankers and businessmen in general came to be deeply influenced by the opinions defended by liberal thinkers. This was precisely the case of two important figures for the transformation of the French economy, Paulin Talabot and James de Rothschild, who shortly before the advent of the Second Republic began to be especially interested in expanding their businesses to the colony.³⁴

Algeria's key economic role was also acknowledged by foreigners settled in the colony. British historian George W. Cooke, well connected to British liberal milieus, confessed to being fairly surprised by the colony's economic dynamism and the way in which business was transacted there. His visions somewhat contrast to those of French liberals, who repeatedly complained about the poor liberal environment of the colony, which was, according to their point of view, very damaging for its prosperity. However, the British writer emphasised how 'liberally everything [was] done' in Algeria, especially when it came to evaluating economic affairs.³⁵ Without giving to his words more importance than they probably deserve, it is worth noting that Cooke presented Algeria's economic situation as being rather 'free', creating an interesting contrast to the official liberal perception coming from France. Cooke's vision is important insofar as it demonstrates the complexity of the situation in the colony and the way in which liberals in France used their complaints about the government's managerial capacities to their own political benefit.

³³ Adamson, *Political and Economic Thought*, pp. 3-5.

³⁴ Adamson, *Political and Economic Thought*, p. 156.

³⁵ George W. Cooke, *Conquest and Colonisation in North Africa* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1860), p. 47.

Liberals' complaints about the poor economic development of the colony were also shared by some renowned Bonapartists. This was the case of senator general Daumas, who on 30 January 1863 assertively declared:

Aujourd'hui l'Algérie est en souffrance ; si cette expression vous choque, je vous dirai que l'Algérie est stationnaire. Tout le monde le reconnaît. Et comment voudriez-vous qu'il en fût autrement, quand depuis trente deux ans l'on n'est pas encore d'accord sur les bases qui doivent servir de fondement de l'édifice !³⁶

Certainly, his words were not exactly encouraging and indeed reflected the widely spread perception that Algeria, at least regarding its economic development, was not progressing adequately. The reason seemed relatively straightforward: after several decades of colonisation, French political elites had proved unable to agree on the way to exploit the colony from an economic point of view. As showed in earlier chapters, the lack of agreement in economic matters went hand in hand with difficulties in establishing an univocal strategy to deal with other issues such as the type of colonisation to implement (civil or military), political administration, property, security and public health, to name but the most important. All these topics were indeed suggested by the Bonapartist senator, who at the end of his speech, in an almost desperate attempt to stir his colleagues' conscience, remarked:

Il faut absolument que le plus grand jour se fasse sur toutes ces questions, si l'on veut rassurer l'opinion, dissiper les préjugés, si l'on tient à marcher, à progresser, à fonder quelque chose !³⁷

General Daumas also referred to the type of commercial relationship that France and Algeria should establish between them. He openly suggested that free trade could be a plausible and desirable possibility, once France had signed the Treaty of Commerce with Britain.

³⁶ General Daumas at the Senate on 30 January 1863. *Journal des Débats*, 31 January 1863.

³⁷ Daumas, *Journal des Débats*, 31 January 1863.

Algeria's Economic Appeal

Since the early years of its colonisation, Algeria took a prominent position within the French imperial imaginary. The economic advantages that France could get from it were doubtless. Military domination was harder than the French authorities presumably expected, and local Muslim populations reacted to French power more violently than envisaged. All this, together with problems in managing the transfer of settlers, made it difficult to efficiently exploit the new colony in economic terms. Initially, Algeria had a local economy mainly based on the exploitation of agricultural and livestock resources, although its wealth of raw materials made it an ideal place for industrial production. Thus, different visions on how to develop the colony economically coexisted among metropolitan intellectual and political elites. Whereas some saw in Algeria the perfect field for agricultural development, others considered that the colony was called to be a grand centre for industrial production. Liberals argued that Algeria's economic value needed to be closely linked to the promotion of commercial exchange with the metropole. In his several speeches in parliament, Jules Favre voiced the thoughts of a number of French businessmen, traders and industrials, who were deeply concerned by the amount of business opportunities which were languishing because of the government's incompetence in managing the colony. The business world asked for the implementation of radical reforms to enhance commercial exchange between the metropole and the colony, minimising customs taxes and administrative barriers, especially for agricultural products. Their claims were partly addressed with the promulgation of a 1867 law, which treated both territories as an integral entity and improved their commercial relations.³⁸

The Bonapartists always acknowledged the need to treat Algeria as the most important colony of the French empire. Apart from the strategic place it occupied within Napoleon III's project to control and/or influence the Arab world, making of the Mediterranean a sort of 'French lake', Algeria was seen as a place worth developing and exploiting for the sake of France's economic prosperity. As suggested in Chapter 2, liberals and the Bonapartists differed in their ways of conceiving how this prosperity

³⁸ Adamson, *Political and Economic Thought*, p. 187; Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Histoire de la France Coloniale. Des origines à 1914* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991), p. 457.

had to be pursued and what measures needed to be implemented to achieve it, especially in the domain of political and administrative reforms. In economic terms, they showed differences, too, although both of them shared the same aim: to bring the colony to its economic splendour. Liberals showed their theoretical and political engagement with the Algerian cause by defending an ambitious project to develop the colony, which included the construction of new maritime and land infrastructures (ports, railways, lighthouses), as well as the reorganisation of land ownership.

From the very first days of the conquest, Algeria's indigenous population was prevented from accessing land ownership. Muslims were only allowed to be beneficial owners of the land they had inhabited for centuries, until Napoleon III's government decided to implement radical changes in their strategy regarding this issue. Since the 1840s, Muslim Algerians were allowed to own a certain, delimited amount of land, according to the system of 'cantonement' (confinement) which physically separated them from the European settlers. Viewed as beneficial to the state treasury, this system kept being applied under the Second Empire, for it allowed the government to collect more taxes. The *Senatus Consulte* of 1863 aimed at protecting indigenous collective property rights and preparing the transition towards individual private property. Nonetheless, the emperor still bestowed upon himself the right of arbitrarily conceding extensive portions of land.³⁹

Industrial Production

In the early years of the Empire, the government's priority was to exploit Algeria as a centre of agricultural production. Industry in the colony was thus almost non-existent at the beginning of the 1850s. As time went by, however, and probably thanks to the pressure exerted by liberal industrialist lobbies, the economic imperial policy towards the colony underwent a substantial change. By the 1860s, industrial production had become a new priority for the metropole, though it still suffered from several legal and administrative shortcomings. The French customs code existing at the time established

³⁹ General Allard, CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 20 March, pp. 306–7. Regarding land property, see John Ruedy, *Land Policy in Colonial Algeria: the Origins of the Rural Public Domain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967).

that all products coming from outside the borders of metropolitan France had to be charged extra taxes. Such a policy weighed heavily on Algerian products, which became much less competitive than the metropolitan ones immediately after crossing the border.

Jules Duval advocated a revision of this law in order to encourage Algeria's industry, arguing that the colony—as a *de facto* part of the French territory—did not deserve to be treated unequally. The liberal thinker seriously endeavoured to put this issue on the public agenda and wrote several articles through which one can decode his (and his liberal counterparts') standpoint on the role that the state should play in the promotion of industry in Algeria. As he argued, the prosperity of every nation...

...comme la santé du corps humain, repose sur l'harmonie et l'équilibre de ses diverses fonctions, au nombre desquelles l'industrie doit compter, parmi les plus essentielles, même dans une colonie naissante et surtout une colonie qui est en pleine voie de développement.⁴⁰

Duval was clearly referring to Algeria. Significantly, Duval voiced the liberal predilection for developing an economic system based on industrial production, which they considered much closer to their ideal of progress than the agricultural business indeed was. Algeria required not only the development of its rich manufacturing industry, but also the exploitation of its abundant raw materials, such as wool, grain, iron, zinc, copper, lead, mercury and clay. Leather, wood, marble, salt and textiles were other products in which the colony was abundant. This extremely rich range of products was a source of opportunity to develop an ambitious plan of industrial production. However, as Duval complained, 'l'administration française n'a pas de parti pris contre l'industrie algérienne ; seulement dans l'examen de ses demandes elle introduit la désespérante lenteur de ses enquêtes et ses hésitations'. Slowness and doubts, two of the major ills of the French colonial administration in Algeria, were problems against which liberals strove energetically. A way to implicitly foster Algeria's

⁴⁰ *Journal des Débats*, 25 September 1858.

industry was to facilitate the selling of its products on the metropolitan market. The reasons to do so, Duval claimed, were pretty straightforward:

L'Algérie, à titre de colonie, ou, si l'on aime mieux, de possession et d'annexe de la France, vit de la France et par la France. De la France lui vient l'armée qui tient en respect les indigènes dix fois plus nombreux que les colons. De la France dépendent les libertés civiles, administratives et politiques nécessaires au plein essor de sa puissance productive, et presque au même degré son crédit. Terre française sous tous les rapports, l'Algérie inspirera confiance à l'émigration européenne ; terre flottante entre la France et l'étranger [...] elle suscite la défiance universelle.⁴¹

Poetically, he also noted that

...elle est le rameau greffé sur un arbre vigoureux qui prospère parce qu'il vit de la même sève : ne le souder qu'à demi au tronc qui le soutient et le nourrit, c'est le livrer aux secousses de tous les vents contraires.⁴²

The connection between France and Algeria was far deeper than this, according to Duval. At least half of Algeria's investments were of French origins. Neighbourhood, family ties, French language, habits and institutions, among others, were aspects that united both sides of the Mediterranean. This way,

...[e]n une pareille condition, tout rapproche les deux pays, l'intérêt aussi bien que le patriotisme, et la véritable loi de leur commune prospérité se doit chercher dans une fusion aussi intime que le permettent la distance géographique, la différence des climats et les égards dus aux populations indigènes. La liberté commerciale entre l'un et l'autre a le bonheur d'appartenir à cet ordre de progrès qui satisfont tout le monde. Elle découle des principes les plus certains de la science.⁴³

Commercial freedom and industrial production were thus to become fundamental axes of France's policy in relation to Algeria. Colonisation, Duval declared, essentially meant

⁴¹ *Journal des Débats*, 25 September 1858.

⁴² *Journal des Débats*, 25 September 1858.

⁴³ *Journal des Débats*, 25 September 1858.

more capacity for production, and capacity for exchanging products for the common good.

Dans cette voie d'une union commerciale plus intime avec la France se trouve, croyons-nous, l'intérêt supérieur de l'Algérie. Depuis la conquête tout y aspire et y tend : les colons, la presse, les corps législatifs, l'administration, le gouvernement. [...] À écarter un tel programme, on risquerait de s'isoler et de s'affaiblir, à le réaliser on peut recueillir une vraie gloire, car il implique la plénitude de liberté commerciale entre l'Algérie et la France, prélude d'une pareille liberté entre la France et ses colonies plus lointaines. Dans cette mesure le libre échange n'a plus le tort d'être une témérité et une aventure, c'est une expérience faite, un succès fort avancé depuis huit années et vraiment populaire des deux côtés de la Méditerranée.⁴⁴

Apart from the promotion of free trade and industrial production, Algeria's economy benefited from external factors that enhanced the colony's economic strength. From 1861 to 1865, the United States was at war, which produced in France a general concern about the economic implications that this war could have for France's industry and economy. The American Civil War created confusion and concern among French liberals, who expressed their astonishment for the fact that the New World's greatest liberal country was so harshly plunging into chaos and instability. The ensemble of deputies expressed, too, their concerns in the address to the throne:

Nous ne saurions désirer l'épuisement d'un pays qui avait su jusqu'ici user de la liberté au profit du travail et de la civilisation. Nos sentiments d'humanité en sont plus affectés que ceux de nos intérêts [...] et nous faisons des vœux pour que les Américains reculent bientôt d'eux-mêmes devant les maux qu'ils causent.⁴⁵

The American Civil War was widely seen in France with great concern due to the implications that this conflict could have for the country's industrial development. It was a Bonapartist deputy who openly recognised that 'la guerre civile qui désole

⁴⁴ *Journal des Débats*, 25 September 1858.

⁴⁵ CRCL 1863, unique vol., session of 9 February, p. 161.

l'Amérique porte une atteinte grave à notre industrie'.⁴⁶ As Ravinel pointed out, in a way which was shared by most of the deputies, including the liberals, the American Civil War was damaging the French cotton industry, whose main centre of production was based in Algeria. In spite of having a potentially powerful, self-sustaining industry in Algeria, France was quite dependent on American cotton production, for it was its main supplier of raw material. The war implied a drastic reduction of American exports, which in fact led to a price increase. Ravinel voiced the need of giving a boost to Algeria's ailing cotton industry, whose potential was expected to be exploited much more efficiently. The Bonapartist deputy did not hesitate to ask the government to take all necessary measures to improve the situation in the colony and to give new impetus to its industrial production. These demands counted on the veiled support of liberals, who also asked for Algeria's economic potential not to be ruined.

Beyond the Corps législatif, the conflict in America worried the economic world. Several chambers of commerce asked for a stronger reaction to the event in order to avoid more economic losses. They defended the idea of implementing more effective laws on international trade, especially concerning some measures of the maritime code, such as the capture and confiscation of commercial ships in wartime. This proposal was seen as an example of the ideals of progress and civilisation, an idea born in France that could easily and promptly be developed as part of the law of nations. Other voices, however, claimed that war in America should rather be seen as a business opportunity for France. Algeria's cotton industry, they argued, would greatly benefit from the lack of direct competition by American cotton in Europe, since war would not only reduce its production, but also America's capacity to deal with the product. Four out of five million bales of cotton that Europe needed for its own consumption came directly from the United States. Even if the conflict would cease quickly, the defenders of this argument pointed out, America would not be able to come back to its previous levels of production. Consequently, Algeria's industry had a new, interesting market niche to fill.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Baron de Ravinel, CRCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 151.

⁴⁷ *Journal des Débats*, 15 August 1862. The editorialist also reminds readers of the creation of the Compagnie anglaise des cotons algériens, which was founded with the aim of 'donner plus

Investments and Labour

To make the Algerian economic dream possible, liberals argued, an ambitious improvement plan needed to be implemented in the colony. Algeria's complex, rugged terrain made it difficult to take full advantage of the colony's industrial and commercial potential. Duval was also a strong supporter of building up infrastructures in the colony as a sign of progress. He advocated undertaking a new program of colonisation, which necessarily had to include the construction of railways, roads, canals and harbours. A good irrigation system seemed to be a priority in such an arid land. Algeria's agriculture would benefit enormously from this measure, and therefore would contribute to increasing its primary sector's production. This way, 'l'Algérie cesser[ait] de mériter le reproche de coûter à la France, depuis trente ans, le plus pur de son sang et de son or'.⁴⁸ However, he still depicted Algeria's situation as frustrating, since the colony was not improving as quickly as expected. Both Algeria's population and richness were rather stagnant, and its economic production, 'bien inférieure aux espérances', was mediocre. Furthermore, the lack of important infrastructures created much trouble, as it was the case in 1861, when a severe drought provoked the destruction of a great number of harvests whilst lost water went directly to the sea due to the lack of flood control dams and reservoirs. To Duval's eyes, such a situation had a clear political responsibility because the Bonapartists, as liberals repeated once and again in parliament, did not prioritise productive investments.⁴⁹ New complaints were expressed in the coming years, as is the case of an editorialist of the *Journal*, who in 1862 informed his readers about the desperate situation of the Algerian fields due to severe drought. Human beings, he explained, can change neither the weather nor the designs of nature, but they can work to mitigate their effects—precisely what the Bonapartist government was not doing.

d'extension à la culture du coton en Algérie et d'aider ainsi l'Europe s'affranchir de la dangereuse dépendance de l'Amérique du Nord'.

⁴⁸ *Journal des Débats*, 23 August 1860.

⁴⁹ *Journal des Débats*, 1 November 1861.

Liberals fully supported the idea of exploiting Algeria's resources as much as possible, enhancing its industrial and agricultural production; improving, ultimately, its economy for the benefit of France's progress. Albert Petit, columnist of the *Journal*, summarised liberals' demands regarding the colony. As he pointed out, Algeria needed to reorganise its political structure, namely the issue of cohabitation of European and indigenous populations either in separate or the same villages. Arab property had to be defined, new urgent infrastructures—including water canals, railways and other means of transport—had to be built and relations with inland tribes had to be improved. The reorganisation of customs, taxes and trade policy was also among liberals' priorities for the colony. In the end, as Petit made clear, it was all about creating a favourable, conducive environment to the development of individual freedom under the protection of a strong authority. Many changes therefore had to be made in the colony, liberals argued, but this did not mean that Algeria's colonisation was unworthy or a failure. On the contrary, they expressed themselves as fierce promoters of this colonial endeavour, and were indeed critical of those who doubted that the project would be carried out and succeed:

La colonisation de l'Algérie a été attaquée par beaucoup de gens qui, souvent de bonne foi croyaient cette œuvre impossible à réaliser dans les circonstances où la colonisation se trouvait placée. Ces attaques inconsidérées ont eu un regrettable résultat: elles ont discrédité l'Algérie, elles en ont écarté les colons, elles ont jeté la défiance dans l'esprit de ceux qui auraient été disposés à y émigrer, à y porter leur industrie, leur intelligence, leurs capitaux. En un mot, elles ont contribué à imprimer un temps d'arrêt à la colonisation.⁵⁰

From Petit's words, it is possible to conclude that the lack of French citizens wishing to migrate to the colony was one of Algeria's colonisation's major problems. The reasons for that can be found not only in the fact that suspicion or mistrust regarding the colony were spreading across society, but also that French and European settlers had no political rights in the colony. As suggested in the previous chapter, this was also a major claim of liberals. Putting all French citizens on both sides of the Mediterranean at

⁵⁰ *Journal des Débats*, 25 October 1862.

the same level in terms of political rights was an essential step to normalise the situation and enhance colonisation. All the more so because:

Quoi qu'en disent les pessimistes et les impatientes, cette terre si admirablement dotée par la nature ne peut rester encore longtemps improductive et stérile entre les mains des Français. La voie libérale dans laquelle nous espérons que l'administration veut franchement entrer, les efforts du gouvernement pour ramener l'Algérie au droit commun, pour l'assimiler avec une juste mesure à la France, l'attention de capitalistes sérieux attirés et fixés sur l'Algérie, la formation de puissantes compagnies industrielles, l'exécution de grands travaux d'utilité publique, sont des signes annonçant qu'une ère nouvelle va bientôt s'ouvrir pour l'Afrique française.⁵¹

A new era in the history of France's expansion in Algeria was therefore closely linked to the development of liberal policies. Statements like the one above show the way in which liberals tried hard to influence politics by deploying all their distinctive discursive rhetoric. To carry out the great works that the colony needed, the government requested the assistance of both the private sector and the army, which according to Duval was an 'alliance digne de la civilisation moderne'.⁵² This particular petition led several foreign, namely British, companies to invest in Algeria. Most of these companies saw in the French colony an outstanding opportunity to expand their businesses by also taking advantage of the encouraging cooperative atmosphere created between the two empires since the signature of the Commercial Treaty. The arrival of British capital into Algeria, however, was viewed with suspicion by many French companies, which considered the colony as their own impregnable domain. In general terms, liberals did not share this rather chauvinistic approach, and instead encouraged the welcoming of foreign capital, provided that it would help improve the colony's economic development. As for the alleged 'patriotic' reaction of some of his fellow countrymen, Duval noted:

Que leur patriotisme se ranime et éclate en un noble émulation, rien de mieux ; mais gardons-nous d'éconduire les capitaux étrangers ! Réjouissons-nous au contraire de voir

⁵¹ *Journal des Débats*, 25 October 1862.

⁵² Duval, *L'Algérie et les colonies françaises*, p. 30.

l'industrie britannique mettre au service de l'Algérie son expérience, sa richesse, sa hardiesse, la modération de ses prétentions, puisque l'industrie française a eu besoin de cet aiguillon !⁵³

One of the major obstacles for Algeria's economic production was the lack of labour for both agriculture and industry. To solve it, a project of bringing workers from China and Cochinchina to the colony was implemented, which clearly shows the extent to which different imperialist projects were inter-related. Faraway expeditions were meant to play a prominent role in the development of France's economy and commerce, given that its industrial products had in the 1860s a difficult access to the American market. The colony was not highly populated, the territory was divided into different military and civil areas and persisting conflicts between European settlers and indigenous populations made it difficult to efficiently exploit all resources from the colony. Since French rulers viewed the so-called 'Arab element' (Muslim indigenous population) as being inefficient and useless to encourage industrial production, the government considered the possibility of allocating Asian workers to Algeria, which, by the way, would represent a new appealing business opportunity to many ship-owners in the metropole. One of them, also a Bonapartist deputy in the Corps législatif, Lucien Arman, encouraged the government to profit from Chinese labour given that 'c'est à l'immigration chinoise qu'il est aujourd'hui possible d'aller demander une population intelligente, patiente, sobre et travailleuse' able to bring to Algeria higher levels of production and efficiency.⁵⁴ As a matter of fact, he took advantage of the situation to ask the government for a special credit to fund the operation. Liberals showed no opposition to this project, persuaded as they were of the need to encourage the colony's economic development as fast as possible.⁵⁵

From a more theoretical perspective, this project is interesting because it shows the way in which colonial affairs influenced domestic decision-making. The proposal of bringing Asian workers to Algeria tells us much about a truly imperial mindset, in which political, economic and geostrategic interests were seen as connected pieces of the same

⁵³ Duval, *L'Algérie et les colonies françaises*, pp. 28–9.

⁵⁴ Lucien Arman, ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, pp. 152–3.

⁵⁵ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 153.

puzzle. Faraway expeditions and interventions were normally justified in political and religious terms. Economic issues, while definitely being taken into account by the government when explaining the reasons to undertake one or another expansionist project, rarely appeared as the principal motivation. Referring to Algeria in the 1860s, however, these issues significantly came to the fore given the state's pressing need to improve its income. To do so, both the government and the liberal opposition knew that the most efficient, rapid solution was in exploiting the potential of France's greatest and most ambitious colonial project in the nineteenth century.

3. COCHINCHINA: A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY FOR TRADE

The expedition to Cochinchina was an important economic endeavour. Cochinchina was commonly presented as the richest and most fertile of all the provinces of the Kingdom of Annam, a colony 'admirablement située pour la navigation et le commerce avec les Indes, [qui] procurera un jour à la France des avantages inappréciables'.⁵⁶ According to official explanations, the government decided to send troops to the Kingdom of Annam in order to defend the Catholic missionaries' dignity, but other reasons for undertaking such an expedition, linked to political geostrategy and the economy, rapidly arose.⁵⁷ As ship-owner Lucien Arman recognised,

[l]es expéditions de Chine et de Cochinchine, destinées à venger les martyres de nos nationaux, étaient à leur début plus politiques que commerciales ; mais la trace de pas de nos soldats y a créé des intérêts plus immédiats qui doivent appeler promptement dans ces contrées la spéculation et le commerce.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Michel Du'c Chaigneau, ancien officier de marine, consul de France à Hué et Grand Mandarin, *Souvenirs de Hué* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1867), p. 271.

⁵⁷ A contemporary pamphlet pointed out that the aim of the expedition was to make as much profit as possible from a territory so strategically situated and to create a prosperous colony that would provide France with a 'juste influence'. M. H. Abel, *La question de Cochinchine au point de vue des intérêts français* (Paris: Challamel Aîné, 1864), p. 16.

⁵⁸ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, pp. 153.

It was indeed a public secret among political elites that the government was seeking to enhance France's presence in Asia. Contrary to what would happen later with regard to the expedition to Mexico, which provoked tough debates between liberals and the Bonapartists, the expedition and colonisation of Cochinchina was not particularly contested by the opposition. During the venture's first years, after the end of the war in China in 1858, liberals barely expressed a complaint nor a comment on the expedition and agreed with Arman's statement:

Notre prise de la base de Cochinchine est un fait considérable ; après la conduite vigoureuse de la guerre, pour laquelle nous avons à louer sans réserve le ministre qui la dirige et le personnel héroïque de la flotte, il est à désirer que les premiers pas dans l'œuvre de la colonisation assurent à notre commerce et à notre industrie le bénéfice de notre conquête.⁵⁹

These comments expressed a common desire to foster French commerce and industry in the region as the main reasons to colonise Cochinchina. The benefits of conquest were inevitably related to economic purposes, leaving in a second place the defence of Christian missionaries. The vast majority of the Corps législatif, liberals included, applauded the ship-owner's claim, which equally pleased those who aimed to promote France's trade and those who were keen to listen to patriotic messages highlighting the military values of honour and bravery:

À aucune autre époque la France n'a eu autant d'intérêt à porter au dehors la puissance expansive de son commerce et de son industrie ; à aucune autre époque l'intervention de la marine dans la politique n'a été aussi directe, aussi active et aussi nécessaire.⁶⁰

The emperor himself used the success of the French troops in Cochinchina to express his confidence and pride in France's future. He presented Cochinchina as a place from which France would obtain great benefits thanks to its endless natural resources as well

⁵⁹ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, pp. 153.

⁶⁰ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, pp. 155.

as the great opportunities it opened to commerce.⁶¹ The Bonapartists were eager to explain to the Corps législatif and public opinion the pertinence and convenience of having conquered such a ‘delta magnifique, enfermé dans les bouches du fleuve Cambodge, offrant une fertilité merveilleuse sur toutes les parties de son sol, une sécurité et une facilité d’abordage pour les plus grands navires’. Cochinchina was presented almost as an earthly paradise,

[u]ne admirable position entre l’Asie occidentale et toutes les régions de l’extrême Orient ; et, par une circonstance heureuse, les populations de ce pays, douces et gouvernables sous la direction de leurs autorités indigènes qu’on leur a laissées, se laissent conduire par la France avec la plus grande facilité. Nous avons donc là réunis tous les éléments d’une prospérité solide ; nous pouvons y faire produire en abondance les trois choses qui dans ces contrées lointaines importent le plus à notre commerce : le riz, la soie et le coton. Cette occupation est donc, je le répète, une grande et fructueuse entreprise.⁶²

By the end of the Second Empire, the interplay between liberals and the Bonapartist government had become closer than ever before. As for the economic arena, this chapter’s central focus, Bonapartists and liberals agreed on several important issues, such as the key strategic role that Cochinchina was intended to play for the expansion of France’s commerce and businesses across the Asian continent. In 1866, a group of deputies from the dynastic majority stressed their full commitment to the regime’s colonial policy in Cochinchina and encouraged the government to expand French domination to neighbouring areas such as Cambodia. This way, they declared, France could have a better and safer access to China’s market and would thus be able to establish rewarding trade exchanges with all the regions at the heart of Asia. Liberals agreed with this idea. As Duval noted:

Douée d’une fertilité extrême, traversée par des fleuves et des canaux accessibles aux plus grands navires, pouvant, par la diversité de ses positions maritimes, mettre à profit les variations périodiques de brises qui régissent la navigation dans ces parages, la

⁶¹ Napoleon III’ speech at the opening of the legislative session, ASCL 1864, vol. 1, session of 5 November 1863.

⁶² Minister Billault, ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 167.

CHAPTER 4
Liberals on Colonial Industry, Trade and Finances

Cochinchine française, avec ses quelques millions d'habitants, est appelée à devenir un important débouché pour un grand nombre de nos produits, en retour desquels elle fournira du riz, des bois, des épices, des gommes, des chanvres, des cotons, des soieries, des fruits, des huiles, des peaux, des poissons salés, de l'ivoire, des métaux, sans oublier des travailleurs d'un caractère maniable.⁶³

As mentioned earlier, the emperor himself publicly acknowledged that the expeditions to China and Cochinchina, although having an initial political goal, ended up pursuing mainly commercial aims. A group of deputies submitted an amendment to support Napoleon III's idea at a moment in which the government seemed to be focused on Algeria. It was an open secret that Napoleon III was seduced by the idea of expanding France's domination across the Mediterranean and developing Algeria as a central, strategic point of connection between France and Africa, Europe and the East. Fascination with this project probably could have taken his attention away from other colonial ventures in which France was fully engaged at the time. Cochinchina was certainly one of them.⁶⁴ Worth highlighting, too, is the way in which the amendment and the parliamentary debate about it suggest the adoption of liberal principles by members of the government and their consequent impact on the Empire's colonial policy. One of the defenders of the amendment, Taillefer, expressed in parliament his appreciation for the fact that the emperor and some of his ministers 'a[ient] résisté aux idées de rétrocession qui avaient pénétré dans le cabinet'.⁶⁵

Taillefer urged the government, and the whole chamber, to continue supporting a successful colonial venture. The colony, in his own words, was 'soumise, ralliée' to French power, and enjoyed an open, liberal economy that encouraged exports and imports of raw materials forbidden up to then, and benefited from private property and a low tax system, all indeed liberals' most appreciated values. The progress of

⁶³ Duval, *Les colonies et la politique coloniale de la France*, p. 369.

⁶⁴ The discussion of the amendment presented by Taillefer, Aymé, Corneille and other deputies belonging to the dynastic majority made it clear: 'Sire, vous nous entrenez de l'Algérie et des espérances que vous fondez sur elle. Permettez-nous de vous entretenir à notre tour d'une colonie dont l'avenir se révèle de jour en jour: c'est la Cochinchine'. ASCL 1866, vol. 2, session of 6 March, p. 144.

⁶⁵ ASCL 1866, vol. 2, session of 6 March, p. 144.

Cochinchina's economy, however, was impeded by several shortcomings in infrastructure that—he argued—needed to be solved at once.⁶⁶ The goal was clear: to foster and ensure economic efficiency. To make it possible, the defenders of the amendment advocated undertaking liberal measures combining economic progress and security. The Navy was mentioned as a necessary element to protect the successful development of commercial transactions in the colony 'dans un bassin où s'agitent les intérêts commerciaux de 200 millions de producteurs et de consommateurs', as Taillefer significantly, even enthusiastically, pointed out.⁶⁷ In addition, he proposed to install irrigation systems to promote rice production and take advantage of the abundant labour of a country whose birth rate was twice as high as the death rate.⁶⁸

Liberal deputies manifested their support in parliament, directly or indirectly, for any initiative whose aim was to deepen the creation of an advantageous environment for economic growth. In their press articles and writings, liberal thinkers and publicists praised the colony's economic and strategic value, and contributed to presenting this venture as positive and necessary in the eyes of the public. Several voices expressed themselves in that sense, like Auguste Nefftzer:

Nous posséderons ainsi [...] une colonie toute faite, une des contrées plus riches de l'Asie, habitée par une race plus honnête, plus courageuse et plus vigoureuse que la Chine. Les produits du Cambodge sont nombreux ; ils consistent en riz, soie, ivoire, coton, tabac, huile de coco, cuirs et cornes de buffles ; la pêche y est très lucrative et il s'y fait un commerce de poissons salés très recherchés sur les principaux marchés de la Chine et de l'extrême Asie.⁶⁹

It is worth noting that Nefftzer showed his enthusiasm for France's settlement of a proper colony in Asia, making evident that this goal had been pursued for a long time and finally accomplished. Moreover, he seemed to be very proud that the colony was founded in one of the richest places on the continent, with plenty of raw materials to

⁶⁶ ASCL 1866, vol. 2, session of 6 March, pp. 144–5.

⁶⁷ ASCL 1866, vol. 2, session of 6 March, p. 145.

⁶⁸ ASCL 1866, vol. 2, session of 6 March, p. 146.

⁶⁹ *Le Temps*, 27 May 1861.

trade. In this kind of writings, authors always tended to make a comparison to China, which was usually presented as a poorer, less refined society. Consciously or not, French writers tended to refer to Cochinchina as a better achievement than any other place in the region. In this way, they reinforced the idea that France was a very successful, sagacious power in Asia, able to build a colony from which to challenge British supremacy. Along the same line, one could read in *Le Temps*:

Notre garnison en Cochinchine, qui est en ce moment de 2.000 hommes sera portée, dit-on, à 3.500, le gouvernement ayant plus que jamais l'intention de fonder dans cette contrée un établissement solide, dans le but d'assurer nos rapports commerciaux, qui prennent chaque jour plus d'étendue dans l'Extrême Orient.⁷⁰

Another columnist expressed himself in similar terms, shortly after a member of the government had declared the profit of French commerce in the Far East to have increased by up to 500 million francs:

C'est là une preuve de l'immense augmentation de nos relations commerciales avec cette partie du globe. Nos expéditions de Chine, la fondation d'une colonie de Cochinchine, nos traités avec le Japon, témoignent de l'importance accordée par le gouvernement aux intérêts français dans ces contrées éloignées.⁷¹

Le Temps insisted on presenting Cochinchina as a rich, powerful possession for France, this time with a certain dose of criticism towards the way in which the colony's resources were being exploited. While recognising that the local population was abundant and hard-working—although very different to the French people—, the journal broke a lance for French settlers and defended the need to provide them with better conditions of settlement upon their arrival in the colony.⁷² According to what was noted,

⁷⁰ *Le Temps*, 27 September 1861.

⁷¹ *Le Temps*, 4 November 1861.

⁷² *Le Temps*, 30 November 1861: 'La Basse Cochinchine peut devenir une riche et puissante possession pour la France, mais il faudrait pour cela que le gouvernement de la métropole fût mieux au courant des ressources du pays, et de ce qu'il faut pour tirer parti d'une population dense et laborieuse, mais des mœurs absolument différente des nôtres'.

CHAPTER 4
Liberals on Colonial Industry, Trade and Finances

Les premiers colons qui se sont présentés à Saigon ont été très contrariés de ne pouvoir obtenir aucune concession de terre. Les négociants européens sont claquemurés dans de misérables baraques, où ils paient un loyer suivant le caprice des autorités ; et quant à des magasins, c'est à peine s'ils peuvent en trouver ailleurs que dans la ville chinoise.⁷³

The issue of land ownership was controversial in Cochinchina as it was present in virtually all colonial ventures. Indeed, it was a fundamental aspect of colonisation itself. The domination of one nation over a foreign land was in practice far easier and more effective with the support of settlers keen on moving to the colony. The reasons for accepting such an adventure diverged depending on each person's situation, but the prospect of acquiring a plot of land for free, or at a good price, was certainly a major one. When, due to inefficiencies in managing the colony, issues of land property were not resolved satisfactorily, settlers complained. The government tried to prevent this from happening since this projected a negative image of the Empire among, precisely, French citizens. Liberals, as we can see in the quotation above, often used the settlers' discomfort to question the government's managerial abilities and to highlight what could not be done with those who dared to leave their homeland to undertake an uncertain, risky endeavour (e.g., placing them in 'miserable' hovels or not providing them with decent facilities.)

On the other hand, liberals took advantage of any opportunity to show their fascination for material progress:

Cependant, on a tracé des routes, et plusieurs d'entre elles sont sur le point d'être livrées à la circulation. Des hôpitaux ont été construits, et le département des travaux publics s'occupe avec activité d'élever toutes sortes d'édifices publics, qui doivent faire de Saigon une des plus jolies villes de l'Orient, surtout si l'on parvient à y établir la propreté qui y manque.⁷⁴

⁷³ *Le Temps*, 30 November 1861.

⁷⁴ *Le Temps*, 30 November 1861: 'Deux choses seulement pourront empêcher la Basse-Cochinchine de devenir une colonie riche et florissante : la première, c'est l'initiative insuffisante accordée aux autorités de Saigon, qui perdent un temps précieux en pourparlers interminables avec les autorités de la métropole ; la seconde, c'est l'ignorance dans laquelle demeurent les Français de l'état de leur

Their conviction that Cochinchina was on its way to becoming a flourishing economic spot was closely linked to their hope that the colony would sooner or later benefit from the necessary empowerment of colonial administration, the establishment of efficient channels of communication between colonial and metropolitan authorities, and the defence of national interests against the excessive interference of foreign actors.

Faith in progress and the quest for business opportunities were values at the core of France's economic circles, particularly those related to trade, the merchant navy and industrial production. These groups acted as powerful lobbies and played a central role in the definition of imperialist projects. Private capital was needed to fund, and to profit from, faraway expeditions. The colonisation of Cochinchina provoked the creation of the *Compagnie commerciale et maritime l'Union des Mers*, administratively located in Paris, with docks in Marseille. The company's capital was worth fifty million francs, used to fund commercial operations and the acquisition of new ships and material. The company had preferential treatment from the state, which provided it with the prerogative of tax-free exploitation of mines, forests and natural resources located in public areas. The company was created as a way to unite private capital resources and be more competitive at the global level, always with an eye cast towards Britain and the United States, seen as France's major competitors. A brochure published to encourage the company's foundation claimed that

...la France est le berceau des idées nouvelles, des réformes et des grands événements ; c'est elle qui porte constamment le progrès et la civilisation chez les nations voisines, et qui, depuis la création des chemins de fer et des bateaux à vapeur, semble être la terre promise où tous les hommes éclairés se donnent rendez-vous.⁷⁵

At the same time, it was lamented that France's industrial production was stagnating, whereas Great Britain was consolidating its economic power, thus 'il est urgent, si la

nouvelle possession, qui menace d'être exploitée par beaucoup plus d'étrangers que par nos nationaux?'

⁷⁵ Edmond Fournier, *Avenir de la France et de la Cochinchine, Compagnie l'Union des Mers* (Paris: Lesueur, Baillehache et Cie., 1865), p. viii.

France tient à conserver le rang de première nation civilisatrice de prendre promptement des mesures nouvelles pour donner un essor considérable à notre commerce, à notre marine marchande et à notre industrie'.⁷⁶

Having in mind the huge business opportunities that opened after the military intervention in Japan and China, many in the metropole advocated continuing with 'our courage and initiative' in order to consolidate France's economic power. Creating associative structures was viewed as the best way to achieve this purpose and to make French trade really profitable and competitive. Liberal ideas of entrepreneurship, free trade and economic progress significantly underlay the government's imperialist projects.

In 1860s France, it was widely assumed that business, trade and industry would be less productive in an insecure, non business-friendly political and administrative system. In fact, one of the most recurrent criticisms of the Kingdom of Annam was its weak and unwarranted legal system. The following citation expresses doubts about

...quelle est l'industrie qui pourrait se développer avec un pareil système qui n'offre aucune garantie aux capitaux ? Quelle est la personne qui voudrait se fier à la parole d'un mandarin annamite qui se laisserait gagner pour quelques piastres ? Par quels moyens pousser les habitants dans une voie de progrès, alors qu'ils craindront d'être dépouillés, par leurs mandarins, des richesses qui seraient avec nous la récompense de leur travail et leur initiative ?⁷⁷

Liberal values were adopted by many Bonapartists, proving that the two ideologies influenced each other. Liberal Bonapartism was stronger when it had to confront foreign regimes, totally disrespectful of the guarantee of basic individual rights. The promotion of liberal principles began to be seen as a distinctive feature of French society, different from most of the Asian regimes. The director of the Hospital of Saigon, commenting on Cochinchina's society, significantly defended the idea that

⁷⁶ Fournier, *Avenir de la France et de la Cochinchine*, p. viii.

⁷⁷ Abel, *La question de Cochinchine au point de vue des intérêts français*, p. 23.

[...] une civilisation plus châtiée, plus virile, plus *libérale*, vienne, pour la prospérité de tous, se substituer à un état de choses vicieux à tant de titres. Les Européens, à tout prendre, valent mieux que les Chinois, et peuvent leur donner des avantages considérables dont ils pourront tirer bon profit dans un prochain avenir.⁷⁸

Such claims were underpinned by the notion that, in the end, economic openness and liberal values were positive for France's industrial prosperity:

Le rétablissement de l'ordre, la vive impulsion donnée aux travaux publics, et l'inauguration de doctrines économiques plus *libérales*, ont déterminé, dans toutes les branches de l'industrie et du commerce de la France, une féconde activité.⁷⁹

Despite the government's huge efforts in presenting the affair of Cochinchina as a necessary way to defend the outraged French honour, the opposition perceived with much concern the expedition's high economic costs. Ignace Charles Pichot, a deputy of opposition ideologically linked to the centre-left, highlighted in a parliamentary session the need for the government to rethink this colonial endeavour, due to the high burden it represented for the French economy. The colonisation of Cochinchina, together with the other 'faraway expeditions', such as Syria and China, was indeed the first reason for the French public debt. Pichot's criticism towards the expedition was motivated not only by economic, but also strategic reasons. He complained about the lack of a clear plan with regard to Cochinchina, which could acknowledge the real benefits that it could bring to France. The government provided vague explanations about the new trade routes planned and about who would benefit from them. Pichot pointed out that in case these new routes also benefited other commercial powers, namely the British Empire and the United States, the 'maîtres de tout le commerce de l'extrême Orient', then France would be sacrificing its budget and its soldiers for alien interests.

⁷⁸ Adolphe Armand, médecin-chef de l'hôpital militaire de Saïgon en Cochinchine, *Lettres de l'expédition de Chine et de Cochinchine* (Paris: Victor Rozier, éditeur, 1864), p. 212 [my emphasis].

⁷⁹ *Progrès de la France sous le gouvernement impérial d'après les documents officiels* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1869), p. 9 [my emphasis].

Even if the deputy claimed to understand the expedition's 'grand intérêt d'humanité et de civilisation', he questioned the huge economic and manpower-related efforts that France had to make in order to build an '*Algérie nouvelle* à six mille lieux de la France'.⁸⁰ His reference to Algeria was not a random one. Algeria was at the time the Empire's main colonial project, even if inherited from previous epochs. The attempts to pacify the indigenous populations and to push them into the Christian creed and values represented a huge nightmare for the imperial government. Much money and energy was invested for decades in a colonial project whose main aim was to become Napoleon III's 'Royaume Arabe'. The fear that such a complex situation could be replicated in an even more distant place was expressed in the Corps législatif in several debates.

Adolphe Billault, minister without portfolio, responded to these concerns with surprising clarity: 'Notre occupation de Saigon est l'une des meilleures entreprises politiques et coloniales qui aient jamais pu se réaliser'.⁸¹ Billault was one of Napoleon III's most combative and eloquent ministers in favour of the French imperial project overseas. A heavyweight in the Bonapartist regime, he frequented the Elysée and spent much of his energy to make the Empire a successful regime. Billault, who came from liberal ideological positions, supported Napoleon III's strategy to open the Empire to liberal ideas and practices from 1860 onwards.

Surprisingly, although they represented a scarce minority, some Bonapartist deputies also criticised the way in which the government was managing Cochinchina. One of the sharpest was Raymond Larrabure, a professional trader who warned the Corps législatif about how heavy the budget of the Ministry of War was becoming because of the large number of imperialist ventures. The Bonapartist deputy not only criticised the sum of budget wasted on these expeditions, but also agreed with his fellow Julien Busson in considering the expenses totally unproductive. 'Je vois avec regret que le besoin d'aventures se montre de plus en plus dans les instincts militaires de la France [qui] nous pousse aux expéditions du dehors et à nous mêler trop des affaires d'autrui', he

⁸⁰ Ignace Plichon, CRCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 166 [my emphasis].

⁸¹ CRCL 1862, vol. 1, session of 13 March, p. 167.

said and immediately ask the chamber whether France was rich enough to pay for its glory. His answer could not have been more assertive: ‘La France est assez riche de gloire pour songer enfin à ses finances!’ This comment was indeed highly applauded, putting in evidence that, though committed in the name of national greatness, the government’s economic excesses were a general concern. This is what encouraged him to suggest that ‘le gouvernement devrait modérer cette *ardeur chevaleresque*, et donner enfin à l’Europe [...] cette grande satisfaction, la paix ; et à la France l’équilibre de ses budgets’ as long as ‘il y a là une gloire assez belle pour tenter l’ambition’.⁸²

Another deputy asked the government to avoid as much as possible in Cochinchina the mistakes made in other colonies. He suggested that

...[a]insi que les Américains l’ont fait avec tant de succès à San Francisco, on peut appeler à Saigon, à droits égaux, les pavillons de tous les peuples du monde ; mais pour conserver à l’élément français la direction principale des affaires, il suffirait en même temps d’introduire dans nos possessions le système hollandais qui a élevé si haute la prospérité de Java.⁸³

He sought to follow a liberal policy concerning the management of the new colony, avoiding any self-sufficient temptation and opening the place to the global market. Liberals agreed with these visions and supported the idea of emulating the Dutch, who had created the proper conditions in Java for peasants, landowners and industrialist to take as much profit as possible from their Asian colony, which had passed from having a deficit of 180 million up to a surplus of 250 million francs, thus providing around seventy million francs of real revenue to the Dutch government. This particular case was seen as a successful way to manage a colony and liberals were therefore pressing the government to follow the example. When coming to detail, deputy Lucien Arman was clear:

Pour déterminer des pareils résultats en Cochinchine, sans demander à l’action gouvernementale des avances considérables, il serait possible de créer sous son

⁸² CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 13 June, p. 705 [my emphasis].

⁸³ Lucien Arman, ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 153.

patronage une société française assez puissante pour remplir, sous la forme d'une banque agricole ou commerciale, le même office que les prêts du gouvernement hollandais à Java. Dans ce système, le colon, quel qu'il soit, ancien ou nouveau possesseur du sol, reçoit les avances nécessaires pour déterminer la culture plus complète des terres, et aussitôt la récolte faite, quelle que soit la nature du produit, des riz, des grains, du tabac ou des sucres, la banque commerciale lui sert de nouvel intermédiaire pour la réalisation annuelle de ses récoltes. Pour attirer en Cochinchine les capitaux français, il est surtout désirable que l'élan qui s'était déjà manifesté ne soit pas entravé par des mesures administratives.⁸⁴

These statements again show a liberal conception of the economy and economic policy. First, they advocated for the establishment of a public bank system to provide the entrepreneurs and traders with the credit needed to finance their businesses and make money circulate easily. Facilitating wealth creation must be a major government concern, which leads to the second main argument: business and economic growth can only be achieved through the government giving facilities to business, thus reducing administrative and bureaucratic barriers. This claim had indeed been one of the defining features of liberals since the beginning. The belief in a limited state with limited powers over society in order to leave more room for private initiative was deeply held by French liberals in the 1860s, as well as by all those who shared certain liberal values, especially among businessmen.

Cochinchina's colonisation was an issue that concerned all those who aimed to enlarge their business opportunities and were consequently persuaded of the necessity to boost France's economy at the global level. Moreover, the defenders of protectionism feared that the government could make the Navy lose its property rights over the conquered territories in Saigon and its surroundings:

S'il s'agit de créer, en Cochinchine, un marché spécial pour la France, d'où seront exclus les produits étrangers, je comprends l'intérêt. S'il s'agit, au contraire, de mettre en

⁸⁴ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 153.

pratique les doctrines économiques qui ont aujourd'hui la faveur du Gouvernement, alors je ne le comprends plus, car le but ne pourrait plus être atteint.⁸⁵

Napoleon III's government was clear that the new Asian colony had to provide the country with economic benefits and that achieving this should not imply many costs. The colonisation of Algeria and all the problems and economic burdens it had involved was on everyone's minds as something which should be strictly avoided. The way in which the colony had to be managed in economic terms created division and doubts. A powerful current of opinion considered the opening of property rights to private hands, no matter where they came from, as a danger to French interests. In their opinion, there was a real danger that foreign speculators, notably the British, could take ownership of the land since they were better established in the area and had more powerful resources at hand.⁸⁶ As the argument went, the government needed to bear in mind that although a certain liberalisation of the colony's economic management was nothing to fear—on the contrary, it was very welcomed—opening it completely to foreign markets could be very negative to French interests and also unfair, for British laws did not allow foreign investors access to landed property.

4. 'ARRÊTEZ-VOUS !' MEXICO AND FRANCE'S FINANCIAL STABILITY

From the very beginning, many of the political and public debates about the Mexican expedition focused on its economic dimension. According to official accounts, the whole mission was organised to pressure Benito Juárez into revoking his decision of suspending the payment of debts to foreign creditors. Mexico's president made a step backwards trying to correct his initial threat of not paying the debt, but the French intervention still went on, becoming one of the greatest burdens for France's finances in the 1860s. Liberals, who never saw with enthusiasm the launching of the Mexican venture, took the opportunity to deepen the construction of their own rhetorical discourse against the Bonapartists, seeking to spread their values (among which the

⁸⁵ Ignace Plichon, ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 166.

⁸⁶ Lucien Arman, ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 153.

good management of public resources occupied an important position) in both the political arena and the public sphere. Although economic debates with regard to Mexico in the 1860s focused on a wide range of topics (commercial expansion, industry, banking), the fact remains that the issues related to the impact of the expedition on France's financial balance were those that emerged most strongly.

Liberals agreed with the explanations and general justification of the expedition given at the Treaty of London. Taking into account that the properties and honour of French nationals had been harmed, the government had to give a firm response. Liberals never questioned such reasoning, but they strongly criticised the way in which the government actually proceeded, investing too many human and economic resources. They instead proposed to undertake a precise, uncomplicated action to get the capital back without creating too much trouble for the army. An efficient way to do so, they argued, was to occupy the harbours of Veracruz and Tampico and to confiscate the tax revenues from all their commercial transactions. 'Tout le monde sait que le Mexique', explained Jules Favre, 'qui est encore dans l'enfance de la civilisation, n'a d'autres ressources que ses douanes, or, ce sont donc ces deux ports de mer qui alimentent la richesse publique', suggesting that taking control over them would be the most efficient way to take the money back. In any case, as he sharply pointed out, there was no need to 'armer 18 bâtiments, de les couvrir de 330 canons, de 5.000 matelots, de 3.000 hommes de débarquement, et d'envoyer encore, comme on l'a fait tout récemment, tout un corps supplémentaire de 3.000 hommes, de dépenser 10 ou 15 millions'.⁸⁷

Favre's concerns about the economic costs of the expedition were provoked by the fact that the Bonapartists seemed to set no budgetary limits when it came to defending the glory of the nation. They were in favour of increasing the military budget as much as necessary, provided that the extra money would serve to 'ajouter une gloire nouvelle aux gloires si éclatantes qu'elle [la France] s'est souvent acquises'. In this sense, there was no doubt about the government's determination to support with all available means those who put their lives at risk to defend the French flag, especially when, in

⁸⁷ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 160.

their opinion, such an effort would not affect the economic strength of the country.⁸⁸ As we have seen in Chapter 3, liberals agreed with assisting French soldiers in case of need, although they were much more critical about the rather negative costs of such a measure.

When the Bonapartists were deploying all their argumentative machinery to justify the expedition, trying to consolidate their political hegemony, it is worth highlighting the way in which Anatole Lemerrier, independent deputy, related the budget debate to his liberal vision of society. Against those who claimed that the government was responsible for all problems affecting the country, such as the Mexican expedition, Lemerrier advocated a greater integration of the private sector in public affairs as a way to ensure the nation's prosperity. As he vehemently declared, 'l'absorption par l'État de l'individu, la substitution de l'initiative et de l'omnipotence de l'État à l'initiative et à l'indépendance individuelles, ce sont les choses les plus dangereuses du monde', which he related to socialism. In the opinion of Lemerrier, the Bonapartist government tended to undervalue the great potential of French entrepreneurs, who would be perfectly able to reinvigorate France's economy on their own and, therefore, reduce the burden on public spending. The powerful presence of the state in society in society was something to avoid and reduce as much as possible.⁸⁹ There was a reason why such criticism came from a deputy who had formerly been among the Bonapartists. Lemerrier was a renowned industrialist and president of a railway company who, from the early years of the Second Empire, had not hidden his liberal approach to economic and political matters. Although defining himself as a Bonapartist, Lemerrier criticised the government's lack of reliability in foreign affairs and their tendency to make 'solemn promises' that later remained unaccomplished. The government disliked most

⁸⁸ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 14 March, pp. 92, 104. In the same session, the president of the Corps législatif stated that 'lorsque le drapeau de la France est engagé, la Chambre ne reculera devant aucun sacrifice pour le soutenir'. Another Bonapartist deputy expressed himself in similar terms, praising the courage of the French soldiers who were forced to accomplish in Mexico the mission they had started together with the British and the Spaniards. He appealed to the patriotic spirit of the entire nation to support the soldiers and to provide them with all their needs in order for them to achieve a final victory, as well as to know that 'le cœur de la France est toujours et partout avec ses soldats'.

⁸⁹ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 14 March, p. 94.

of his public statements and gradually excluded him. Indeed, he was prevented from standing for election in 1863, a fact that made him closer to liberals.⁹⁰

In the following months, liberals not only benefited from the rapprochement of former Bonapartist deputies to their postulates, but also took advantage of the very sequence of events. Almost two years after the start of the expedition, the situation in Mexico had become far from pleasant and straightforward for the French troops. War became harsher, as a result of the—apparently unexpected—difficulties to subjugate the country. In their attempt to alter Mexico's political system, the French government undertook a series of actions which led to the conquest of the whole country. In 1863, even Émile Ollivier recognised that war in Mexico could not be stopped. France was already too engaged in a venture that needed to be finished. Yet, contrary to what the government probably expected, Ollivier did not defend the need to 'accomplish' the goals of the enterprise, but to finish it in a decent way as soon as possible. The liberal deputy believed that, once the war was declared and considered an unavoidable strategy, it was useless for the government to consult in the chamber on this issue. The important decisions seemed to have been made already, war was on, and the deputies could not but support the soldiers who risked their lives on the battlefield.

According to Ollivier, however, this patriotic approach to the conflict did not mean that the whole chamber was supporting either the objects of war or its development. As he pointed out, 'il [le Corps législatif] peut vouloir que cette guerre soit renfermée dans de certaines limites'.⁹¹ These limits were mainly budget-related. The Mexican affair spurred intense debates surrounding the issue of France's public finances, the faraway expeditions' budgets, and, more importantly, the government's managerial capacities. Liberals were persuaded that most of the nation's greatest budgetary difficulties would diminish, and even disappear, once the Bonapartists were out of power. As Ollivier significantly noted, 'la responsabilité ministérielle, voilà le vrai remède financier'.⁹²

⁹⁰ Adolphe Robert, Edgar Bourlouton and Gaston Cougny (eds.), *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, vol. 4, (Paris: Bourlouton, 1889–91), p. 90.

⁹¹ CRCL 1863, vol. 1, session of 6 March, p. 311.

⁹² CRCL 1863, vol. 1, session of 6 March, p. 314.

The liberal concern about the good health of state finances came through regularly in parliament. When discussing the overseas ventures, their high costs were a recurrent issue around which lots of debates took place, for it was a concern not only for French but also for other European liberals. In this respect, liberals kept a rather ambiguous position. In general terms, they behaved as proud defenders of France's financial strength, using a range of expressions and arguments which depicted the country as a truly great power. Acting this way, liberals contributed to creating and spreading the idea that France was a solid nation, able to compete with the world's most powerful empires. Britain was certainly seen as the most direct competitor, before whom France had never to show the slightest sign of weakness. Other times, however, liberals attacked the government for not taking proper care of the nation's finances, arguing that they were not as splendid as they should be. One can argue that there is no contradiction in claiming that something is good and that it can be better at the same time, although, expressed as liberals did, and taking into account the political use they gave to their claims, it is worth noting the ambiguity of their language. A plausible explanation of this apparent ambiguity can come from the fact that, whereas the former claim mostly had an outward look, trying to position France at the core of an optimistic, victorious narrative internationally, the latter aimed at eroding the government's prestige and credibility, thus having rather in mind a domestic audience.

The truth is that both discourses were two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, liberals sought to promote national pride among French citizens and, especially, to project an image of strength and confidence abroad. On the other hand, they persevered in their attempt to weaken the government, a goal for which they did not hesitate to even jeopardise the prestige of the nation. In their rhetoric battle against the Bonapartists, liberals took advantage of all opportunities at their disposal. They were perfectly aware that the Mexican question, for example, could only bring them arguments in their favour. As they repeated again and again, the Mexican adventure began shrouded in mystery, with no clear objectives nor sufficient political support. From an economic point of view, the figures provided by the government showed that the expedition's costs would be—and were—much higher than the income that it was supposed to achieve. Thus, it was only a matter of waiting until the situation was

unsustainable and new arguments to strengthen their cultural hegemony would naturally arise, liberals thought. Liberals' ambivalence, to which we have just referred, is noticeable in Émile Ollivier's words:

Nos finances seraient excellentes si nous n'étions pas engagés dans la guerre de Mexique, si des expéditions lointaines ne les embarrassaient pas. Sur ce point, nous sommes complètement de [cet] avis. Aucun de nous n'a jamais dit, parce qu'aucun de nous n'a jamais pensé, qu'il pût y avoir la moindre inquiétude à concevoir sur les puissances financières de la France.⁹³

Whereas he claimed that liberals never doubted the strength of France's finances, he stated that they could be better. He proudly recognised that France's resources 'sont d'une telle fécondité que, avec une bonne administration et une sage politique, elles peuvent nous permettre d'ajouter à la prospérité générale par des diminutions progressives d'impôts'.⁹⁴ This statement is revealing of two important things. First, it shows Ollivier's pride in the robust position of French finances, which stresses the idea that liberals were enthusiastic defenders of France's power, in both its internal and external dimension, and, second, it links the liberal desire to achieve greater progress for France to two key pillars of liberal economic thinking: good administration and tax reduction. Ollivier's focus on these issues when debating a foreign expedition such as the one to Mexico, one of the Empire's more notorious imperialist projects in the 1860s, allows us to trace a direct connection between liberal thinking and imperialist practice in the times of Napoleon III. Ollivier's outspoken criticism of the government's policies was not an isolated phenomenon, but rather the representation of a genuine liberal current in French politics. He made a passionate speech, through which one can trace liberals' point of view in relation to the Bonapartists' expansionist project and the need to keep the nation's finances in balance. His is a fine example of liberals' moral, exemplary rhetoric. Given the clear, almost emotive nature of his expression, his words are worth quoting at length:

⁹³ ASCL 1864, vol. 2, session of 8 January, p. 274.

⁹⁴ ASCL 1864, vol. 2, session of 8 January, p. 274.

Quand un pays s'appelle la France, quand sa comptabilité est parfaite, quand son mécanisme financier ne laisse presque rien à désirer, [...] ce ne peut être évidemment que la bonne ou la mauvaise politique qu'on les oblige à supporter ; aussi, dès que nous avons entendu parler des expéditions lointaines, [...] nous n'avons pas attendu les résultats, et, faisant moins bien avant ce que vous faites mieux après, nous avons dit: "Voilà un écueil pour notre situation financière. Arrêtez-vous ! Toute guerre qui n'est pas une guerre d'honneur ou de devoir se réduit à un calcul d'arithmétique ; vous allez vous battre pour développer le commerce, mais êtes-vous sûrs que le fardeau que vous imposerez à nos finances ne dépassera pas de beaucoup l'extension que vous procurerez à notre commerce ? Arrêtez-vous !"⁹⁵

Ollivier considered the increasing public debt and the raising of income taxes as solutions with a negative impact on the country's economy and consequently supported containing state expenditure. A way to do so was to reduce the number and extent of 'faraway expeditions' and military interventions abroad. Ollivier suggested to focus on a fewer number of foreign interventions and to manage them 'avec une bonne administration et une sage politique'.⁹⁶ In this respect, he argued that pursuing a 'policy of peace' would be much more beneficial than promoting constant military expansion. In this sense, he was clear in declaring that:

Il ne suffit pas de prononcer ce mot magique [paix] et d'applaudir à l'idée d'avoir appelé dans un congrès tous les souverains pour obtenir d'eux des sacrifices et un désarmement [...] Le mérite n'est pas de la reproduire, mais de la rendre pratique et de la réaliser. Il n'y a pour cela qu'un moyen qui nous assurera en même temps la plus efficace des économies c'est de réduire l'armée, de désarmer, de désarmer le premier, courageusement et sincèrement.⁹⁷

The words of the liberal deputy, as the parliamentary proceedings explicitly note, caused astonishment and discomfort among most of his peers. Since the advent of the Second Empire, it was the first time that someone had dared to express so clearly the need to reduce the army. In fact, the use of the term 'disarmament' in a chamber mostly

⁹⁵ ASCL 1864, vol. 2, session of 8 January, p. 274.

⁹⁶ ASCL 1864, vol. 2, session of 8 January, p. 274.

⁹⁷ ASCL 1864, vol. 2, session of 8 January, p. 277.

formed by deputies supporting a regime whose power relied on military dominance was broadly seen, to say the least, as risky and provocative. Considering Ollivier's intellectual and moral stature, it is plausible to argue that his words were not the result of coincidence or randomness. Rather, they must be understood as part of a strategically elaborated discourse that aimed to voice liberals' main economic and political values, and the interplay between them. Defending the need for undertaking targeted military ventures and controlling public spending on imperialist projects as a way to improve the financial situation of the nation was something that liberals related to a greater, more general claim: the attainment of freedom. As Ollivier told the Bonapartist deputies:

Seulement, je vous en préviens, vous serez condamnés à un dernier sacrifice, car il ne suffit pas de l'économie, il ne suffit pas de la paix, il ne suffit pas du désarmement, tout cela sera inefficace et dangereux si vous n'accordez pas la liberté.⁹⁸

Ollivier's words were expressing French liberals' most important feature of their political struggle over the course of the nineteenth century. The consecution of true political freedom, from which other economic and social freedoms would emanate, was a fundamental claim, which, already in the 1860s, became an urgent matter for liberals. The notion of freedom became particularly relevant with regard to economic matters, for liberals advocated a greater involvement of private capital and less state intervention.

5. CONCLUSION

Economic visions on colonial ventures were surely informed by the notions and general understanding about what colonisation was at the time. In mid-nineteenth-century France, as it also was in other neighbouring European contexts, ruling political and economic elites were fascinated by the opportunities for expanding their power that the colonisation of faraway lands brought. Both the Bonapartists and liberals believed in the need to expand France's hegemony worldwide, and to make its moral superiority

⁹⁸ ASCL 1864, vol. 2, session of 8 January, p. 278.

clear. Although from different, sometimes opposed, perspectives, the two ideological groups did their best to promote the domination of new territories. An influential, respected voice in the colonialist world was that of Jules Duval, who, as suggested in Chapter 1, wrote profusely on colonial matters at the most renowned top-selling liberal dailies. His insights on the French colonies' economic development, as well as his theoretical approaches to the issues of colonisation and emigration in general, deeply contributed to configuring social images on these topics. A fervent defender of colonisation, Duval thought of it as the most brilliant phase of humankind's general history. He proudly referred to it as being

...le rayonnement extérieur des familles humaines, l'exploration, le peuplement et le défrichement du globe : ses récits mettent en lumière les lois qui président à cette expansion, dont la guerre est trop souvent le prélude et la sanction, mais dont les instruments propres sont la navigation, l'agriculture, le commerce...⁹⁹

Duval's enthusiasm for colonialism as a means to pursue the nation's economic development found a good ally in the regime's turn to more liberal trade policies. The signature of the Commercial Treaty with Great Britain exemplifies the Second Empire's aim to promote the economy through the implementation of measures with which liberals agreed: openness of markets and more free concurrence. Yet the communion between liberals and Bonapartists in economic matters rapidly encountered some conceptual barriers. Liberals, who cheered the economic advantages that such a Treaty could have for France's economic progress, were deeply worried about the state's financial balance. As defenders of less state interventionism in public and economic affairs, liberals advocated controlling meticulously the highest budgetary allocations, that is, those related to the military and the navy. Faraway imperialistic expeditions played an important part in increasing the state's budgets, for they demanded great investments in both human and technical resources. Liberals saw these ventures from a double perspective: on the one hand, they saw in many of them a positive endeavour to open new trade routes and encourage new profitable markets. On the other hand, liberals saw in these ventures the response to the Bonapartists' bombastic pretensions

⁹⁹ Duval, *Les colonies et la politique coloniale de la France*, p. v.

in the world, making them the image of an alleged imperial glory that needed to be promoted and defended at any price.

Algeria was seen as an appealing colony from an economic point of view. Once the effective control of the territory had been carried out, and the greatest military interventions had already finished, liberals thought that, by the 1860s, the time for France's policy to focus on the colony's economic development had definitively arrived. Shortly before the advent of the Empire, Algeria was seen as a producer of agricultural products; industry was almost non-existent. When the Bonapartists seized power, they implemented several measures to promote industrial production in the colony, with a depth and rapidness with which liberals were never pleased. An important challenge was to incorporate into the new legislation the wide range of indigenous products, especially charged with customs duties, as they were considered almost as foreign products. Jules Duval stood for considering Algeria as a simple part of the French territory, and its products as being like any other national product. This aim implied revising the French customs system.¹⁰⁰

Although social turbulence was still alive, liberals considered that the Bonapartists were not doing their best to make the colony truly profitable economically. Its industry was languishing and the variety of raw materials in the region was not being exploited to its full potential. In the 1860s, the colony indeed suffered from great difficulties that made it very complicated to pacify and bring prosperity to the colony, taking into account its complex social, racial and economic backgrounds. The government found it difficult to legislate in a satisfactory way for all the groups involved, namely the settlers and the local Muslim populations. The government's action in Algeria rarely counted on the support of liberals and found some reservations among the Bonapartists too. French policymaking in the colony was never univocal and two ways of understanding the colony, its role and development, always had to coexist: on the one hand, the one

¹⁰⁰ Jules Duval wrote: 'Nous aimons signaler à cette occasion, pour la vingtième fois, la nécessité d'abolir ce statut, inique et impolitique, du système douanier de la France, qui classe l'Algérie dans les pays étrangers, et grève à ce titre de taxes onéreuses un grand nombre de ses produits. Sous peine de dommages graves pour elles-mêmes, les Compagnies doivent insister en faveur du libre commerce entre les diverses provinces d'un même empire'. Jules Duval, *L'Algérie et les colonies françaises*, pp. 30–1.

which wanted to encourage commercial expansion and, on the other hand, the one which stood for more cautious behaviour.¹⁰¹ As suggested, liberals shared with the Bonapartists the theory that the colony had to be fully developed from an economic point of view and thus become a keystone of France's economic growth. Yet in practice, they barely united their efforts to achieve this goal. Liberals soon realised that Algeria could become an appropriate issue to challenge the government and deploy their discursive rhetoric on good government and the defence of the true interests of the nation. Liberals tried hard to present themselves as the defenders of settlers, who were always reluctant to support Napoleon III's regime because it never provided them with full political rights. At the same time, the regime, too, was reluctant to concede any privilege to settlers, as it saw in them a rather unfaithful group.

As a brand-new colonial project, Cochinchina was the living image of nineteenth-century liberals' fascination with economic expansion. Their political standpoints with regard to this imperialist endeavour were much more moderate than they were regarding Algeria and, certainly, Mexico. As it happened with other ventures promoted by the Second Empire, the expedition to Cochinchina initially demanded great investments to fund military actions, although liberals never made of it a great issue of debate in parliament. They fiercely criticised the government in relation to the expedition and intervention in Mexico, a political project towards which they always showed strong disagreement. The Mexican expedition's high costs, which increased inasmuch as the situation in the country turned more and more difficult, were from the beginning the focus of the liberals' harshest criticism. In their intention to present the Bonapartists as irresponsible political leaders, even harmful for the nation's interests, liberals found in the Mexican affair the perfect battleground, as it was an inefficient venture, especially from an economic standpoint. Not for nothing, Mexico has been viewed as the beginning of the end of an imperial regime that, aiming to reach glory, found on the American continent one of the most embarrassing episodes of its history.

¹⁰¹ Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844-1902* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 200.

Chapter 5

Liberals, Religion and Empire

*Le pèlerinage de ses sujets algériens est un devoir religieux
dont [la France] doit protéger l'accomplissement,
car elle leur a promis et garanti la liberté du culte musulman.*

—Jules Duval, 1858¹

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the Second Empire and the Church was as close as it was controversial under Napoleon III. The emperor, who married a fervent religious Spanish aristocrat, conceived of religion as a cornerstone of both his private and public life, and the Church as an institution to strategically consolidate his power and to guarantee the Empire's social order.² He understood religion as a fundamental pillar for society, a useful tool to order it and make it better. On the occasion of the opening of the 1866 legislative session, he pointed out:

Quand tous [les Français] auront reçu, dès l'enfance, ces principes de foi et de morale qui élèvent l'homme à ses propres yeux, ils sauront qu'au-dessus de l'intelligence humaine, au-dessus des efforts de la science et de la raison, il existe une volonté suprême qui règle les destinées des individus comme celles des nations.³

These 'principles of faith' were thus seen as essential for the development of both society and the individual. As it was indeed common in the mid-nineteenth-century

¹ *Journal des Débats*, 19 July 1858.

² Juliette Glikman, *La monarchie impériale. L'imaginaire politique sous Napoléon III* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2013) p. 365.

³ ASCL 1866, vol. 1, opening of the legislative session, 22 January, p. 6.

Western world, religion was important not only from a social and cultural point of view, but also from a political one, as its close connection to the development of nationalism comes to show.⁴ With regard to colonialism and imperialist endeavours overseas, religion played a fundamental role too. In the early 1860s, the defence of Christian values and missionaries wherever they were threatened was a recurrent political demand of virtually all ideological groups.

The emperor's approach to religion was far from exceptional in nineteenth-century France. Historians have highlighted how the Hexagon's politics, institutions and society were throughout the century particularly shaped by religion, either in favour or against it, much more than in other neighbouring contexts, such as the British.⁵ Indeed, Napoleon III rested his brand-new imperial regime on the clergy. Due to his alleged defence of the Catholic interest, skilfully exploited in the immediate years before he seized power, many Catholics rallied behind the Empire and provided it with strong moral support against the forces of opposition.⁶ During the Second Empire, the Church organised several public prayers to honour the figure of the emperor, which, as Sudhir Hazareesingh has pointed out, tells us about the spiritual renewal that Napoleon III's regime aimed to foster.⁷ This premise applied especially to the provinces, where rural communities were more attached to priests and their moralistic exhortations.⁸ Over the years, this tendency would prove dangerous for the Bonapartist Empire, inasmuch as Ultramontane Catholicism, much more related to conservative political forces such as

⁴ Literature on the relationship between religion and nationalism is abundant. A good recent general account including updated references on the topic is Rogers Brubaker, 'Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches', *Nations and Nationalism*, 18/1 (January 2012), pp. 2-20.

⁵ Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett (eds.), *Religion, Society and Politics in France since 1789* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991), p. vii. In this respect, Alan Kahan has pointed out that nineteenth-century France had a religious history far more complicated than that of any other European nation, as it was divided in two: Catholic and anticlerical. See Alan S. Kahan, *Tocqueville, Democracy, and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 147.

⁶ Brian Fitzpatrick, 'The emergence of Catholic Politics in the Midi, 1830-70', in Atkin and Tallett, *Religion, Society and Politics in France since 1789*, p. 90.

⁷ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *The Saint Napoleon: Celebrations of Sovereignty in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 166.

⁸ As for the strategies the Second Empire followed in order to construct a specific moral order, the tense relationship between the church and the state and the impact of ecclesiastic institutions in the provinces, see Roger Price, *The French Second Empire. An Anatomy of Political Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Part 2, especially pp. 171-210.

legitimism, began to be better connected with urban popular classes and to question the Bonapartist legitimacy.⁹

In times of the Second Empire, the resources dedicated to churches increased and Paris was given further impetus as France's religious capital in a process that has been labelled as 'religious haussmannisation'.¹⁰ Either real or symbolic, the power of religion was undeniable, deeply rooted in society's habits and beliefs.¹¹ To profit from it, a political point of view could not be but advantageous for those who managed to merge their interest with that of religion. It is under this premise that, during the Second Empire, the Church gained political presence in state institutions, notably the Senate, and the clergy became a reliable ally of the regime. As deputies recognised in their address to the throne in 1865,

[...] les questions religieuses ont pris, dernièrement, une plus large part dans les préoccupations du pays. D'un côté, le grand principe de la liberté des cultes est hors d'atteinte, de l'autre, l'opinion publique rend témoignage à ce que vous avez montré de déférence et d'intérêt au culte catholique, en multipliant les succursales, en améliorant la situation du clergé, en ouvrant le Sénat aux princes de l'Église.¹²

Yet, despite his religious convictions, Napoleon III tried to find a compromise between his secular power and that of the Church. As his uncle did, the emperor remained faithful to the 1801 Concordat, which recognised Catholicism as 'the religion of the great majority of the French' but not the official state religion, thus keeping religious

⁹ This was especially the case in the southern provinces of the country, as Brian Fitzpatrick has demonstrated in his study on the Midi. See Fitzpatrick, 'Emergence of Catholic Politics in the Midi', in Atkin and Tallett, *Religion, Society and Politics in France since 1789*, pp. 89-107.

¹⁰ We owe the expression to Jacques-Olivier Boudon, who in his *Paris capitale religieuse sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001) addresses in depth the process of construction of Paris as a truly religious centre, as well as the church-state relationship in times of the Second Empire.

¹¹ Theodore Zeldin has pointed out how Madame d'Agoult, Franz Liszt's wife, once recognised that 'the Catholic Church still rules, not, to be sure, over the mind or the heart of French society, but over its habits', implying that it proved to have much power over 'a country in which principles are so weak and passions so changeable'. See Theodore Zeldin (ed.), *Conflicts in French Society. Anticlericalism, Education and Morals in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable Ltd., 1970), p. 10.

¹² ASCL 1865, vol. 3, session of 10 April, p. 101.

freedom and ensuring respect for other creeds.¹³ After the Concordat, the Church lost a great part of its jurisdictional power. Religion became a private matter from an official point of view, and the state remained the sole institution with power to monitor the expression and deployment of religion, in any of its confessions.¹⁴ Despite the close links between the emperor and the clergy at the beginning of the regime, the Second Empire followed increasingly a general tendency in many other European Catholic countries in mid-nineteenth century which consisted in taking progressive legal steps strengthen the state's secular power.¹⁵ Although large sections of society still remained closely attached to religious values, the truth is that the nineteenth century viewed the greatest, fastest process of separation between both secular and religious powers.¹⁶

As a matter of fact, the 1860s experienced a revival of anti-clerical movements which were very critical of the Church's political prerogatives. In France, the groups of opposition, including virtually all liberal and republican sensitivities, started using the term 'clerical danger' to describe the excessive political role that the Church had at the time.¹⁷ Many republicans such as Victor Hugo perceived the Church as an institution to be fought, for it represented the opposite of their own progressive values, proving the extent to which it was perceived as a political, social and cultural adversary.¹⁸ Such an ideological confrontation was aggravated by the publication of the *Syllabus of Errors*, a document under Pius IX in 1864 in which the Holy See condemned a number of ideological errors, among which liberalism, modernism and secularisation, which it argued would drive Western societies to disaster. Pius IX's papacy has been defined as a

¹³ For a general perspective on the role of the church in France's modern history, see the classic Jean-Marie Mayeur (ed.), *L'histoire religieuse de la France, XIXe et XXe siècle. Problèmes et méthodes* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1975).

¹⁴ Xavier de Montclos, *Histoire religieuse de France* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988), pp. 85–6.

¹⁵ René Rémond, *Religion and Society in Modern Europe* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), p. 4.

¹⁶ Hugh McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 285.

¹⁷ Michel Vovelle, 'La fin de l'alliance du trône et de l'autel (1789-1880)', in Jacques Le Goff and René Rémond (eds.), *Histoire de la France religieuse*, vol. 3, *Du roi Très Chrétien à la laïcité républicaine (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), p. 133.

¹⁸ J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 7.

moment of intransigent, ultramontane Catholicism, which opposed directly the religious, philosophical, moral and political liberalism of his time.¹⁹

The relation between the Church and the Second Empire was also a matter of huge controversy for its participation in the so-called Roman Question.²⁰ Napoleon III's policy in Italy suffered from severe diplomatic difficulties. On the one hand, the emperor had some sympathies for the *carbonari*, the Italian secret revolutionary societies with which he had become involved during his years of youth in Rome. Moreover, due to his resolution in defending the 'principle of nationalities', that he had acquired during the Revolutions of 1848, Napoleon III rapidly became deeply engaged in his support to the cause of Italian unification against the Austrian Empire. During almost one decade, the Second Empire provided the Italian nationalists with economic and military support and sent its troops to the battlefield on several decisive occasions in 1859. In return, France was given in 1860 the county of Nice and the duchy of Savoy.²¹

On the other hand, Napoleon III had to deal with the opposition of the French Catholic Church towards a project that could put the Pope's power in danger. The Papal States being a substantial part of the Italian peninsula, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Adriatic and spreading over its entire central part, their annexation to the brand-new Italian state was required to ensure its unification. In order to not exasperate the French clergy, Napoleon III engaged in protecting the Pope's territories, although he continued contemporarily to provide the Italian

¹⁹ See Philippe Boutry, 'La doctrine chrétienne face au monde moderne. Un catholicisme intransigeant : le moment « Pie IX » (1848-1878)', in Alain Corbin (ed.), *Histoire du Christianisme* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2007), especially pp. 410, 411.

²⁰ The Roman Question was an issue that generated great interest among contemporaries. Intellectuals and politicians published a wide range of books and pamphlets on the topic, the following being examples worth mentioning: Unknown author, *Napoléon III et la France dans la Question romaine* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1861); Edmond About, *La Question romaine* (Paris: Librairie de Michel Lévy Frères, 1861); Paul Roger, *Le prince Murat et la Franc-Maçonnerie à propos de la Question romaine* (Paris: Aumont, 1861); Hercule de Saucières, *Napoléon III et la Question romaine. Réponse à la lettre impériale du 20 mai 1862* (Leipzig: K. F. Köller, 1862); Unknown author, *Lettre sur la question romaine. Solution* (Paris: Daupeley Frères, 1863); P. André, *A leurs majestés les souverains d'Europe: Moyen radical pour résoudre le problème de la Question romaine, de la paix des nations de l'Europe et de la régénération morale des peuples* (Marseille: Arnaud, Cayer et Cie., 1868).

²¹ Napoleon III's policy in Italy has been told by a number of the emperor's biographers and students of his reign. A good overview of the period can be found at Eugenio di Rienzo, *Napoleone III* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2010), pp. 212–79.

unionists with military and logistic support. Indeed, King Victor Emmanuel had promised to respect the Emperor's wish to protect the Pope but, by the mid 1860s, Garibaldi intensified his attacks against the Papal States with the consent of the king. Napoleon III felt betrayed and therefore increased the presence of French troops in Rome. The pressure of Italian unionists over Rome remained constant until 1870, when the Second Empire ended its days after the defeat of Sedan against Bismarck's Prussia. The Second Empire's policy in Italy was thus wavering between two diplomatic strategies that were condemned to collapse. Either the unification of Italy was to be taken seriously with all its (territorial) consequences or the Papal States were to remain a political (and territorial) unity, which would include the possibility of reducing their territorial scope. The strategy of standing for the two options simultaneously was doomed to failure, as it was the case, both at home and abroad.

For their part, liberals proved to have a relationship with the Church as diverse as they were. Since they were not represented by a well-established party or political organisation, it is difficult to trace their 'official' position towards this issue, but it is possible to tackle individual understandings on the topic which are indeed translatable to a wider context. With regard to their personal profession of faith, many liberals declared themselves to be Catholic believers and, as most of society at the time, could barely conceive life without its religious component. But personal approaches to religion often had little to do with the political role that religion was expected to play in 1860s French society. As pointed out earlier, Napoleon III's regime took religion as one of his fundamental pillars of legitimation and as a useful tool for ensuring social order. In general terms, liberals tended to be more reluctant to accept the interference of the Church in public affairs, although they recognised its essential social value. Most nineteenth-century Catholic French liberals had to struggle to accommodate their religious faith with their strong belief in the values of the Revolution. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, despite his deep Catholic convictions, defined liberalism as the pretention of resolving all kind of issues from a rational standpoint. Such a statement clearly contradicted the very essence of religion, which is broadly speaking based on irrational dogmas. Referring to the passage from *Ancien Régime* to a new liberal society after 1789, Leroy-Beaulieu said that 'à l'État vivant sur la tradition et la coutume, le libéralisme

moderne a prétendu substituer un État fondé sur la raison et la nature [...] Il est à la fois rationaliste et naturaliste'.²²

Over the course of the century, many contemporaries took for granted an alleged clear opposition between liberalism—seen as the ideological project resulting from the Enlightenment's philosophy—and Christianity, related to autocratic power and irrational authority.²³ Moreover, these notions vary depending on whether they refer to Protestants or Catholics. As Alain Dierkens points out, and due to the aforementioned dichotomy, liberalism tended to be in the nineteenth century closer to Protestantism, viewed as a more open, modern current of Christianity than Catholicism. While this worked well in places of a Protestant majority, such as Germany, in France, where Protestants were far less numerous, it created more problems, for liberal Catholics were more reluctant to make Catholicism appear as a conservative, traditional force.²⁴ French liberal Catholics struggled to present themselves as the legitimate heirs of the Revolution, aiming to combine the defence of individual freedoms and the defence of freedom of the Church and within the Church, and to making an effort to adapt to post-1789 society.²⁵ They claimed to have sympathy for political freedom, free intellectual research and for social democracy.²⁶ 'Religious liberalism', indeed, succeeded in configuring a historical movement throughout the nineteenth century which ended more than a thousand years of a particular tradition and form of social interaction.²⁷

²² Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *Les catholiques libéraux. L'Église et le libéralisme de 1830 à nos jours*, Paris, 1885, p. II sq.; quoted in Alain Dierkens (ed.), *Le libéralisme religieux* (Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1992), p. 8.

²³ Dierkens, *Le libéralisme religieux*, p. 8.

²⁴ Dierkens, *Le libéralisme religieux*, p. 51. Moreover, anti-liberalism was one of the main features of German catholicism. See Victor Conzemus, 'Les foyers internationaux du Catholicisme libéral hors de France au XIXe siècle: esquisse d'une géographie historique', in Colloque International d'Histoire Religieuse, *Les catholiques libéraux au XIXe siècle: actes du Colloque international d'histoire religieuse de Grenoble, 30 septembre-3 octobre 1971* (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 1974), p. 25.

²⁵ As for the movement of liberal Catholicism, its plurality and variants, see Colloque International d'Histoire Religieuse, *Les catholiques libéraux au XIXe siècle*.

²⁶ Conzemus, 'Les foyers internationaux du Catholicisme libéral', p. 50.

²⁷ Dierkens, *Le libéralisme religieux*, pp. 211–3.

As for the Roman Question, liberals viewed with mistrust France's commitment to defending the Church's temporal power.²⁸ In one of the multiple debates around this thorny question, Jules Favre significantly manifested the liberals' appreciation for religion as a social and cultural value, while questioning the excessive commitment of the Bonapartist government towards the Papacy. He expressed his attitude in the following unequivocal terms:

Que la France ait intérêt à maintenir dans son sein le respect des idées religieuses, que le culte qui est celui de la majorité des Français soit l'objet de faveurs particulières, *j'y consens, je le veux*; mais, en plein XIXe siècle, est-il possible de commander à des hommes de courir à la mort pour que des prêtres soient sur un trône ?²⁹

Favre's rhetorical question clearly shows his reluctance to engage troops in a military conflict to protect the Pope. Ironically, he refers to how 'modern' the fact was of having, 'well into the nineteenth century', such disputes to keep clergymen at the head of political power, which connects to the liberal ideal of separating religion from politics. Without entering into a deeper judgement on the Papacy's political legitimacy, Favre at least made clear that liberals were not in favour of compromising France's human and economic resources to protect it. Again, this assumption was not incompatible with expressing recognition for an institution which 'pendant huit siècles, [...] a été l'initiatrice de la civilisation' and for religion as a fundamental and positive value for society.³⁰

Yet the concept of liberalism seemed to have other meanings. For the Bonapartist publicist Bernard Garnier de Cassagnac, France's reaction to the Roman question was the best expression of an 'eminently French policy', that is, moderate and conservative 'parce qu'elle est en même temps catholique et libérale'. At first sight, this statement seems a *contradictio in terminis*, since moderation, conservatism, Catholicism and

²⁸ As Alan S. Kahan points out, Tocqueville showed his delusion for the fact that the Church supported Napoleon III's restrictive regime and the clergy was attached to tyranny. Kahan, *Tocqueville, Democracy, and Religion*, p. 168.

²⁹ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 21 March, p. 348 [my emphasis].

³⁰ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 21 March, p. 348.

liberalism, although combinable in different ways, could hardly go hand in hand all together. Liberals would have never agreed to be qualified as ‘conservative’, although some conservative Bonapartists could agree, for instance, with some liberal economic measures. Catholicism was a shared value and we can conclude that moderation, understood as a rejection of revolution, was definitely a feature of both the Bonapartists and liberals.

In the context of this peculiar relationship between the Empire and the Church and between religion and liberalism, the following sections will tackle the issues and debates that religion produced in relation to the three imperialist ventures under study. However, it should be noted that while religion was an important topic regarding Algeria and Cochinchina, this was not the case with regard to Mexico.

2. ALGERIA: THE CRESCENT UNDER THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

Since the colonisation of Algeria began in 1830, the religious question had been a contentious issue for all French governments. The first expedition into the territory in 1830 had, among others, religious motivations, for it was viewed as a ‘modern crusade’ against Ottoman power.³¹ The fact that Ottoman pirates enslaved Christian subjects in the region became an issue for antislavery activists in France, who advocated undertaking harsh measures, such as the conversion of all Muslims to Christianity, after the military colonisation.³² Imbued with this increasingly tense ambiance, King Charles X felt himself called to defend religion and Christian power, relating it to an ideal of civilisation. His undertaking was by no means new, but rather connected to a long tradition of European monarchies to spread the Christian creed as a humanitarian or civilising idea, rooted in the language of the historical religious crusades.³³ The revival

³¹ Darcie Fontaine, *Decolonizing Christianity. Religion and the End of Empire in France and Algeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 23.

³² Gillian Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 147.

³³ Jacques Frémeaux, *La France et l'Algérie en guerre, 1830–1870, 1954–1962* (Paris: Économica et Institut de Stratégie Comparée, 2002), p. 60; Fontaine, *Decolonizing Christianity*, p. 23. The conquest

of this religious idea was particularly intense under Charles X, an epoch in which the defeat of the Ottomans in Algeria in 1830 was celebrated by singing the Te Deum in all masses across the country.³⁴ Before then, especially in times of the first Napoleonic Empire, France had focused its energies on expanding its power mainly across Europe and, to a lesser extent, over territories overseas. In any of these cases, religion was a major issue to confront politically and it never jeopardised the Empire's social peace. Yet, once the French colonial power entered a phase of consolidation in Algiers and its neighbouring territories, French authorities had to face an entire indigenous population whose main profession of faith had nothing to do with Jesus but with the prophet Mohammed. All of a sudden, Islam became a new religion in France. Conflict that emerged as a consequence of the encounter between Christianity and Islam still lasts nowadays, and so do its deep political and ideological implications. This section seeks to enquire about the liberal responses to the religious question in Algeria during the 1860s and to see how liberals' perceptions of religion were also linked to broader social, institutional and geostrategic issues.

The previous chapters have shown how liberal economist Jules Duval defended the idea of making Algeria France's greatest colony, arguing that the colony needed to become a true French territory where all French citizens could feel at home. Following the liberal mainstream at the time, Duval was in favour of assimilating Algerian inhabitants into the French institutions and lifestyle, including both European settlers and indigenous people. He was clear that the success of such policy, combined with the necessary administrative reforms, would make Algeria 'une France plus jeune, plus confiante en l'avenir, plus amoureuse de mouvement, plus féconde et plus originale dans ses créations'. Religion was not seen as a problem but rather as an opportunity to keep the necessary peace to undertake a successful project of progress for the colony. He clearly expressed his thoughts:

was thus officially presented as a missionary way to convey the Christian faith to the Algerian indigenous populations, a process that, as noted in Chapters 2 and 3, was not exempted from severe episodes of violence. See Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844-1902* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

³⁴ Jenniffer E. Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 43–4.

CHAPTER 5
Liberals, Religion and Empire

Dans la famille chrétienne élargie par ses alliances avec la famille arabe, dans la commune agrandie et affranchie, dans la province admise à s'administrer elle-même, dans la représentation nationale ouverte à la colonie, tout noble cœur donnerait essor à ses sentiments, toute noble ambition trouverait une vaste carrière. L'Algérie deviendrait vraiment pour les Français une seconde patrie.³⁵

Liberals' project of assimilating local populations into the French nation had an important religious component. In the metropole, many shared the desire to convert Algeria as an integral part of France, another province at the other side of the Mediterranean in front of Marseille. Certainly, in the mid-nineteenth century, one could perceive Algeria as a closer territory to France than, for instance, anywhere in South Spain. Transport by boat was indeed faster and even safer than long trips on bad and dangerous roads.³⁶ Algeria was also viewed as the place where the French nation could best put into practice its civilising mission and show the world how the French national project was able to enlarge its boundaries and contribute to the development of North Africa. Religion was expected to play an important role in this endeavour, and the defence of Christian values against one of the major religions of the Book, Islam, promised to be complex. The relationship between Christian settlers and Muslim Algerians was often difficult. Religion, together with race, was an important element of differentiation between communities, although there were voices softened this view. Duval, for instance, claimed that coexistence of religions was a more defining feature of Algeria than conflict:

Le catholicisme et le protestantisme sont largement et régulièrement organisés dans notre colonie. Sous le rapport religieux, l'Algérie présente même un spectacle digne d'admiration et d'étude : les quatre grands cultes du genre humain dans l'Occident [...]

³⁵ Jules Duval, 'Politique coloniale de la France. L'Algérie. I. Gouvernement et administration', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. xx (April 1859), p. 930.

³⁶ As for the historical roots of the connection between Europe and North Africa and circulation of ideas and missionaries in the nineteenth century, see Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900* (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 2011).

vivent paisiblement côte à côte, non d'une vie restreinte par une jalousie réciproquement hostile, mais dans la pleine liberté de leurs manifestations.³⁷

Duval also highlighted the importance of religious institutions to provide social services where the state's action was still ineffective, namely with regard to works of charity and social assistance such as nursing homes, nursery schools and orphanages. Some of these institutions worked together with national public schools. Following a similar line of reasoning, the Saint-Simonians wanted to become the promoters of a new Christianity which would be the expression of modernity. They defended Napoleonic ideas as a perfect mixture of reaction and progress.³⁸ Thus, the defence of Christianity would play an important role in the conquest of Algeria at a moment in which the Second Empire was fully committed to the protection of the Pope in Rome, and French power in many Christian sites was being threatened by Russia and other European Catholic powers.³⁹

Further Evangelisation

On 20 February 1858, a basilica began to be built on a hill overlooking Algiers' bay. This new church was meant to be much more than a religious temple: it was a crucial icon of the French presence in Algeria.⁴⁰ Just in front of Marseille, Notre Dame d'Afrique represented the connection of the two rivers of the Mediterranean under the impassive gaze of the Christian Cross. The basilica's symbolic importance also lies in the message that can be read on its apse: 'Notre Dame d'Afrique priez pour nous et pour les Musulmans'. Some have seen in it a symbol of tolerance. One of its main promoters, cardinal Charles Martial Lavigerie, was however a fierce defender of the Christianisation of Muslims. Its construction lasted fourteen years and it was inaugurated shortly after the fall of the Empire, in 1872, by the same cardinal, at the

³⁷ Duval, 'Politique coloniale de la France. L'Algérie', p. 907.

³⁸ Henry Laurens in the preface of Michel Levallois, *Ismaïl Urbain, royaume arabe ou Algérie franco-musulmane ? 1848–1870* (Paris: Riveneuve, 2012), p. 16.

³⁹ See Gérald Arboit, *Aux sources de la politique arabe de la France: le Second Empire au Machrek* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

⁴⁰ The construction of this church can be seen as an example of Napoleon III's regime's desire to introduce Algeria into the cultural imaginary of its time, forging a sort of patriotic image of the conquest. A broader reflection on this issue can be found in Sessions, *By Sword and Plow*, chapter 3.

time archbishop of Algiers and primate of Africa.⁴¹ The relationship between Lavigerie and civil authorities from the colony was rather tense and created at times some conflicts that included not only religious, but also political issues.

By 1868, the great famine that was devastating Algeria decreased in intensity. Lavigerie took the initiative of collecting orphans into villages. This action met the opposition of Marshal McMahon, governor-general of Africa, who feared that indigenous populations would see this initiative as an infraction of the religious peace, guaranteed by the regime. As Muslim faith was recognised and protected by the French state, McMahon preferred to take the Muslims away from any risk of proselytism and urged the cardinal to confine his charitable actions to Christian villages. Lavigerie took these commands as an offence, as he was determined to work for all the Algerian population with no exception of creed. In fact, his final goal was to increase the process of Christianisation of the colony given that, unlike other colonial contexts, settlers in Algeria were never particularly engaged in missionary tasks nor proved a special interest for Christianising the indigenous population.⁴² Lavigerie's final aims proved that McMahon's fears were justified in the end. Indeed, Lavigerie was persuaded that France was historically called to resuscitate the legacy of Roman Christianity in north Africa.⁴³ Probably because he saw his authority undermined or because he wanted to stress his disagreement with the governor-general's methods to rule the colony, the truth remains that Lavigerie raised the tone of his reclamations, calling for a further commitment to the expansion of the Christian faith. This created some trouble in the colony and fostered a public debate on the Christianisation of local populations and religious tolerance in the metropole.

The dispute between the Archbishop and the Marshal was commented on by the liberal press only after some time. As the editorialist of the *Journal* recognised, 'nous avons

⁴¹ Charles Martial Lavigerie was appointed archbishop of Algiers in 1867 and since then the missionary conception of colonisation was intensified in Algeria. According to the administrative division created during the Second Empire, Lavigerie extended his scope of action over the dioceses of Oran, Constantine and Algiers. Fontaine, *Decolonizing Christianity*, p. 30. For more detail about cardinal Lavigerie's life and action, see François Renault, *Le cardinal Lavigerie* (Paris: Fayard, 1992) and its translation into English by John O'Donohue, *Cardinal Lavigerie: Churchman, Prophet and Missionary* (London: Athlone Press, 1994).

⁴² See Sessions, *By Sword and Plow*, chapters 5 and 6.

⁴³ Renault, *Le cardinal Lavigerie*, p. 142.

longtemps gardé le silence sur cet incident’, an issue which required prudent opinions, as ‘des faits de cette nature ne peuvent que s’aggraver par la publicité qui leur est donnée’.⁴⁴ This approach to conflict, aiming above all to avoid the break of social peace, found a clear contrast in the reaction of Lavigerie, who seemed far more interested in convincing public opinion of his approach and in encouraging a passionate public debate on the issue. As suggested, more than a conflict between two different ways to face religious conflict in Algeria, the dispute represented a clear struggle between civil authority and the clergy in the colony.

As stated in his writings, Lavigerie defended the right of his diocese to exercise with full autonomy its power across the colony. He wanted the clergymen in Algeria to assist all the needy people (namely after the devastating cholera epidemic and the years of great famine) and, at the same time, provide Muslim populations with the ‘right’ faith. Lavigerie, representing the will of most of the French priesthood at the time, stood for ‘correcting’ Muslims from their mistake of professing a ‘barbarian’ religion and bringing them the proper Christian faith.⁴⁵ To Lavigerie, these two aims of assistance and evangelisation were complementary and indeed could not be achieved without the collaboration of civil power represented by the Bureaux Arabes, or at least if they did not interfere continuously in the church’s action. In a published letter, Lavigerie asked the government to let the church in Algeria have complete freedom of action in order to consolidate ‘un édifice toujours prêt à crouler, parce qu’on a omis de placer à sa base la pierre fondamentale qui est Dieu et sa loi’.⁴⁶ These claims, as the editorialist of the *Journal* noted, hid a greater mission: ‘catéchiser les musulmans et d’extirper l’islamisme de l’Algérie pour remplacer le Croissant par la Croix, le Coran par l’Evangile’.

When it came to discussing religion in the Algerian colonial context, liberals certainly had to face a huge controversy. On the one hand, they were the defenders of the project of assimilation according to which all citizens of France had to adopt—or adapt

⁴⁴ G.-Albert Petit, *Journal des Débats*, 16 May 1868.

⁴⁵ Lavigerie’s image of Muslims was rather negative. He thought of them as an inferior civilisation to the Christian European and complained on several occasions about how difficult it was to convert them. See for example, Karima Dirèche-Slimani, *Chrétiens de Kabylie, 1873-1954: une action missionnaire dans l’Algérie coloniale* (Saint-Denis: Bouchene, 2004), pp. 23–4.

⁴⁶ *Journal des Débats*, 16 May 1868.

to—the cultural, religious and linguistic features of the nation. On the other hand, as defenders of individual liberties, freedom of conscience was non-negotiable.

Nous admirons sincèrement le dévouement incontesté de l'archevêque d'Alger. Tous les cœurs ont été touchés du zèle charitable dont il a fait preuve en recueillant les orphelins que décimaient la misère et la maladie. Mais si nul plus que nous n'est disposé à admirer de tels actes, nous voulons être des premiers aussi à défendre les libertés fondamentales que la France a données au monde, au prix de tant de luttes et de sacrifices. Parmi ces libertés, la liberté de conscience est une des plus précieuses et des plus nécessaires. Cette liberté de conscience, que l'on revendique tous les jours pour les protestants et pour les juifs, faut-il donc la refuser aux indigènes de l'Algérie ? Pouvons-nous, au nom d'un intérêt quel qu'il soit, violer les engagements si souvent renouvelés par la France, de respecter le culte et la foi du peuple vaincu ?⁴⁷

In the end, the defence of freedom proved more important than social cohesion based on assimilation. Under the premise that France could not betray the principles born in 1789, liberals needed to adapt their language and standpoints to particular cases, probably aware of the risk of contradiction it could often imply. Another aspect to keep in mind in the Algerian case, the *Journal* noted, was the obvious reluctance of Muslim populations to abandon their faith and convert to Christianity, as archbishop Lavigerie aimed. Such a goal seemed foolish and utopian to the liberal newspaper's editorialist, which was certain that no Muslim would change his faith, especially if he was forced to. This assumption came along with some veiled criticism of the different ways in which Christians and Muslims approached their own religions:

Nous devons dire, nous devons avouer que les musulmans ont en général beaucoup plus de respect pour le Coran que nous n'en avons pour l'Évangile. Au moins dans les formes extérieures du culte, ils affectent une exactitude, une observance rigoureuse qui fait honte à l'indifférence, pour ne pas dire à l'impiété qu'affichent bon nombre de chrétiens.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Journal des Débats*, 16 May 1868.

⁴⁸ *Journal des Débats*, 16 May 1868.

Whereas in the metropole many people praised their neglecting of Christian precepts as a sort of honourable behaviour, Algerian Muslims instead showed a 'pious respect for their religious customs'. The loss of Christian pride by most of French citizens, the editorialist argued, could contribute to spreading among Muslims the idea that France was a disrespectful nation towards religion which, as a matter of fact, would reassert their religious convictions. In any case, Muslims would only accept conversion on a voluntary basis. For that reason, the archbishop's efforts proved useless. This vision, however, does not mean that the liberal editorialist did not agree with the archbishop in considering the very existence of Muslims in Algeria as one of France's greatest challenges:

Ah ! Sans doute, si l'on pouvait, d'un trait de plume, supprimer le Coran et transformer, avec l'aide du ciel, 3 millions d'Arabes en 3 millions de chrétiens, notre tâche serait rendue singulièrement aisée en Algérie. A coup sûr l'islamisme est un des grands obstacles contre lesquels nous avons à lutter dans l'œuvre que nous poursuivons sans relâche depuis trente-huit ans.⁴⁹

Defending the right of all French citizens to express freely his or her faith did not prevent the *Journal* from openly recognising that the situation in Algeria would be much easier if Muslims were not present there. In this particular matter, there was total agreement with Lavigerie's postulates, although liberals' reluctance to undertake any political action against individual freedom prevented them from fully supporting the archbishop:

Sur ce point, nous sommes complètement d'accord avec Mgr Lavigerie. Mais, nous le répétons, en essayant de détruire l'islamisme dans nos possessions africaines, d'une part nous violerions nos propres conventions ; d'autre part, nous nous exposerions à faire naître de grands troubles au sein des tribus et à amener de dangereux désordres en Algérie.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Journal des Débats*, 16 May 1868.

⁵⁰ *Journal des Débats*, 16 May 1868.

In this respect, the governor-general counted on the support of the liberal newspaper, for he had shown determination in preventing the risks that Lavigerie's pretensions could have had for the colony. Mac-Mahon's resolution to guarantee freedom of conscience to Muslims was equally applauded. Having done otherwise could have endangered public order in the colony.⁵¹

Girardin and the Link Between 'Two Worlds'

Liberals' concern about the way in which religious issues could affect, and indeed did affect, politics grew as problems in Algeria became more severe. It is worth noting that most of the liberal debate on these issues did not focus on the doctrinaire aspects of religion, nor questioned topics such as faith or religious practices, mores and customs, which they considered to belong to a more individual, private sphere. Many of their references to the topic were rather related to exogenous consequences of confrontation between religions, namely geostrategic ones, closely linked to imperial expansion, the inter-imperial dynamics of the nineteenth century and the very concept of Europe and its place in the world. In 1860s France, as the Empire was progressively expanding to new territories and Algeria's colonisation was becoming a true affair of state, liberals deployed a rich variety of arguments to analyse the interplay between religious conflict and global geostrategic politics.

In what follows, an article published on the front page of the liberal *Journal des Débats* on July 1858 by the academic and politician Saint-Marc Girardin will be taken as a representative example of the liberal approach towards the interplay between religion and international politics. In the 1860s, as indeed still happens today, the confrontation between Christian Europe and its surrounding Islamic nations was seen as unavoidable and the fruit of deeply-rooted, irreconcilable differences. Current visions of Europe as being intrinsically Christian, shared by significant sectors of European societies today, were obviously far more widespread in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, at a time in

⁵¹ G.-Albert Petit was clear in this regard: 'Nous ne mettons pas en doute un seul instant l'ardent désir qui anime Mgr Lavigerie de se dévouer à la cause de l'Algérie; mais nous tenons pour certain aussi qu'en ce moment la colonie n'a pas besoin d'éléments nouveaux de désordre et de surexcitation. En présence de la crise que l'Algérie traverse, les représentants du gouvernement doivent tout faire pour maintenir entre eux la bonne harmonie'. *Journal des Débats*, 16 May 1868.

which Islamic communities in Europe were much smaller than today, tensions between the Christian world and Islam developed in the context of colonial encounter and imperialist expansion. In the specific case of France, Algeria's colonisation and the Empire's attempts to enhance its influence in the Near East were the issues to which liberals had to react.

The radicalisation of Islam, as described by French liberals, was seen in the 1860s as an increasingly serious threat to the European nations' stability. As just suggested, this perception was not based on specific problems happening in Europe, but on recent upheavals—rather social instability—taking place in the colonies. The more Islam (or 'Mohammedanism', the term used at the time) increased its power in Saudi Arabia, the more radical Islamic groups felt legitimised to challenge the European imperial power. As Girardin noted:

À mesure que la mahométisme languit et s'amortit à Constantinople, il se réveille et s'exalte à la Mecque. C'est de là que partent les impulsions fanatiques qui agitent l'Inde contre les Anglais, qui agiteraient l'Algérie contre la France, si la France semblait vouloir un instant se relâcher de sa force en Algérie, qui dans l'Afrique centrale étendent partout l'empire d'un mahométisme grossier.⁵²

Girardin, like his ideological counterparts, defended the strengthening of colonial power in Algeria, in order to control the region geopolitically and avoid the inconveniences that weak authority could bring to both the colony and the metropole. When defending this position, Girardin was thinking of the 1857 Indian Rebellion, which had began as a mutiny of sepoys of the East India Company's army and escalated into other mutinies across the country. The revolt, which was perpetrated mainly by Muslim insurgents, provoked great trouble to the British rule of India and therefore was seen with much concern in France because of the contagion effect it could have in colonies such Algeria.⁵³ From his words, one can say that Girardin was

⁵² *Journal des Débats*, 25 July 1858.

⁵³ As for the Indian Rebellion, see for example the classical contributions by Pamela Cardwell, *The Indian Mutiny* (London: Longman, 1975), Michael Edwardes, *Red Year. The Indian Rebellion of 1857*

convinced of the key strategic role Algeria was expected to play in the pacification of the whole North African region, in closely monitoring the development of radical religious organisations which could endanger France's colonial project. As he himself acknowledged, Islam had an astonishing capacity to expand its influence across vast territories, even faster than European empires were able to scientifically explore them. This was a fact he expressed with a certain fear, presenting it as inconvenient for France's interests. However, Girardin did not refer to Islam's 'capacity of conquest' as a purely religious danger, but rather as a geopolitical one. His words speak for themselves:

Je ne veux pas dire que le mahométisme reprenne l'ardeur religieuse de ses commencements ; je ne veux pas dire que le Coran soit plus commenté et plus pratiqué que jamais ; mais la haine du christianisme et surtout des chrétiens est plus vive que jamais. La lutte qui commence entre les mahométans et les chrétiens n'est peut-être point une lutte entre les deux religions, c'est une lutte entre deux climats, si je puis parler ainsi, entre l'Orient et l'Occident.⁵⁴

As already suggested, liberals did not perceive the struggle between Christianity and Islam as a purely religious conflict, but rather as the sad representation of a 'civilisational' difference based on incomprehension. Girardin significantly and openly spoke of a struggle between East and West, two clearly differentiated regions which were, according to his vision, condemned to perpetual misunderstanding. The reasons for that seemed to be quite straightforward: 'l'Europe croit avoir le droit de dominer l'Orient, parce qu'elle est plus civilisée et que la civilisation est le vrai droit divin de pouvoir dans ce monde. L'Orient résiste, [...] il se révolte...'⁵⁵

As one can see from these utterances, Girardin was not openly defending the validity of the alleged moral superiority of the Western world over the East. Rather, he showed it as a given fact, to which the East legitimately reacts. The position that Europe was

(London: Hamilton, 1973) and Frederick William Rawding, *The Rebellion of India, 1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁵⁴ *Journal des Débats*, 25 July 1858.

⁵⁵ *Journal des Débats*, 25 July 1858.

going to take before this struggle was something that concerned him. He presented the relationship between Europeans and Muslims (the true representatives of the East) as being based on mistrust and hatred, not really mutual, but rather coming from the Muslim side.⁵⁶ In his opinion, the battle between the two civilisations was an old one, and seemed to be called to last for a long time:

La lutte n'est pas près de finir entre l'Orient et l'Occident ; Hérodote commence par là son histoire ; elle est donc ancienne, et quoique dans cette vieille guerre les plus grandes victoires et celles qui semblent le plus définitives appartiennent à l'Europe, cependant l'Orient, qui quelquefois paraît vaincu et soumis, reprend toujours la lutte et rejette le joug de l'Occident au moment même où il semble l'avoir accepté avec cette soumission d'esclave qui touche de si près à l'audace du révolté.⁵⁷

Girardin used the example of the Spaniards in America, and the way in which they annihilated the 'American races' to state that, in the nineteenth century, the application of such a cruel method of domination would be simply unthinkable. Europe, he claimed, cannot, and should not, try to eliminate its enemies in the Eastern countries since 'il y a là un vieux monde qui ne se laissera pas exterminer'. Since Orientalism was invincible in the East, as he pointed out, Europe was forced to find a solution to avoid a perpetual situation of conflict:

Heureusement l'orientalisme, qui est indestructible, n'est pas seulement représenté en Orient par le mahométisme et par les mahométans ; il y a aussi un orientalisme chrétien ; et ce que le génie de l'Europe n'a pas pu faire, le génie du christianisme l'a fait, parce que c'est le génie de Dieu. Le christianisme oriental représente la paix et la conciliation entre l'Orient et l'Occident. Les chrétiens orientaux sont les intermédiaires nécessaires entre l'Europe et l'Asie. Ils n'ont pas contre l'Orient le dédain de l'esprit européen ; ils se

⁵⁶ Girardin is clear in showing his fear that Muslims, rather sooner than later, will put the Europeans in danger as a consequence of their hatred towards all that Europe represents: 'L'orientalisme, représenté par les mahométans, déteste les chrétiens et surtout les Européens. Il en a donné de cruelles preuves dans les Indes contre les Anglais ; il en donnera d'autres preuves encore, nous en sommes tristement convaincus'. *Journal des Débats*, 25 July 1858.

⁵⁷ *Journal des Débats*, 25 July 1858.

rapprochent du monde oriental par les mœurs et par les usages ; *ils sont le lien prédestiné des deux mondes*.⁵⁸

It is worth highlighting the role that Girardin conferred to Eastern Christians as mediators between the two worlds.

Citizenship

Another topic around which liberal perceptions on religious matters revolved in the 1860s was that of citizenship. As we have learned in Chapter 2, liberal visions on the role that France had to play in a colonial environment were significantly focused on the need to define and determine the political rights of both settlers and the colonised. These rights were linked to their legal status as French citizens and consequently they fostered a profound discussion about the topic. Napoleon III's regime provided the indigenous population with French nationality, although only a limited few enjoyed rights of full citizenship.

Liberals generally stood for the strengthening of the French nation founded upon the principles of freedom and equality, which indeed created problems when the state faced the challenge of managing diverse ethnic and religious communities. Liberal policies leading to the consecution of social equality have traditionally led to centralisation and harmonisation of citizens of a single country. Especially in France, the liberal state struggled to create a single homogeneous national community, for which different cultural, ethnic, religious groups were seen more as a burden than as a richness. However, their strategy of diminishing these differences to the highest possible degree had to face a great paradox: that of ensuring at the same time individual and social rights and liberties, including religious freedom.

Muslim pilgrimages to Mecca even took place with state financial support. When pilgrims crossed the French border and had to meet local authorities on their way to Arabia, French Muslims (as subjects of Christian France) proudly showed their

⁵⁸ *Journal des Débats*, 25 July 1858 [my emphasis].

belonging to France and its system of rights and freedoms. As Jules Duval told the readers of the *Journal*, when Algerian Muslims were in trouble outside France, ‘ils réclament avec fierté les privilèges de citoyens français et la protection des consuls de notre nation’, and pointed out that

À chaque étape qui les met en présence des autorités locales, on les voit déployer triomphalement leur passeport et faire parade de leur nationalité française, non certes par patriotisme, mais parce qu’ils savent qu’il n’est pas dans tout l’Orient un meilleur titre de sécurité.⁵⁹

Not religious matters, but the civil rights that Algerian Muslim were entitled to enjoy within the French political system were those which created trouble within the Muslim community. Eastern Muslims saw in their Algerian counterparts a privileged group:

Le pèlerinage de ses sujets algériens est un devoir religieux dont elle doit protéger l’accomplissement, car elle leur a promis et garanti la liberté du culte musulman. Sur la terre étrangère, elle ne peut abandonner des hommes qui sont, en Algérie, soumis à ses lois et qui, délaissés par elles, ne pourraient invoquer aucun autre pouvoir.⁶⁰

The defence of freedom of religious conscience was certainly a battleground on which liberals got deeply engaged over the course of the 1860s. The paragraphs above are but an example of the connection between religion and citizenship that French liberals made when evaluating the status of indigenous populations in Algeria. Liberals defended the idea that Algerian Muslims were, above all, French citizens. This ‘administrative’, non-patriotic tie with the metropole needed to be reinforced, they believed, in order to enhance the indigenous population’s sentiment of belonging to the French nation. Of course, theirs was a theoretical approach that was difficult to apply. Liberals had to combine their defence of Muslims’ right to enjoy religious freedom with their conviction that Muslims could only complicate the consolidation of a united,

⁵⁹ *Journal des Débats*, 19 July 1858.

⁶⁰ *Journal des Débats*, 19 July 1858.

culturally uniform nation.⁶¹ Citizenship was thus a crucial issue around which the French colonial experience evolved also in later times, until virtually the dismantling of France's empire.⁶²

3. COCHINCHINA AND THE PROTECTION OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

Religion was a major issue related to Cochinchina's expedition. In the mid-nineteenth century, France was trying to spread its power and influence not only in Europe and the Near East, as previous regimes had been doing since the times of the Revolution, but also in faraway places, in order to become a true counter-power to the British Empire. The British dominated the seas thanks to a powerful navy and their control of strategic trade routes, and their colonisation of India was indeed an important step forward towards the domination of a great part of the Pacific and the Far East. The French therefore aimed at broadening their influence in those remote lands. The presence of French people in the region, however, was not new. For centuries, as suggested in Chapter 2, religious missionaries had settled in the area, especially in the territories of the Kingdom of Annam, where they came under attack in the early nineteenth century.⁶³

In the 1860s, most opposition deputies shared Ignace Plichon's idea that France should not engage in the defence of all missionaries living in 'contrées barbares' since 'toutes les richesses de la France ne sauraient suffire à une semblable protection, et je crois qu'elle serait plus nuisible qu'utile aux intérêts que la France veut servir'. This notion

⁶¹ Almost a century later, Algeria's independence proved that the liberals' struggle for the construction of such a nation had been in vain. As Todd Shepard has pointed out, 'Algeria became the first dramatic failure of French state institutions on French territory to convince people to identify themselves as French'. Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization. The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 9. See also Chapter 1.

⁶² The issue of citizenship in colonial France has been addressed by Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation. Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁶³ An account of the important role that French Catholics played in Cochinchina, especially in the nineteenth century is Charles Keith, 'A Colonial Sacred Union? Church, State, and the Great War in Colonial Vietnam', in Owen White and J. P. Daughton, *In God's Empire. French Missionaries and the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 195-212.

was directly related to the conception that military interventions abroad could only bring problems and make things worse. As Plichon noted:

Nous le voyons d'une manière [...] saisissante en Cochinchine, où nous ne remportons pas une victoire, et ne faisons pas un pas, sans que la terre se trouve arrosée du sang des malheureux chrétiens immolés aux défiances et aux vengeances nationales.⁶⁴

France should not engage as strongly in a military sense in places where there were only religious problems, but think better of the benefits of its military interventions. When economic and trade interests were at stake, then it was worth intervening. In this respect, Plichon reminded how difficult and costly the colonisation of Algeria was and asked the government to avoid all the mistakes made there, since France would not want to repeat the same errors 'six thousand miles away from France'. This vision, however, seemed to not match with that of the emperor, who proudly claimed:

C'est ainsi que, pour venger notre honneur à l'extrême Orient, notre drapeau, uni à celui de la Grande-Bretagne, a flotté victorieux sur les murs de Pékin, et que la croix, emblème de la civilisation chrétienne, surmonte de nouveau, dans la capitale de la Chine, les temples de notre religion, fermés depuis plus d'un siècle.⁶⁵

Catholic missionaries had complained to French authorities in the past, but their claims had never been properly addressed. It was only in the 1850s, when Napoleon III, aiming to enhance his regime's expansionist policies, cast an eye towards Asia and decided to launch a military intervention in lower Cochinchina.⁶⁶ As we have seen, the motivations of this endeavour were manifold, the most important being the wish to obtain for France a more decisive political and economic role in the region. Defending French Catholic missionaries settled in the colony was another one, and the one officially used to justify the expedition. The emperor himself and all his government

⁶⁴ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 166.

⁶⁵ CRCL 1861, unique vol., opening legislative session on 4 February, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Deputy Plichon noted: 'Dans ces derniers temps, les cruautés du gouvernement annamite à l'égard des missionnaires et des chrétiens assez nombreux qui se trouvent dans cet empire, ont appelé l'attention du gouvernement sur la Cochinchine'. ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 165.

rapidly settled on a coherent official discourse to justify before both public opinion and the groups of opposition their new ambitious imperialist project. Their main argument revolved around the central idea that France had the moral duty to assist all its citizens who were outraged by the Annamite's authorities because of their religious beliefs. Avenging their dignity was not an individual but a collective need, the government argued. Although liberals often felt distrustful of the government's claims and their tendency to hide their actions' real goals, this time they did not show great opposition to the project.

Some deputies, however, expressed their concerns regarding the way in which the colony was going to be ruled, either through direct military domination or through the establishment of a protectorate. Charles Ignace Plichon, for instance, wondered about the real need to defend Christianity and the European missionaries in the region. Plichon suggested that the latter issue was being used as an excuse to undertake military actions and establishing a new colony. In doing so, the deputy of opposition created doubts about the government's reliability. As he ironically pointed out, 'les conquêtes religieuses sont des conquêtes essentiellement pacifiques, c'est avec la croix et l'Évangile, et non avec les armes qu'elles s'accomplissent' and poignantly noted that 'le martyr du missionnaire est la plus noble récompense de ses travaux'.⁶⁷ Although martyrdom certainly remained an essential source of glory and inspiration for any missionary throughout the century,⁶⁸ and beyond the implicit attack on the government that these statements represented, Plichon's words can also be read as a denial of the real importance of the missionaries' claims for more security. Surely, Plichon was not among the clearly identifiable liberal deputies. He rather acted as independent, close to the Bonapartists in some cases and close to liberals in others, such as the defence of the freedom of the press.

According to the Empire's propaganda, Napoleon III was forced to intervene in Cochinchina both to protect the French Catholic missionaries from the increasingly

⁶⁷ ASCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, pp. 165, 166.

⁶⁸ Daughton, *An Empire Divided*, p. 46. As for the political use of martyrdom in the nineteenth-century European context, see Lucy Riall, 'Martyrs in Nineteenth-Century Italy', *The Journal of Modern History*, 82/2 (June 2010), pp. 255–87.

harsh attacks of the Annamites and to ensure the safe exercise of Christian faith in the region. This vision was systematically repeated by all ministers and Bonapartist deputies at the Corps législatif and was indeed reproduced in all sorts of official publications. The idea was so widely spread that public opinion would have arguably assumed it as valid.

Some voices, however, criticised and moderated this view. Journalist Eugène Vuillot, renowned director of the important Catholic daily *L'Univers*, termed the expedition as a 'victoire stérile [qui] ne représente pas seulement du temps perdu, de l'argent et des hommes sacrifiés sans profit' but also 'l'affaiblissement morale de la France dans toutes les contrées de l'Indochine'. Vuillot even pointed out that 'on y doute de notre puissance militaire, et notre protectorat, où l'on voyait le salut, est devenu une cause de ruine'. In any case, he clearly stated that the expedition had not accomplished its supposed mission, since 'avant notre intervention les chrétientés annamites avaient beaucoup à souffrir ; depuis notre intervention elles ont été détruites'.⁶⁹

Vuillot's statements came as a heavy blow for the government. His comments connected to the discomfort of a considerable group of deputies at the Corps législatif. His complaints were not the result of an individual whim. In publishing his book *La Cochinchine et le Tonquin*, Vuillot became the voice of disagreement and dissatisfaction regarding the Empire's policy in Asia, a discontent that many people shared. This, however, did not mean a total rejection of government projects. At the same time, he showed his acute criticism 'avec douleur mais sans aucune pensée de récrimination', he pointed out that 'il est évident que le gouvernement français voulait et veut encore atteindre en Cochinchine et au Tonquin le but fécond et glorieux marqué à son expédition'.⁷⁰ These comments are important as they show that political Catholicism, so often linked to Bonapartism due to their alleged shared aims when it came to defending religion, was structured in a much more complex way.

⁶⁹ Eugène Vuillot, *La Cochinchine et le Tonquin. Le pays, l'histoire et les missions* (Paris: Gaume Frères et J. Duprey, 2nd ed, 1861), v-vi. Vuillot complained because 'la persécution n'a pas seulement tué ceux que les bourreaux ont pu atteindre. Des fidèles, des prêtres indigènes, des missionnaires sont morts de misère dans les bois et les marécages où ils avaient cherché un asile' (p. vii for this last quote).

⁷⁰ Vuillot, *La Cochinchine et le Toquin*, p. viii.

Questioned about these issues, the minister without portfolio Billault emphasised the government's inalterable will to continue with Cochinchina's colonisation and to defend, at any price, the interests of France in the region. He could not be more clear in warning that 'la France a mis les pieds en Cochinchine, et elle n'est pas disposée d'en sortir', adopting as his own the statement of a Bonapartist deputy who had declared in the Corps législatif that '[j]'ai n'ai pas besoin de signaler à la Chambre l'importance de notre expédition en Cochinchine [car] il y a là un intérêt majeur. Là aussi, nous avons le sang chrétien à venger'.⁷¹

Ironically, whilst Catholics protested for the scarce results of the expedition regarding the defence of Christian missionaries, expressions of support to the Second Empire's plans in Cochinchina came not only from the side of the Bonapartist deputies (with the liberals' acquiescence), but also on the part of officers and military men who, in most cases, came to publish their perceptions and experience in the colony.

À l'empereur Napoléon III était réservé l'honneur d'arrêter l'effusion du sang des missionnaires et des chrétiens, de venger la France, et de la doter d'une magnifique colonie. C'est une belle page que l'histoire ne manquera pas de consacrer à la gloire de l'illustre souverain de la France, et de sa valeureuse armée.⁷²

Liberal media also welcomed the Empire's policy towards the colony and supported the government's attempts to establish order and security for Christian missionaries. The defence of the Christian faith in Asia was often expressed in terms of pride and appreciation for the emperor's determination to make the nation's values prevail in faraway, hostile contexts.⁷³ Moreover, religion played an important part in spreading the French language and culture among indigenous populations in Cochinchina. Since the

⁷¹ CRCL 1861, unique vol., session of 20 March, p. 328.

⁷² Michel Du'c Chaigneau, ancien officier de marine, consul de France à Hué et Grand Mandarin, *Souvenirs de Hué* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1867), p. 270.

⁷³ An article of *Le Temps* claimed: 'Les restes d'une colonie chrétienne et nos zélés missionnaires sont massacrés en Cochinchine ; par ordre de l'empereur, la Cochinchine est vaincue, la colonie chrétienne rétablie, et le pays ouvert de nouveau aux prédications de nos missionnaires'. *Le Temps*, 22 August 1863.

beginning of colonisation, Catholic priests had used Latin to teach and fulfil their main goal: evangelise the indigenous populations. When military power became stronger and more present in the colony's every day life, as it happened also in Algeria, officers found it difficult to communicate with the local population as no one knew the other's language. In order to teach a number of interpreters who could help in the communication process, several schools were created in order to teach French, a basic knowledge of numeracy and some techniques to improve agricultural production.⁷⁴ Since the French clergy was present in the colony in small numbers, the colonial authorities rapidly acknowledged the need to train local, indigenous priests to ensure that the evangelisation was duly accomplished.⁷⁵ It was not only at home but also in the colony that the clergy and the regime co-operated. This co-operation is telling of the use that the Second Empire made of colonial ventures not only to spread France's power overseas, but to consolidate the strategic networks needed, namely with the Church, to sustain its power at home. By supporting the regime's plans for defending Christian missionaries abroad, liberals found likewise a source of legitimation, for they knew that such political position could only strengthen their ties with French society and help to present themselves as responsible patriots before public opinion.

4. MEXICO

As the heir of Spain's Catholic tradition, Mexico was from the times of its independence—and until today—a country of deep Christian roots. Unlike Algeria and Cochinchina, where the French encountered and had to face profound religious differences, Mexico was a totally different case. When analysing liberal domestic perceptions of French expansionism, religion was not with regard to Mexico an issue of debate as it was in relation to the other two imperialist ventures under study. At most, religion could have been a topic of discussion for its political implications. As shown in Chapter 2, Mexico was in the 1860s ruled by a government which had as its main

⁷⁴ Marcel Émerit, *Les méthodes coloniales de la France sous le Second Empire* (Alger: Société historique algérienne, 1943), p. 205. As for the connection between colonisation, religion and education in Cochinchina and the rest of the Indochinese peninsula, see Pascale Bezançon, *Une colonisation éducatrice? L'expérience indochinoise (1860-1945)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002).

⁷⁵ Bezançon, *Une colonisation éducatrice?*, p. 38.

political adversary the conservative party, representative of the interests of, broadly speaking, landowners and the clergy. The liberal option of President Juárez and his counterparts was seeking to deprive the church of its great privileges, which created great controversy between two seemingly irreconcilable political options.

As the intervention in Mexico was never seen as an archetypal colonial venture, ideas of civilisation and the spreading of allegedly superior values over 'backward' peoples were expressed in ways and with an intensity that were very different from the case of other colonial projects. With regard to Mexico, the defence of Catholicism was nevertheless considered. A notice by the minister of Justice in 1863 mentioned religion as one of the reasons for which the expedition to Mexico was undertaken, which was seen as a 'noble soutien au-delà des mers à la cause de la civilisation, aux intérêts de la religion catholique et à l'honneur de notre drapeau'.⁷⁶ Moreover, in order to subvert the political system in the country and to foster the establishment of a new monarchical regime, the Bonapartist government did not hesitate to gain full support of Mexican conservatives. Mexican liberals, as their European counterparts, did not reject religion, but did they stand for the loss of political power and influence of the Catholic Church. The Senate also agreed to consider the Mexican enterprise a complicated one and praised Napoleon III's determination for avoiding any 'antagonisme de race' and 'rapprocher les deux mondes par les échanges pacifiques et bienfaisantes de la civilisation'.⁷⁷

The general commander of the French expeditionary corps to Mexico, Marshal Forey, insisted in parliament that the role of France in Mexico had less to do with religion than with the country's moral development. As he said:

Le Mexique n'est pas perdu. Il y a des éléments d'avenir dans ce pays [...] Oui, malheureusement tout est à refaire au Mexique. Le sens moral y a été complètement perverti ; il n'y a plus d'administration, plus de justice, plus d'armée, plus d'esprit national ; il n'y a, pour ainsi dire, plus rien. Mais ce n'est pas la faute de la nation. Au

⁷⁶ Minister of Justice, Paris, 1 August 1863, quoted at Hazareesingh, *La Saint-Napoléon, Quand le 14 Juillet se fêtait le 15 Août*, p. 87.

⁷⁷ ASCL 1865, vol. 1, session of 18 March, p. 190.

CHAPTER 5
Liberals, Religion and Empire

fond elle est bonne, elle est généreuse, elle a les sentiments du peuple d'où elle procède, des Castellans, des fiers Castellans.

Thus, as a convinced Catholic, Forey gave to the Mexican expedition a mystic sense. He declared in the Senate: 'Je crois en Dieu et je ne peux pas supposer que, puisque sous son inspiration notre Empereur s'est armé de l'épée de la France pour rétablir l'ordre dans ce pays, la Providence abandonne le Mexique. Non, ce n'est pas possible !'. Forey was convinced that providence could not leave Mexico to its fate, so the French intervention was meant to be the solution to all the problems of the country. Napoleon III aimed at achieving in Mexico 'une des belles pages de son règne' which, according to Forey, 'l'histoire prouvera un jour qu'elles étaient vraies'.⁷⁸

The Mexican people, so a Bonapartist deputy claimed, were wise and young and had suffered important misfortunes, the greatest among which was the conquest of America by the Spanish. Comparing it with Ancient Egypt, he said Mexico only needed to receive Enlightenment ideas and the Gospel to become an important nation in the world, something that occurred 'vous savez comment'.⁷⁹ These words were representative of a widely shared consideration in 1860s France that the Spanish conquest had been rather damaging for Mexico and the Americas in general. French Bonapartists, and also liberals, marked a difference between them and the Spanish way to colonise, although they sought the Spaniards' collaboration in many of their expansionist projects.⁸⁰

When Napoleon III decided to undertake his 'Mexican dream', he was surely thinking of the spirit that, barely half a century earlier, had inspired his uncle when conquering Egypt. The Napoleonic campaigns in the country of the pyramids, the soil of the most ancient civilisation known by the Europeans in the early nineteenth century, still lasted by the 1860s in the minds of French elites as an unforgettable success for their nation.

⁷⁸ ASCL 1865, vol. 1, session of 18 March, p. 191.

⁷⁹ Achille Jubinal, CRCL 1862, vol. 2, session of 13 March, p. 156.

⁸⁰ A general overview of France's attempts to be influential in Latin America, including the interplay with other European powers, namely Spain, and local American elites can be found in Michael Gobat, 'The Invention of Latin America: A Transnational History of Anti-Imperialism, Democracy, and Race', *American Historical Review*, 118/5 (December 2013), pp. 1345-1375.

In the case of Mexico, not religion but science was a clear motivation of French imperialism. As Napoleon I did in Egypt, the Second Empire aimed at fostering in Mexico an ambitious plan of scientific expeditions which were intended to discover new archaeological ruins, to find new raw materials, and to know more about such an abundant land. Specific commissions were created to conduct anthropologic, linguistic, historical and geological research across the country.

Thus, these expeditions need to be framed in Napoleon III's will to follow his uncle's footsteps in Africa half a century earlier. The idea of bringing to light 'undiscovered' places and materials connects to the very essence of imperialism in the nineteenth century. Mexico and all of Central America appeared to be an ideal starting point to develop the Second Empire's project of cultural domination in the region.⁸¹ The study of local languages proved to be a priority for the Second Empire's scientists, who undertook such an endeavour prompted by the desire to emulate Champollion's discoveries in Egypt: 'Les ruines de Palenque gardent des mystères comparables à ceux que l'expédition d'Égypte trouva au bord du Nil et que, grâce à elle, Champollion put ensuite percer'.⁸²

To that effect, the 'Commission scientifique, littéraire et artistique' was created to 'recueillir et coordonner, soit pour les conserver dans ses salles d'exposition permanente, soit pour les expédier en France, les objets intéressant les diverses branches sus mentionnées des sciences, lettres et beaux arts, qui lui seront envoyés des divers points du Mexique'.⁸³ The Mexican scientific expedition's final goal was clear, as

⁸¹ Napoleon III's project to strengthening cultural domination over the former Spanish empire in the Americas was, as suggested in Chapter 3, a way to promote Latin, Catholic, monarchic values in opposition to the Anglo-Saxon Protestant republicanism the United States represented in the region. Second Empire's conservative elites were clear that France needed to replace Spain in the role of guiding European power it had in early modern times. This project enhanced further the construction of the anti-imperialist concept, more cultural than racial, of 'Latin America', which Latin American elites developed in opposition to both U.S. and European intervention in their countries. This was especially the case after Napoleon III's attempt to restore absolutism in Mexico, as local liberal elites increasingly identified with the concept, as Michel Gobat suggests in his 2013 article 'The invention of Latin America', especially pp. 1346, 1373.

⁸² Reminiscence to Napoleon I's expeditionary spirit is noticeable in a draft of a document addressed to the emperor, unknown author and date, AMAE 46ADP/7.

⁸³ Document dated March 1864, AMAE 46ADP/7.

it stands in the first article of its draft regulation: 'faire connaître à tous les points de vue le Mexique proprement dit et les contrées qui se rattachent à cet antique centre de civilisation antique'.⁸⁴ Many officials were mobilised to make sure that all their subordinates collaborated with the task of the commission. Mexico was a land rich in natural resources and raw materials which appeared to be very coveted by French businessmen. The country excelled in gold, silver, copper, sodium and salt mines, to name the most important. Utilisation of these resources did not happen from the beginning of the French intervention. In a 1866 letter, businessman J. Vaillant suggested that the richness of the country was still underestimated and suggested that the Minister of Foreign Affairs take action in this matter.⁸⁵ Initially against the intervention, this businessman came to realise that the presence of a 'dominant French element' in Mexico could be very useful to counteract the United States' expansionist wills and, by the way, its attacks against the French people, since...

...le peuple américain est un grand enfant, orgueilleux et vantard. Son ambition est sans bornes, et sa jalousie contre la France en particulier se traduit par des insolences inouïes. Que l'Europe y prenne garde ; les propensions de ce peuple ne tendent à rien moins qu'à la domination du monde, et si les gouvernements européens n'opposent pas une digue à cette ambition, les plus grands embarras, pour ne pas dire plus, pourraient en résulter.⁸⁶

Once the Civil War ended, the United States focused on helping the Juárez troops by sending them weapons and ammunition. Republican resistance to the new Mexican imperial government and therefore the French Empire relied greatly on the help that might come from outside. As Vaillant points out, at a certain point, it was a matter of pride for the French to keep their troops in Mexico and to sustain Maximilian's reign, for it was the most effective way to both ensure the French nationals' safety and make the world notice France's ascendancy in America.

⁸⁴ Mexican scientific expedition's draft regulation, AN F/17/2909.

⁸⁵ Letter from businessman J. Vaillant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 29 July 1866, AMAE 46ADP/8.

⁸⁶ Vaillant to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 29 July 1866, AMAE 46ADP/8.

5. CONCLUSION

In the nineteenth century, the relationship between the state and the Church in France was controversial, as it was in other neighbouring countries. As his uncle did in the early nineteenth century, Napoleon III tried to use the Church's political power and social influence to spread his regime's propaganda. Indeed, the French clergy supported enthusiastically Louis Napoleon's coup in 1851, for it saw in the new imperial regime a good opportunity to ensure its prerogatives and keep them away from any revolutionary threat. The relationship between the Second Empire and the Church was thus founded on mutual pragmatism.

In the 1860s, religion remained a factor of division among liberals.⁸⁷ Apart from their different ways to approach religious faith, liberals disagreed on the political role that the church had to play in the country. Émile Ollivier, for instance, recognised that liberal Catholics were comparable to 'cette poussière qu'à la veille d'une bataille le vent soulève entre les deux armées et qui les empêche de se voir jusqu'à ce qu'elle soit retombée à terre', suggesting that they often made it difficult to unite the liberal family.⁸⁸

The relationship between religion and imperialist ventures is difficult to tackle, for it is rather inseparable from other political and cultural issues. As for what parliamentary and press sources show, liberals did not engage much in religious debates when discussing French expansionism in the 1860s. The Roman Question and Napoleon III's intervention in Italy was a topic which created huge controversy among intellectual and political elites and deepened the ideological division between different political groups, either in power or in opposition. However, the Roman affair cannot be placed in the 'imperialistic ventures' category, as it was mainly a European matter. Therefore, the debates both in the Corps législatif and in the press about this matter have not been analysed in depth. Rather, they have served as a general context for the topic on which this chapter focuses, that is, liberal attitudes towards religious matters in relation to the

⁸⁷ Antoine Schwartz, *L'Union libérale. Contribution à une sociologie politique des "libéraux" sous le Second Empire* (PhD thesis, University of Paris Ouest Nanterre, 2011), p. 59.

⁸⁸ Émile Ollivier, personal diary 1861, AN 542AP/5.

Second Empire's expansionist projects. Broadly speaking, it must be said that religion was used by Napoleon III's government as an official justification for undertaking imperialist ventures in Algeria, Cochinchina and Mexico, although with very different intensities.

Regarding Algeria, religion was a major topic. Since its colonisation in the 1830s, Algeria was the most important laboratory for the French nation to confront its cultural, linguistic and religious values in the 'unknown'. From the very beginning, Muslim indigenous populations and their profession of Islam caused problems to French colonial authorities, which had to deal with this religious complexity following the indications by political elites in the metropole, often ignorant of the real situation on the spot. In the 1860s, the Bonapartist government had to face social upheavals provoked by religious confrontation, as any other government probably did before. The effectiveness and rapidity of colonisation came to be questioned by religious authorities, enthusiastically represented by archbishop Lavignerie, who increasingly saw the need to accelerate the process for Muslims to become Christians. This challenge was in clear contradiction to Napoleon III's tendency to preserve the indigenous' mores, habits and religion for the sake of the colony's social peace.

Two competing visions of facing the Muslim question and of evaluating the role they had to play in the colony's prosperity were thus at stake, provoking at times important institutional trouble. Liberals proved to be vague when facing this debate. Whereas they were in favour of an assimilationist approach to deal with difference—claiming that all French citizens had to be equal no matter where they lived or were born—they appeared to be more moderate than convinced conservative Catholics, such as the archbishop of Algiers, when it came to forcing religious conversions. The defence of freedom of religious conscience came into play, proving that it was a value deeply rooted in liberals' minds. It was 'one of the most precious and most needed freedoms', as we have seen in the preceding pages. Liberals had to deal constantly with the contradiction of standing for an assimilationist project and, at the same time, demanding respect for individual freedoms.

CHAPTER 5
Liberals, Religion and Empire

In Cochinchina, religion became a central issue too. In 1858, after the king of Annam ordered new measures of repression against (mainly French and Spanish) Christian missionaries established in the region, Napoleon III and his Spanish counterparts decided to intervene militarily in order to stop such aggressions. The French troops operating at the time in China rapidly took the southern part of the Kingdom of Annam to protect the Christian missionaries. Shortly thereafter, the French navy joined the armies to consolidate the domination of the territory. Once the missionaries were protected and their honour avenged, the French troops remained in Cochinchina, proving that their presence was rather aiming to fulfil other economic and geostrategic goals. In the metropole, liberals never opposed directly the plans for protecting the missionaries, nor questioned openly the government's official justification for undertaking the venture.

With regard to Mexico, religion was an issue that played a much lesser role. The government never used it as a justification for the military expedition. Since the earliest Spanish colonisation in modern times, Mexico had become a Catholic country. Therefore, religion was not precisely an element of differentiation with France. Although Napoleon III profited from his, and his wife's, contacts with Mexican conservatives, defenders of the clergy's interests, French liberals never questioned the Mexican venture for any religious purpose. Science and plans for cultural domination were more important for Napoleon III's government when decided to undertake such venture. In this respect, liberals showed no clear opposition.

Conclusion

Liberals and the Empire: A Relation of Mutual Influence, the Making of a Political Brand

At Home with the Empire

On the occasion of the inauguration of the Paris Universal Exhibition on 1st April 1867, the Empire's greatest personalities led by the emperor and his wife entered in all their pomp the pavilions placed at Champs de Mars. Their Majesties, a contemporary pamphlet flatteringly noted, showed their deepest gratitude and satisfaction for the event while 'pendant tout le parcours, à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur du palais de l'Exposition, elles ont été acclamées avec le plus vif enthousiasme'.¹ To inaugurate the exhibition was certainly a cause of rejoicing for the emperor and the entire government, for it was the living image of the Empire's success, a priceless projection of France's glory to the world. The same pamphlet pointed out enthusiastically:

L'on peut être fier de son pays, en visitant cette merveille des merveilles que l'on nomme le palais de l'Exposition du Champ-de-Mars. Quand on songe qu'en si peu de temps, sur un sol plat de 446.000 mètres carrés, ce pays a pu, avec ses seules ressources, opérer tant de chefs-d'œuvre, c'est à crier au miracle ! Que de difficultés vaincues... que d'or, que de travail !!!²

The 1867 Universal Exhibition was indeed an excellent opportunity for the imperial regime to promote its achievements overseas. Like any other universal exhibition, especially during the nineteenth century, that of Paris was meant to enhance the Second Empire's power and splendour, bringing together domestic growth and imperial expansion. The event also represented magnificently the Second Empire's political

¹ Anonymous author, *L'exposition universelle à vol d'oiseau* (Paris: Alphonse Duchenne, 1867), p. 3.

² *L'exposition universelle à vol d'oiseau*, p. 5.

CONCLUSION

imaginary. The regime tried hard to present itself as a powerful and successful form of government, immensely beneficial for all the French people. Napoleon III took advantage to present himself as a leader of a flowering country in Europe. Broadly speaking, liberal thinkers and politicians did not criticise the exhibition but rather supported it, for it symbolised France's economic dynamism and political power. The exhibition was indeed a clear example of what Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose have labelled as 'being at home with the empire', as much as 'à chaque pas, vous vous trouvez transportés dans un pays nouveau, costumes nouveaux, visages nouveaux, mœurs nouvelles... C'est étourdissant ! C'est grandiose! C'est magnifique !!!'.³

In this exhibition, Algeria played an important part. Jules Duval, probably the liberal thinker who was most engaged with the defence of Algeria's colonisation, suggested that the previous exhibition in 1855 was 'un début dans la carrière de la grande publicité' of Algeria as France's main colony, a moment in which the colony entered the arena of inter-imperial competition with strong confidence in its economic strength:

Depuis un quart de siècle, cherchant sa voie dans les directions les plus diverses, à travers mille tâtonnements pénibles et coûteux, elle avait acquis enfin la connaissance de ses principales richesses [...], elle faisait appel aux intelligences et aux capitaux de l'Europe, en leur disant : voilà ce que je suis, ce que je puis, ce que je vau.⁴

The 1867 exhibition continued this path, making Algeria's progress visible 'at first sight'.⁵ The rest of the colonies were placed together in a hall which was the same size as that of Algeria alone. The pavilions exhibited plenty of cartographic materials as well as images and photographs depicting the indigenous people's everyday life and the colony's landscapes, but 'les fermes, les villages, les villes, les usines, les travaux publics de tout ordre, qui marquent la trace et le progrès de la colonisation, on y a à peine pensé, à la différence des colonies anglaises, qui ont recouru pour la plupart, avec une ampleur intelligente, à ce genre de propagande, déjà fort apprécié à l'Exposition de Londres'.⁶

³ *L'exposition universelle à vol d'oiseau*, p. 6.

⁴ Jules Duval, *L'Algérie et les colonies françaises* (Paris: Guillaumin et Cie., 1877), p. 201.

⁵ Not in vain, it has been suggested that the Paris exhibition might be regarded as a 'hypostasis of the civilisation-idea'. Reuel A. Lochore, *History of the Idea of Civilization in France (1830-1870)* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid, 1935), p. 100.

⁶ Duval, *L'Algérie et les colonies françaises*, pp. 202–3 [my emphasis].

CONCLUSION

Duval's words are worth noting, as they refer to two important aspects this dissertation has aimed to highlight: first, the French liberals' inclination to compare their nation to Britain, which acted as a sort of inescapable reference for them. Certainly, they were not the only ones to do so. Britain was taken as a model, a reference and a counter-model by virtually all ideological groups in 1860s France. Yet, as example of a liberal regime in mid-nineteenth-century Europe, French liberals looked to Britain with a special interest. Second, Duval underlines the idea that imperialist ventures had an intrinsic propagandistic mission which aimed to reinforce at home the image of those who undertook these ventures. Both in Britain and in France, the governments in charge of running colonial expansion were looking—not only but also—for social recognition. It was very important not only to colonise, but to make the results of colonisation visible, noticeable to everyone for the sake of the nation's progress, as Duval noted referring to Algeria: 'En Europe, et en France même, on ne peut guère se résoudre à croire qu'une société nouvelle, constituée avec les forces et les éléments de la civilisation, ait surgi en quelques années sur un sol qui semblait voué à une éternelle barbarie'.⁷ To achieve this goal, the press played a very important part.

The 1860s witnessed an interesting combination of the strengthening of French imperial ambitions and the capacity of both public opinion and political opposition to monitor the Empire's actions due to the application of liberal measures, especially regarding the press and the Corps législatif's internal running. Through the examination of liberal responses to French expansionism under Napoleon III in the 1860s, this thesis contributes to rethinking a political regime which has so deeply shaped France's modern history. The Second Empire and the almost two decades it lasted were not a mistake of an alleged teleological path towards the Republic—as it became fashionable to think among liberal circles in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries—but as an essential period to understand France's intellectual and political transformation in modern times. One of this thesis' essential purposes is to bring together two important dimensions of mid-nineteenth-century French politics, which have resulted in two different, rather disconnected corpuses of scholarly literature: liberalism and

⁷ Duval, *L'Algérie et les colonies françaises*, p. 203.

imperialism. National and imperial historical narratives encounter each other in such an undertaking, breaking the tendency of considering them as two distinct, almost incompatible fields of study separated by old intellectual schemes which remain in the minds of increasingly fewer historians.

Competing Political Ideologies and Mutual Influences

The Introduction has stated that the focus of this thesis is on the liberal ‘dimension’ of the French Second Empire, which implies two different things: on the one hand, it refers to the extent to which Napoleon III’s Empire, as an institutional and political machinery, progressively adopted measures of government that can be defined as ‘liberal’, especially with regard to economic development, free trade and the reaching of new individual freedoms. On the other hand, the expression refers to the way in which liberal thinking and liberal attitudes to politics were organised and expressed in times of the Second Empire. As suggested, the liberal political movement in the late 1850s and 1860s was mainly, yet not only, a movement of opposition.

Analysing liberal approaches to French expansionism together with the development of the Bonapartist mainstream opens an interesting perspective of French politics in the 1860s. Liberals and Bonapartists were not separate from and impermeable to each other. They both built their ideological position in constant interaction and mutual influence. At times, they aimed to achieve the same, or similar, goals, although their conception of the French nation and its projection abroad was definitely founded on different outlooks. Liberals believed in France’s moral superiority as a political unity with the right and duty to spread its values, mores and customs across the world. Although somewhat sharing this vision with the Bonapartists, liberals combatted the latter’s imperialistic rhetoric—guided by an excessive zeal in the defence of patriotic honour—which they considered damaging to France’s real interests.

Liberals supported colonial expansion when it was clearly intended to provide economic advantages to the metropole and to be a source of global prestige for France. French liberals in the 1860s viewed colonial expansionism as an effective way to enlarge France’s economic and strategic influence in the world and to compete with other

CONCLUSION

powerful European empires, namely Britain. In this sense, liberals had some basic premises in common with the Bonapartists, although the former always put the sense of efficiency beyond any other consideration. In the case of ventures such as the one in Mexico, liberals were opposed to wasting the nation's economic and human resources to pursue unclear goals, that they saw as related more to the emperor and his regime's glory than to the achievement of tangible benefits for the nation.

Although the Bonapartists tried to present the Second Empire's expansionist project overseas as a direct consequence of their ambitious ideal for France, the truth is that liberals contributed largely to the configuration of the French imperial imaginary. Liberal criticism of Bonapartist imperialism was harsh, but it never denied the latter's underpinnings. Liberals believed in France's moral superiority as the Bonapartists did, and were indeed persuaded that France was legitimately entitled to deploy its influence worldwide through political, economic or cultural ways. Liberals managed to keep a good balance between the defence of the French nation and their criticism of the Bonapartist government. Both actions benefitted their own interest as much as they presented them as a reliable, truthful political option to lead the country and to represent, better than anyone else, France's interests in the world.

Broadly speaking, French liberals in the 1860s advocated the defence of the right of nations, political rights of representation for colonial settlers and the application of effective economic measures to enhance industry and trade in the colonies. The discourse about French expansionism kept liberals fairly united, facilitating their internal coherence. French liberals rejected the Bonapartists' bombastic imperialism, which entailed high budgetary costs and brutal military interventions. Liberals rather stressed the need to take action to encourage industrial production, the extraction of raw materials, and to promote the opening of new trade routes and commercial exchanges. To a great extent, liberals built their political claims on the need for France to keep balanced finances and ensure budgetary control. As did their British counterparts, French liberals argued in favour of fostering private business instead of increasing public expenditure as a sign of progress and for the sake of social prosperity. Indeed, they even presented the fact of having strong, sound national finances as an asset to gain international prestige. To achieve this goal, liberals advocated a more

CONCLUSION

moderate, less violent policy abroad. As I suggest, French liberals' arguments in favour of reducing the number of overseas ventures in the 1860s somewhat contradicts existing scholarly assumptions about outright liberal support of imperialist ventures in the mid-nineteenth century.

By the mid 1860s, the Second Empire was already giving signs of moving towards political and economic liberalisation. At least from an official point of view, the defence of liberal values was far stronger than it had been barely one decade earlier. Napoleon III's public speeches stressed the need to encourage individual initiative before an excessive interference of the state in public and private affairs. On the occasion of the opening of the 1865 legislative session, the emperor proudly claimed that, in his personal struggle to reduce the obstacles that restrained 'la libre expression de l'initiative individuelle', he aimed to make it easier for commercial and workers' associations to carry out their activities in France. A key pillar of the new liberal epoch was without a doubt the Commercial Treaty, signed with Great Britain in 1860, which had allowed both British and French producers to expand their goods without being charged with customs fees. Yet not only the Treaty was applauded by the emperor as a positive measure for France's economy; he also stressed the fact that national trade had reached unknown levels of prosperity 'grâce à une législation libérale, grâce à l'impulsion donnée à tous les éléments de la richesse nationale' and proudly announced that French commerce had more than tripled its annual revenues since the advent of the Empire.⁸ The Empire's liberal tendency expressed itself in political terms too. By the end of the regime, Napoleon III mandated the drafting of a new constitution for Algeria. This text consecrated freedom of transactions and communication among all the inhabitants of the colony (art. 3) and established that every civil department would be granted the right to send a representative to the Corps législatif (art. 16), one of the oldest liberal demands in relation to the colony.⁹

All in all, the 1860s witnessed two political ideologies which confronted as well as influenced each other. Liberals and Bonapartists struggled to obtain social recognition

⁸ ASCL 1865, vol. 1, session of 15 February, pp. 3-4.

⁹ *Une constitution pour l'Algérie?*

<http://www.napoleontrois.fr/dotclear/index.php?post/2006/04/05/128-une-constitution-pour-l-algerie> (28 September 2016).

and make their viewpoints shared and supported as widely as possible, and their competition found a prolific breeding-ground in the discussion of the Second Empire's expansionist ventures. Bonapartists and liberals represented two ways of understanding not only France as a nation, but also the very exercise of political practice. Both struggled to make their vision of the country and themselves predominant and lasting, as the two following paragraphs—the first one Bonapartist, the second one liberal—come to illustrate:

Vous avez en même temps décerné à nos armées un des plus magnifiques triomphes dont l'histoire ait gardé le souvenir. Soldats de la civilisation, du droit des peuples et des légitimes intérêts du pays, ces braves ont mérité ce glorieux témoignage de leur chef suprême, en versant leur sang dans les quatre parties du monde [...] La France possède, dans son génie, des forces immenses qui décuplent le bien : elle les mettra au service de la noble cause qu'elle représente. Par là nous verrons les partis s'effacer et la nation grandir et prospérer. La France, plus riche sous le rapport des institutions, des lumières, du commerce et des arts, resserrera les liens qui l'unissent à la Dynastie.¹⁰

Nous vous demandons, alors, quand nous serons rentrés dans la vie privée, de ne pas oublier complètement les cinq députés qui n'ont pas désespéré, quand presque tous les hommes politiques désespéraient et se tenaient à l'écart; nous vous demandons de garder un souvenir sympathique à ceux qui n'ont pas voulu que l'histoire pût dire un jour qu'à une époque quelconque, la France libérale s'était abandonnée elle-même !¹¹

Imperialist Ventures

The French political culture of the 1860s was informed by a rich range of notions and concepts mainly crafted during the French Revolution, which expressed a particular conception of the role of France in the world, as an intellectual and moral unity called to spread its values everywhere. This particular mindset, which was indeed a fruitful source of French nationalism in the nineteenth century, was not exclusive to any ideological group, but instead a shared set of ideas built around three key notions:

¹⁰ Address to the throne approved by an almost absolute majority of Bonapartist senators, ASCL 1865, vol. 1, session of 18 March, p. 192.

¹¹ *Cinq députés de l'opposition (Alfred Darimon, Jules Favre, Émile Ollivier, Ernest Picard, Hénon) à leurs électeurs de Paris et de Lyon: compte-rendu de leurs travaux* (Paris, 1863), p. 16.

CONCLUSION

civilisation, glory and greatness. When analysing liberal approaches to this conception and the relation that this role had with a broader conception of civilisation and the French civilising mission, Algeria comes to play a prominent part, as the 'jewel in the crown' of French colonialism since the times of its creation in 1830. To Napoleon III, who viewed himself as the legitimate heir of the Napoleonic ideas his uncle had begun to define some decades earlier, Algeria was likewise seen as an enthralling, challenging project deserving all the government's attention. For the liberal opposition, and among liberal circles in general, Algeria became a major issue of concern, dramatically related to important political and economic matters, such as the need to integrate the colony within the metropolis' institutional scheme and to foster, among others, cotton industrial production.

As defenders of the free market and the need to find new trade opportunities to foster France's economy, liberals praised the colonisation of Cochinchina from the beginning. Their concerns about the costs of the expeditions were practically inexistent in general terms, and only few voices complained about the damage this expedition, together with other faraway ventures, could inflict on the state public finances. In any case, these concerns were by no means comparable to those expressed regarding the expedition to Mexico. Liberals always understood, and supported, the project of founding a new colonial space in the Far East, from which new, profitable trade exchanges could be developed. As already suggested, the example of British India as a prosperous colonial venture was permanently pressing on French leaders' subconscious as a model to imitate.

Certainly, Cochinchina opened rich new opportunities for France's economy, not only because of the wide range of abundant raw materials that could be exploited on the spot, but also due to all sort of infrastructures, buildings and machinery that French entrepreneurs and businessmen could build or fund. This was the case of powerful steam engines that were needed to undertake public works in Saigon, which, as Duval noted, brought to French industrials at the metropole 'd'importantes commandes'.

La ville de Saigon croît et embellit à vue d'œil, une liberté commerciale absolue attire dans son port de nombreux navires venus des diverses régions de l'Orient avec la

CONCLUSION

certitude d'y écouler leurs cargaisons et de repartir bientôt chargés de riz à destination, non seulement des pays asiatiques mais de Maurice et de la Réunion, ainsi que des places maritimes de France, Angleterre et d'Allemagne.¹²

Britain, however, was much more than solely a power to overcome. It was mostly an example to follow. Generally speaking, this duality was rather noticeable in most liberal accounts on Cochinchina's colonisation, informed by a delicate mixture of admiration and rivalry. In this respect, imperialist endeavours reshaped the political and ethical arenas of public debate, and boosted new conceptions of France as an imperial power.

Both the Empire's domestic functioning and its imperialist ventures abroad were mainstream topics for the French political debate in the 1860s. The then predominant ideological current, the Bonapartists, used all the means at their disposal to configure and consolidate a solid mental framework from which the ruling political elites could influence public opinion. A vast majority of deputies in parliament contributed to providing the Second Empire with the popular legitimacy it sought to achieve from the beginning. As a consequence of this situation, liberals needed to find innovative ways to organise themselves and ensure that their claims were heard in the chamber. A reduced group of five deputies coming from diverse pre-existent political groups, and their fruitful collaboration with other representatives (mainly republicans), succeeded in making liberal standpoints on a wide range of issues visible to the public. They had to overcome the difficulties created by the Empire's regime of censorship imposed on the press. Liberals, in the end, had to face a double imperial 'tyranny': factual and symbolic.

Once the Empire came to an end after a disastrous war against Prussia in 1870, the 'imperial pedigree' that had defined the French political language for almost twenty years resulted in a reappraisal of the concept of nation, with which liberals felt much more comfortable. Liberals used the Second Empire's expansionist project to discredit the regime. Throughout their criticism of Napoleon III's imperialist dreams, liberals managed to confront their ideological postulates to those of Bonapartism, which transcended the mere realm of political ideas. Liberal notions of expansionist, colonial issues, expressed through a particular rhetoric, made evident the differences between

¹² *Journal des Débats*, 23 June 1869.

CONCLUSION

two competing political ideologies. However, the liberal republican regime born in the 1870s was the one that undertook France's greatest imperialist expansion, allowing to spread its power and influence all over the world with an intensity unknown until then.

As suggested, an outlook on the Second Empire's imperialist ventures united liberals against the Bonapartists, but their standpoints were not always homogeneous. Émile Ollivier, for instance, stood for defending the nation's superiority in the world through its economic and cultural strengths and not through violent actions. In this respect, he defended the policy of non-intervention as a way to gain prestige internationally. According to Ollivier, France would be much more respected in the world for its strong diplomatic, cultural and economic values than for the indiscriminate use of its violent power of coercion. Ollivier did not reject any kind of military intervention abroad, but was in favour of reducing them as much as possible. Only when the nation's interests were clearly in danger, such interventions could be justified.

This was Jules Favre's opinion too, although the liberal politician advocated a more active role for France on the global stage. A policy of absolute neutrality, he thought, could lead the country to a weak position. France needed to engage in what was happening in the world, making its voice heard and its interests respected. His frontal opposition to the intervention in Mexico, however, is explained by the specific characteristics of such a venture: as it was from the beginning prepared and conceived as a means to boost Napoleon III's personal glory, Favre (and with him all liberal deputies) did all that he could to undermine the project and to present it to public opinion as foolish and irresponsible. The reasons argued were rather straightforward: first, the Mexican government needed to be respected as the legitimate one of a legitimate country which fought so deeply to be independent from an old European empire. Second, the French intervention in Mexico could achieve nothing but trouble with the US government which, some decades earlier, had made clear its refusal to accept the establishment of any extra-American power in the region. Besides, French liberals viewed in the United States an example of a modern liberal republic, for which they professed an admiration that was beyond their respect for their own country's government. Liberals, through the words of Jules Favre, could never support the establishment of a new monarchy in Mexico, sponsored by the Mexican conservatives.

CONCLUSION

As a country, Mexico suffered from great political difficulties. French liberals always recognised them and wished the situation could be different, but they never supported a direct political and military intervention in the country, for the sake of respecting the principle of non-intervention and the right of nations. In this sense, Mexico was viewed as a different case from Algeria or Cochinchina for their different institutional, historical, religious and racial scheme. Moreover, the Mexican venture was seen from the beginning as an example of the Bonapartists' alleged tendency to not say the truth, to hide the real goals of their actions; something that liberals skilfully exploited to their own political benefit, with differences: Favre was more aggressive and radical in his statements, whereas Ollivier advocated a much more moderate strategy, taking into account the need to defend the nation's reputation.

Liberals and the Empire

In the 1860s, the Second Empire contributed decisively to enlarging France's overseas possessions, laying the foundations of the well-known republican imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the turn of the 1860s, France's imperialist policies were at the heart of political and public debates. A large number of articles, comments and publications showed great interest for these 'faraway expeditions' in which the imperial government was fully engaged. These expeditions likewise centred a wide range of passionate debates in the chamber. Both the Bonapartist 'dynastic majority' and the group of liberal opposition took advantage of these discussions to promote their political convictions, their ideas of what France was and should be in the world, as well as their perceptions on a wide range of key political, economic and religious aspects. In this way, I argue that the liberals were influenced by Bonapartism and used the regime to define their identity as a 'brand'.

In the colonial debate of the 1860s, we see an explicit liberal belief in the moral superiority of the French nation and, consequently, in the nation's right to rule over 'less civilised' peoples. This point of view, also shared by prominent republican thinkers, provided a strong ideological ground for the Third Republic's project of

CONCLUSION

colonial expansion.¹³ By the 1860s, the so-called principles of 1789 (liberty, civil equality, sovereignty, citizenship) were no longer the exclusive property of republicans; they were also shared by other ideological constellations, namely liberals and Bonapartists.¹⁴ Indeed, it was the defence of these principles that defined the relationship between liberals and Bonapartists. This thesis contributes to the understanding that the republican transformation of France from 1870 onwards finds its origins in the decades preceding the fall of the Second Empire. Not surprisingly has Napoleon III's regime been acknowledged as a pivotal period for France's intellectual transformation in the nineteenth century.¹⁵

Through their creative interpretation of French expansionism, liberals succeeded in projecting a genuine, powerful image of the French nation. When commenting on the Empire's undertakings, policies and management of imperialist ventures, liberals were defining their own ideal of the nation, deeply informed by the values of economic benefit, administrative efficiency, respect for the international legal order, institutional transparency and government accountability. In this thesis I suggest that, despite their inner differences and nuanced opinions, liberals during the Second Empire represented a coherent current of thought and, moreover, succeeded in defending it in both parliament and the press. Their effectiveness was obviously limited, for they constituted a minority force of opposition which had to fight against the regime's attempts to control freedom of speech and public opinion. Although the Second Empire underwent an evolution towards liberal positions by the beginning of the 1860s—which affected some economic and political domains and distanced it from its first authoritarian years—the regime was indeed far from accepting free expression of the political opposition. The press suffered from strong censorship and therefore the public had difficulties in accessing the opposition's points of view on all kinds of matters. This context of lack of full liberties needs to be taken into account when evaluating the development of liberal political action under Napoleon III's rule.

¹³ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 289.

¹⁴ Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic*, p. 294.

¹⁵ Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic*, pp. 4, 5.

CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have shown that there was not a consensus on how to manage foreign policy among the two main ideological groups. As suggested, Bonapartists and liberals shared some basic notions about the French nation, but they differed in the ways to manage it. Liberals' belief system was built on a basic intellectual rejection of Bonapartism and the populist, authoritarian type of rule that it represented. The Bonapartists' blind faith in France as an essentialist unity inextricably related to the first Napoleonic empire and the emperor's lineage was contrary to the idea of a nation made by the sum of individual wills with which liberals felt much more comfortable. Although they never advocated the use of force to achieve their purposes or supported any revolutionary strategy, liberals' struggle for more political and economic freedom found great resistance from the side of the Bonapartists. Liberals tried hard to use the regime's expansionist project to channel their criticism towards the regime, which they wanted to depict as dishonest and unable to lead the country properly.

In this thesis, I suggest that liberals often magnified their differences with the government in order to position themselves as a genuine, superior political option. By commenting on, and criticising the regime's expansionist policies, liberals took advantage of the regime to produce themselves as a political brand. The ways to do so were manifold and sought to highlight the emperor and his government's inconsistencies, using irony to emphasise the Bonapartists' inability to lead the country. Liberals used the press to echo their ideas and influence public opinion in their favour all that they could. In their speeches, they exploited the notions of good judgement and true patriotism as their own, claiming to have a strategic vision on economic and political matters related to the idea of progress. Thus, despite some sympathy with Bonapartist expansionism, the liberals established a rhetorical narrative that presented themselves as a moderate, efficient, clairvoyant political option. Liberal ideas developed and were shaped to a great extent by interactions in the public sphere and by boosting anti-Bonapartist agitation through flamboyant parliamentary speeches. These debates certainly contributed to positioning liberalism as an ideologically rich, reliable and sophisticated alternative of power. Some years later, this would play an important part in the configuration of the Third Republic.

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