

*H-France Forum*

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Christina B. Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France, 1850-1900*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2022. xiii + 284 pp. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 U.S. (h.b.). ISBN 9781501763083; \$32.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781501763137.

Review Essay by Patricia M.E. Lorcin, Emerita, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

Nineteenth-century Europe was characterized by empire, both overseas and on the European mainland. In 1850, three European countries had substantial empires, Austria, Britain, and France, of which only Britain and France had extensive territories beyond the European continent. During the period 1850-1900, Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in 1877, but remained Queen of Britain, thus theoretically keeping separate the political concepts of kingdom and empire. In France, however, Napoleon III was Emperor of both France and its overseas territories. Furthermore, neither Austria nor Britain was exposed to the sort of national upheavals and regime changes that characterized France. These anomalies have given rise to an extensive literature on the convergence with, or distinction between, France's dual type of empire and its legacy under the Republic.

Memory, as Christina Carroll argues in *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France, 1850-1900*, is important to understanding how the notion of empire was constructed in France. The incongruities of the Revolutionary period—which saw the Proclamation of the Rights of Man, the loss of its territories in the Caribbean and the United States, Napoleon Bonaparte's imposition of empire over republic followed, half a century later, by Napoleon III's equation of nation with empire—set the stage for the intellectual and political debates that characterized the second half of the century. Carroll's book makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of these debates. Whereas much scholarship has focused on activities and controversies either in the metropole or in the colonies, Carroll brings the two together. Thus, she argues, the concept of empire served as a contested category for competing political and intellectual factions and denominations in French society. Continental and colonial visions of empire were not separate categories; rather, she argues, during the latter half of the century the former lost its appeal while the latter increasingly gained support. The question then became how to integrate concepts of republicanism with those of empire.

The Second Empire's imperial ideologies, which is the focus of the first chapter, concentrates largely on Mexico and Algeria, although there is a shorter discussion of the areas in the Levant, of interest to the French due to their significant Christian populations. The two ideological concepts that gave rise to debates in France and among the peoples in its overseas territories are the concepts of *Latinité*, discussed mainly in relation to Mexico, and Napoleon III's definition of Algeria as a *Royaume Arabe*.

In 1850, as far as France and its empire were concerned, there were significant differences between Mexico and Algeria, most notable of which was the fact that two years earlier the conquered areas of Algeria had been divided into three French departments. Algeria became, *ipso facto*, part of

France, whatever Napoleon III's critics, or indeed, the Algerians, may have thought or wished. This point is salient, in so far as it allowed the settlers, whose population was starting to increase substantially, to consider themselves as rightful inhabitants of the territory. Whereas critics may have continued to think of it as a colony, Algeria's European inhabitants and French pro-expansionists saw it as an extension of France. The French concept of *royaume* (realm) is an ambiguous one, signifying either kingdom or province. This allows for a dual interpretation of a kingdom within an empire or province within a nation. In his effort to recast France as a multicultural Mediterranean empire, wasn't Napoleon III's *royaume arabe* an attempt to accommodate and mollify the local population to prevent the sort of strife that had characterized the twenty previous years of conquest, as well as a way of emphasizing the incorporation of the area as a part of France?

The idea of a Mediterranean empire was not, of course, Napoleon III's innovation. Rather, he was picking up on earlier positions that were present from the early days of the conquest of Algeria when Rome was used as an avatar for France's activities.[1] By the 1850s, historians and archaeologists were paying closer attention to the abundant Roman ruins and emphasizing their importance in relation to France's role in the area.[2] Whereas by 1870, the French adventure in Mexico was over, in Algeria, settler predominance was coming into its own, and the connections between Rome and France were still being used, but in an altogether different way. Personalities such as Louis-Adrien Berbrugger, founder of the national library of Algeria, or the *Académicien*, Louis Bertrand, were differentiating between the "Latin" roots of the settlers and the local population. *Latinité* was no longer being used as a symbol of similarity but as one of difference.

The fall of the Napoleon III's regime in 1870 provided a new chapter in the debate surrounding nation and empire. As Carroll rightly points out, the trauma of 1870 did not just result in the loss of Alsace and part of Lorraine, it was also the moment France nearly lost Algeria due to the Kabyle (Mokrani) rebellion. The brutal repression that followed the unsuccessful uprising helped to strengthen the settler presence by marginalizing the military and providing the settlers with anti-Algerian arguments that would serve to consolidate their control in the colony. The dual trauma, on the mainland and in the colony, triggered a debate that was to characterize the final years of the nineteenth century, namely, how to reconstitute the relationship between France and Algeria.

Carroll suggests a mythical connection between the two, whereby Algeria was to compensate for the loss of the French territories. Among the related arguments was Algeria as a haven for displaced Alsatians and Lorrainers whose move there would increase the settler presence, seen as a necessity if the territory was to become truly French. There was, however, a counter narrative in the metropole which hardly gets a mention. Prominent figures such as Paul Déroulède and Maurice Barrès were at the forefront of a nationalist movement, which emphasized the need to reconquer the lost French provinces rather than expending energy on colonization. Whereas Déroulède was one of the founders of the *Ligue des Patriotes*, originally established with that end in view, Barrès's *Culte du Moi* (1888-1891) and trilogy of the *Roman de l'énergie nationale* (1897-1902) elaborated an inward-looking version of the nation that paid little attention to the colonies. Although the *Ligue* eventually morphed into something much more reactionary, together with Barrès's popular oeuvre, its message formed part of the multi-faceted debates over nation and empire that characterized the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The final decades of the nineteenth century saw the consolidation of France's overseas territories and the remaining two chapters of the book cover developments in Africa and Asia. As the Third Republic stabilized from its shaky beginnings, the debates surrounding expansion intensified. Jules Ferry, who became prime minister in 1883, was an advocate of expansion and, as Carroll stresses, under his aegis overseas diversification proliferated. The Opium Wars of the earlier part of the century had underlined the necessity of gaining a foothold in the region, which Napoleon III had taken initial steps to secure. It is during the final two decades of the century that Carroll best illustrates the "politics of imperial memory." The question of the overseas territories provided an additional, and convenient, focus for critics of both the Republic and overseas expansion. The brutality of the military interventions in Indochina and Madagascar allowed for additional elements of criticism. But as Carroll points out, by the 1890s criticism was tempered. She provides a useful example of the shift in Georges Clemenceau's differing reaction from being openly hostile to the Tonkin expedition (1883-1886) to a more moderate stance on Madagascar. It was not so much republican values that he focused on, but rather the corruption of republican politics.

Carroll covers the intellectual and ideological stakes and, in doing so, disputes the sense that European expansion was a process in which France had to participate. Economic interests, on the other hand, receive less overt attention. By the 1890s, India was a considerable money-spinner for Britain, as were some of its African colonies. Did this not have an impact on concerns in France? To cite just one case as an example: by the 1890s, rubber and its importance to industrialization was preoccupying many European industrialists. Although rubber plantations in Vietnam did not come into their own until first decades of the twentieth century, in the 1890s, bacteriologist Alexander Yersin, in addition to his research on (and discovery of) the plague bacillus, was keenly interested in agriculture and promoted the possibility of economic gain for France in the area. As Michitake Aso has pointed out, the question of how to manage and exploit the Indochinese forests arose during, and immediately after, conquest.[3] Interests of this sort in newly acquired territories must have had echoes in the metropole and formed part of debates about the juxtaposition of republic and empire. Empire, after all, has as much, if not more, to do with economics as it does with prestige, competition, and national politics. Certainly, this was the case by the end of the nineteenth century. If the politics of imperial memory in France did not have an economic dimension, what does that tell us about France's imperial memory?

Carroll has written an engrossing and provocative book that raises questions not just about the way imperial memory played out during the second half of the nineteenth century, but also about how contested memory evolves over time. As such, it will be stimulating to scholars and useful to students interested in the various political and ideological currents that developed in France about its post-revolutionary empire.

#### NOTES

[1] Patricia M.E. Lorcin, "Rome and France in Africa: Recovering Colonial Algeria's Latin Past," *French Historical Studies* 25.2 (2002): 295-329; Diana Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2007).

[2] Bonnie Effros, *Incidental Archaeologists: French Officers and the Rediscovery of Roman North Africa* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018).

[3] Michitake Aso, *Rubber and the Making of Vietnam* (Durham, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 84.

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