Defining “Empire” under Napoleon III: Lucien-Anatole Prévost-Paradol and Paul Leroy-Beaulieu

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In the last years of the Second Empire, two liberal thinkers with little apparent connection to one another, Lucien-Anatole Prévost-Paradol and Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, wrote tracts that sought to articulate new colonial models of empire and justify the expansion of French settlement in Algeria. While the models they proposed were far from identical, the authors’ works shared a number of concerns. On the most basic level, they both rejected the Second Empire’s official policies towards Algeria. They also distinguished between colonial empire and metropolitan political questions and explained why colonization would be beneficial for France. And perhaps most importantly, the works ultimately came to help constitute the foundation for a republican vision of colonial empire in the early Third Republic.

Both the Third Republic’s construction of an extensive overseas empire and the diverse attempts of politicians, administrators, and writers to justify that empire by developing an imperialist ideology have attracted scholarly attention over the past twenty years. However, imperialist practices and discourses during the Second Empire have been less thoroughly studied.¹ This is partly because the Second Empire’s colonial projects were

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less ambitious than its successor’s. It is nevertheless clear that many disputes that would later emerge over the purpose and practice of colonial empire had their roots in Second Empire debates about Algeria. During the 1860s in particular, an ongoing public argument transpired over Algeria’s organization, its connections to France, and the relationship between Napoleonic European empire and overseas colonial empire. This argument emerged in response to Napoleon III’s attempt to organize the territory around a new imperial model in line with Bonapartist ideals. Prévost-Paradol and Leroy-Beaulieu would prove to be among the most influential opponents of this model: they proposed alternative visions of Algeria’s future that would help shape both republican attitudes towards the territory and republican colonial imperialism.

This article examines the similarities and differences between Leroy-Beaulieu and Prévost-Paradol’s respective colonial models and considers what they reveal about the discourse of “empire” in late Second Empire France. It focuses on three main sets of questions. First, how did each author define the meaning of “empire” and “colony”? Second, how did they connect these definitions to their understandings of France’s relationship with Algeria? Why did they believe that extending French settlement there would be beneficial for France? And finally, how did their ideas relate to Napoleon III’s imperial model? Through this analysis, this paper sheds light on a specific moment in debates about Algeria that transpired in the late 1860s and early 1870s. It also provides insight into the relationship between Napoleonic and colonial understandings of empire during this period. Finally, it demonstrates the role that Bonapartism and liberalism played in the early stages of the construction of republican imperial ideology.

In the early 1860s, Napoleon III sought to popularize a new vision of the Second Empire. He found that his early vision, which promoted the empire as a political program emphasizing order and stability within France, was no longer sufficient to capture the loyalty of his subjects. He therefore invoked a number of strategies to expand the empire's appeal. One of these strategies was to associate his regime with Napoleon I’s legacy of conquest. Napoleon III had always made use of the Napoleonic myth, but he

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had initially rejected his uncle’s military legacy. His new emphasis on Napoleon I’s victories thus marked a shift. Unlike his uncle, however, Napoleon III did not focus on European expansion. Instead, he turned overseas. He tried to increase France’s foothold in North America by setting up a proxy emperor in Mexico, and, more successfully, established French control over Cochinchina and Cambodia. But ultimately, it was in Algeria, a territory already ruled by France, that Napoleon III made the most concerted effort to articulate a new model of French empire.

Napoleon III’s new awareness of Algeria was tied to his rising interest in North African territories held by the Ottoman Empire. As the Ottoman Empire had weakened, Napoleon III had begun to dream of expanding his imperial reach into countries that had once belonged to Rome. He saw French control over North Africa as an opportunity to recast the Second Empire as both a particular political program within France and as an expansive, multinational “Mediterranean Empire.” The emperor made a series of efforts to increase French influence in these Ottoman territories, although he never attempted to seize them. Instead, he tried to redefine France’s relationship with Algeria in order to use it as a model for this still-unconquered Mediterranean Empire.

Napoleon III explained this new framework for Algeria and the Second Empire in two letters published in 1863 and 1865, which declared that Algeria was not a “colony” but a *royaume*

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6 Beginning in the late 1850s, he pursued many paths to increase French influence in Ottoman territories. He intervened in the Crimean War to reassert France’s position as the protectors of Christians beneath Turkish rule. He sent ambassadors to Tunisia to court the affection of the bey, intervened in Syria during the massacre of the Christian population, and secured the autonomy of Libya from Syria. In Egypt, he sponsored the construction of the Suez Canal and spread French influence in the Egyptian administration. See Gaël Nofri, *Napoleon III, Visionnaire de l’Europe des Nations* (Paris: Éditions François-Xavier de Guibert, 2010), 407.
arabe or “Arab kingdom.” His insistence that Algeria was not a colony derived from his belief that the term “colony” did not just signify a state’s overseas territory; it referred to a territory that a state intended to populate with its own citizens. Because Napoleon III thought that indigenous peoples would remain the primary population of Algeria, he believed that calling it a “colony” would be misleading. His contention that the territory should instead be understood as a royaume arabe or “Arab kingdom,” on the other hand, emerged from his belief that Algeria was a country of Arabs who had a cohesive sense of national identity. By calling Algeria a royaume arabe, Napoleon III was thus describing Algeria as an Arab nation. He went on to claim, “I am as much the Emperor of the Arabs as I am the Emperor of the French.” This statement, when deployed alongside the idea that Algeria was a royaume arabe, had wide-reaching implications. If, as the letter contended, Napoleon III was equally the Emperor of both the French and the Arabs, it followed that he was also the Emperor of both the French and Algerian or Arab nations.

This formulation, and particularly Napoleon III’s implicit contention that Algeria was an “Arab nation” distinct from the “French nation,” deviated from the vision of the French Second Empire that he had long promoted. Early in his reign, Napoleon III had treated the “French nation” and the “French Empire” as functional equivalents: he had used the term “empire” to designate a type of political program in France, mobilizing it in opposition to “republic” or “kingdom.” But according to this new model, the French Empire was a multinational entity, composed of a set of distinct nations ruled by the same central administration. Beneath this new regime, “empire” would refer both to a form of

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8 Napoleon III was drawing on the thought of Ismael Urbain. See Levallois, Ismaïl Urbain, 322.
9 This is especially clear in light of his promise to a group of Arab listeners in 1865 that France did not invade Algeria “to destroy the nationality of a people.” See René de Saint-Félix, Le Voyage de S. M. L’Empereur Napoleon III en Algérie et la Régence de S. M. Impératrice (Paris: Eug. Pick, Grande Librairie Napoleonienne, 1865), 110.
11 By insisting that Algeria was a nation distinct from France, Napoleon III sought to end ongoing debates about Algeria’s status. See Guy Pervillé, La France en Algérie, 1830-1954 (Paris: Vendémiaire Éditions, 2012), 45.
metropolitan political organization and to a way of ordering and relating different peoples beneath one governing body. The model thus collapsed “metropolitan” policies and France’s relationship to “overseas” territories together into one overarching imperial entity. It also extended the reach of Napoleon III’s faltering empire, casting it as larger than the French nation itself. The French nation would continue to occupy the privileged position in this constellation of nations, but it would stand beneath a wider imperial structure. Moreover, by symbolically extending his empire’s reach, Napoleon III directly associated his position with the expansionary vision of Napoleon I, who had sought to reorganize all of Europe beneath his rule.

Napoleon III’s new vision of the Second Empire and its relationship to Algeria was extremely unpopular, especially among the colonists who had settled in Algeria during the thirty-odd years since its conquest. They objected to the Emperor’s implication that they were less important to Algeria’s future than the indigenous population. These colonists, along with some of Napoleon III’s political opponents, wrote articles and pamphlets advocating that France’s relationship with its overseas territories should be understood in different terms. They contended that Algeria was foremost a French colony and argued that colonists alone could ensure the territory’s economic and political success.

So while Napoleon III’s vision of empire was never popularly embraced, it excited a conversation about the meaning of empire and its relationship to colonization that transpired in both Algiers and Paris during the late 1860s.

Prévost-Paradol, a prominent liberal journalist and essayist, published La France Nouvelle in 1868, during the last years of the Second Empire. Although it directly engaged with the ongoing debates about Algeria’s future, the work did not focus on the subject of empire or colonization. Instead, Prévost-Paradol analyzed what he saw as contemporary France’s underlying problems. He maintained that the French nation had begun to

12 “Lettre,” in La Politique Impériale, 394.
13 In fact, colonist opposition was so intense that most of the measures he proposed to reorganize the territory failed. See Rey-Goldzeiguer, Le Royaume Arabe, 371.
14 Many of these pamphlets were written by colonists, but they were often published in both Algeria and in the metropole. For examples that Leroy-Beaulieu cited frequently, see Auguste-Hubert Warnier, L’Algérie devant l’Empereur (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1865) and Jules Duval, Réflexions sur la politique de l’Empereur en Algérie (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1865).
suffer from what he called “decadence.” He blamed this problem above all on the country’s political organization, which he insisted veered between demagogy and despotism. This political instability, he asserted, had led the people to believe “force is the measure of right.” As a result, he argued, the country had lost its moral compass: neither religion, nor duty, nor honor compelled its politicians or its citizens and its social order had begun to fray. He implied that the Second Empire had accentuated these problems by combining despotism and demagogy together into one particularly destructive political system.

As Prévost-Paradol made clear, France’s “decadence” was not an idle problem. In fact, he insisted, it was dangerous in light of growing Prussian influence over the German states and the ever-expanding size of the British Empire. As French society turned inward on itself and fell apart, Prussia and Britain would chip away at France’s international strength and influence. Ultimately, he warned, France, “confined within its traditional boundaries,” would become a second-rate power. In fact, if France did not adopt a balanced political system and patch the holes in its social fabric it was in danger of disappearing completely like Poland.

Prévost-Paradol proposed several solutions to redeem the country. On a political level, he argued, France needed to secure democratic rights for its citizens while establishing political institutions to keep those rights in check. He believed that only a democratically-oriented society would be able to prevent the country from veering back into despotism or anarchy. Prévost-Paradol was not calling for a revolution – he was a liberal Orléanist, not a republican – but he thought that the people (and especially the upper classes) needed to play a more direct role in law-making processes than they had in the Second Empire. A democratic society, he maintained, would ensure public peace.

16 Ibid., 360.
17 Ibid., 36, 363.
18 Ibid., 377-8.
19 Ibid., 386.
20 Ibid., 341.
21 Prévost-Paradol insisted that the best kind of government was “democratic” rather than “anarchic” or “despotic,” but maintained that both monarchies and republics could be democratic. Ibid., 68, 349.
while making the population feel individually responsible for the country's fate. These political measures, Prévost-Paradol argued, would alleviate internal divisions and provide the French populace with some sense of political coherence. But by themselves, they would be insufficient. In order to halt France’s slide into decadence and international irrelevance, the nation needed to extend its borders and increase its population. Because France had limited opportunities for expansion in Europe, it would have to follow Britain’s example and increase its reach overseas by expanding its colonization efforts dramatically. Prévost-Paradol highlighted Algeria specifically as the point from which the French could begin this project of colonial expansion. France, he claimed, needed to settle large numbers of colonists in Algeria to transform it into a France africaine. Once French citizens were firmly established there, they could extend their reach farther into North Africa, towards Tunisia and Morocco and, “finally found that Mediterranean Empire that will not only satisfy our pride, but secure our future position in the world.” Together, these holdings would create a wide-ranging empire that would allow France to compete with its neighbors.

Prévost-Paradol saw French colonial expansion in Algeria and North Africa as beneficial for several reasons. On the most basic level, he argued that controlling the Mediterranean Sea would provide France with military security. But even more importantly, he maintained, such an empire would provide space for the French race, language, and culture to flourish, an opportunity he found especially appealing in light of Prussian expansion in Europe and British domination of North America and Australia. It would also, he implied, provide the French nation with a positive project to focus on and dampen its internal political divisions. Overseas colonial expansion would thus help guard against both despotism and anarchy in the metropole itself.

In some ways, Prévost-Paradol’s desire to create a French Mediterranean empire was similar to Napoleon III’s: both saw expansion into North Africa as a way of securing prestige. However, Prévost-Paradol’s understanding of that expansion was quite distinct. Napoleon III had argued for the creation of a multinational Mediterranean empire, in which the imperial

22 Despite his advocacy for democracy, he was skeptical of what he called “the unenlightened classes.” He argued that slowly extending voting rights was preferable to immediate universal suffrage. Ibid., 63.

23 Ibid., 397.

24 Ibid., 383, 416.
government would exercise control over a set of distinct nations. In Prévost-Paradol’s vision, on the other hand, a French Mediterranean empire would be based on the extension of the French people over new territories. The existing populations in North Africa would have to either assimilate or leave: they certainly would not be able to form their own nation.\footnote{Ibid., 418.} Settlement, not political control, was at the center of Prévost-Paradol’s vision for Algeria’s future. He thus advocated that France’s relationship to Algeria should take the form of what he called a “colonial empire.” He implicitly distinguished between this kind of empire and Napoleonic or metropolitan empire. For him, Napoleonic empire represented a particular way of organizing the country politically that he did not find effective. Colonial empire, on the other hand, referred to the slow movement of French colonists into North Africa. Prévost-Paradol’s vision of colonial empire was not entirely divorced from metropolitan politics. He implied that the project of colonizing Algeria would only become possible after France established a “democratic society” and expressed hope that the process of founding a Mediterranean Empire would serve as a bulwark against future domestic political disturbances. But his ideas about the political implications of colonial expansion had little to do with Bonapartist goals or ideals.

Paul Leroy-Beaulieu composed the first version of *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes* for a competition for the Léon-Faucher prize at approximately the same time as Prévost-Paradol published *La France nouvelle*. The Academy of Moral and Political Science granted the prize every year to the “author of the best essay on a question of political economy.” The subject of the 1868 prize was the “colonial system of modern people.” In early 1870, the Academy pronounced Leroy-Beaulieu’s submission the winner. He published the manuscript several years later in 1874.\footnote{This first edition was very similar to the manuscript. See Dan Warshaw, *Paul Leroy-Beaulieu and Established Liberalism in France* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1991), 84.} Unlike Prévost-Paradol, Leroy-Beaulieu focused specifically on colonial and imperial questions in his work. His primary goal was not to solve France’s problems, but to create an ideal model for colonial empire – although he, like Prévost-Paradol, believed that establishing a colonial empire would ultimately help strengthen the French nation.

Much of Leroy-Beaulieu’s first edition was devoted to a history of “colonization.” His narrative began in early modern Europe, with separate chapters that explained the French, English,
Spanish, and Dutch colonial projects of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By comparing the different methods of colonization they used, he claimed that he could elicit a general theory of colonization and a model for future French colonial policy. He devoted the second half of the work to explaining this theory and recommending policies that he felt metropolitan governments should adopt vis-à-vis their colonies. Above all, he argued, colonies required both economic and political “independence.” From an economic standpoint, he contended that colony and metropole alike would prosper most if colonies could trade on the free market. On the political front, he claimed that colonies needed to have the authority to act on internal matters independently of the central government. He insisted that settlers should elect local administrators and politicians democratically. Only once the settlers had the ability to trade and govern themselves as they saw fit, he argued, would the colonies prosper. He lamented that the French government had failed to follow these guidelines, claiming that the Second Empire continued to overregulate the extant colonies’ trade and deny the colonists a voice in their own affairs. If France hoped to keep its remaining colonies, he warned, the government would have to increase these territories’ economic and political freedoms.

Leroy-Beaulieu sought to define the meaning of “colony” more systematically than Prévost-Paradol had. Prévost-Paradol had equated “colony” with “settlement.” Leroy-Beaulieu, on the other hand, insisted that not all colonies were the same and that they could take several different forms. He maintained that there were three types of colonies: commercial, agricultural, and plantation. Each of these types had different purposes. Commercial colonies were trading outposts designed to bring goods and wealth into the metropole. These colonies, however, neither “augmented the power nor extended the race of the metropole.” Plantation colonies cultivated consumer goods like sugar and tobacco. Agricultural colonies, on the other hand, were founded by large settler populations and contributed most directly to the country’s economic welfare.

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28 He drew many of these insights from English colonial policies. Ibid., 167, 446.
29 He condemned the “colonial pact” that forbade colonies from trading with foreign countries. Ibid., 524
30 Ibid., 593, 235, 341.
31 Ibid., 537.
32 Ibid., 534.
influence and power, but rarely did much to enrich the metropole. Of the three types, he maintained that agricultural colonies were both the most complex and the most rewarding.33

Leroy-Beaulieu’s preference, at least in the early 1870s, for settler or agricultural colonies was reflected in his justification for colonial expansion.34 He contended, “Colonization is the expansive force of a people: it is its power of reproduction ... it is the submission of the universe or of a large part to its language, ideas, and laws.” 35 In other words, colonization, and especially the establishment of agricultural colonies, was beneficial because it would secure the future of the French language and culture by spreading it globally. Despite the fact that he was an economist, Leroy-Beaulieu thus saw the benefits of colonization as political and national in nature. Like Prévost-Paradol, he believed that colonizing would help bolster France’s ability to compete demographically, linguistically, and culturally with other European powers.

Despite the similarities between Prévost-Paradol’s and Leroy-Beaulieu’s beliefs about the benefits of colonisation, Leroy-Beaulieu differentiated more radically between Napoleonic European empire and overseas colonial empire than Prévost-Paradol had. Prévost-Paradol had implied that the goals of Napoleonic Empire and colonial empire were fundamentally at odds, but he had described French metropolitan politics and overseas colonial expansion as tied together. Leroy-Beaulieu’s narration of the history of colonization, on the other hand, strongly implied that colonial empire and successful colonial expansion had little to do with domestic political organization at all. He argued that a number of different states with distinct kinds of governments had successfully founded colonies, and showed that any type of government could keep them by adopting the right kinds of liberal policies. And while Prévost-Paradol had implicitly treated Napoleonic European Empire and overseas colonial empire as different enterprises, Leroy-Beaulieu explicitly distinguished between the history of Napoleonic military expansion within Europe and colonial expansion overseas. By definition, he maintained, overseas colonization was marked by the

33 Ibid., 535-6.
34 Leroy-Beaulieu began by debunking “myths” about the colonies’ benefits and drawbacks. He maintained that they neither reduced overpopulation nor stripped colonizing countries of their population. He also noted that colonies did not enrich the metropole, but insisted they were less expensive to maintain than many thought. Ibid., 472, 529.
35 Ibid., 606.
spread of one particular nation across the globe in the form of small “new” societies that would come to dominate the territory in which they were situated.\textsuperscript{36} Colonial empires were thus distinct from all European empires because European empires ruled over a diverse set of pre-existing societies while colonial empires founded new ones. Tellingly, his history of colonization made no mention of French metropolitan empires like the one constructed by Napoleon I.

Like Prévost-Paradol and Napoleon III, Leroy-Beaulieu saw Algeria as the obvious site to begin to rebuild a new French Empire. And like Prévost-Paradol, he believed that such an empire should be centered on a settler population. In fact, he contended that Algeria’s future prosperity depended on its ability to expand its European population as quickly as possible.\textsuperscript{37} But he took his argument a step beyond Prévost-Paradol’s by explicitly opposing his view of Algeria to Napoleon III’s. He maintained that Napoleon III’s vision of Algeria as a \textit{royaume arabe} was a “deadly chimera” that would only serve to undermine the French presence in Algeria. Instead of treating the indigenous people who lived in Algeria as a separate nation, he argued, the state should take a series of measures to integrate them into settler society.\textsuperscript{38} Napoleon III, Leroy-Beaulieu thus implied, needed to drop the Bonapartist expansionary model that was only relevant in a European context and re-evaluate the nature of the empire he was attempting to construct.

Napoleon III had sought to secure the prestige of the Second Empire in the early 1860s by promoting a vision of empire that combined a particular political program with overseas imperial expansion. His vision of a multinational Mediterranean Empire dominated by France drew heavily on his uncle’s attempt to establish a modern version of the Roman Empire across Europe. Both Prévost-Paradol and Leroy-Beaulieu insisted that France’s relationship with Algeria needed to be understood in another way. They differentiated between metropolitan and colonial empire in no uncertain terms. The political organization of the French Second Empire, they implied, did not determine its relationship to the territory it conquered. If anything, both indicated that the Second Empire would have a deleterious effect on France’s attempts to colonize overseas. Prévost-Paradol contended that France would be able to colonize most effectively when it had

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{37} Unlike Prévost-Paradol, Leroy-Beaulieu acknowledged that the indigenous population might impede complete colonization. Ibid., 339.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 354.
structured its society democratically. Leroy-Beaulieu, on the other hand, implied that domestic political structure and overseas colonial expansion had little to do with one another. But he argued that colonizing powers needed to promote economic liberalism and self-governance in their colonies, and showed that thus far, the Second Empire had directly opposed the implementation of both. These writers did not just rebuff Napoleon III’s political goals and policies, moreover: they also rejected his vision of a multinational empire, which they saw as at odds with the colonial empire they hoped to establish. A French Empire expanding across North Africa would not bring new nations under French rule, they argued: instead, it would allow the French culture, language, and “race” to spread across a wider geographical expanse.

Prévost-Paradol’s and Leroy-Beaulieu’s respective works initially met with different levels of commercial success. La France Nouvelle was heavily anticipated: journals such as Le Gaulois leaked passages from it to their readers even before its publication. It sold widely and went through ten print runs by 1869. The critical reception was largely positive: the book attracted complementary reviews in moderate Orleanist, Republican, and Bonapartist circles alike. Le Figaro praised it as a work of “great depth.” That said, most of its initial reviews focused primarily on Prévost-Paradol’s analysis of France’s political problems and his desire to create an orderly democratic society and not on his ideas about colonizing Algeria. Leroy-Beaulieu, on the other hand, first released his work to the narrow audience of a prize committee. Even after its official publication, it did not make headlines in the same way that Prévost-Paradol’s book had. But over the course of the next twenty years, Leroy-Beaulieu’s work became increasingly prominent in French public life, partly because it continually reappeared in new, expanded editions. The imperial visions of both

39 Ibid., 301-7.
40 “L’Esprit des autres,” Le Gaulois, 7 August 1868.
41 Francis Magnard, Le Figaro, 7 July 1868.
43 By the time the work was published in 1874, Leroy-Beaulieu had become an influential economist. His work was not ignored, but it did not see immediate circulation. See Warshaw, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, 48.
works, in fact, became more influential in the early 1880s than they had ever been during the Second Empire. Both heavily figured in later debates about colonial expansion.\footnote{During this later period, many authors began to invoke Prévost-Paradol’s vision of a \textit{France africaine}. In 1877, J. J. Clamageran published an account of his recent travels to Algeria inspired, he claimed, by Prévost-Paradol. In 1877, a geography textbook aimed at families reminded them that “there exists on the other side of the Mediterranean that a great writer, Prévost-Paradol, named \textit{France nouvelle}.” In 1879, \textit{Le Temps} noted that Prévost-Paradol had shown that “the future of French nationality” depended on Algeria. See J. J. Clamageran, \textit{L’Algérie: Impressions de Voyage} (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillière, 1874), 2; Henri de Senhaux, \textit{La France et l’Algérie} (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1871), 179; \textit{Le Pays}, 7 August 1871; O. Neil, \textit{Géographie de l’Algérie}, vol. 2 (Paris: Challamel, 1878), xiv; “Insurrection algérienne,” \textit{Le Temps}, 13 August 1879; and V. A. Malte-Brun, \textit{La France illustrée} (Paris: Jules Roueff, 1897). Leroy-Beaulieu’s influence was even wider: he was cited by colonial advocates, school textbooks, and in debates about colonial enterprises. See Gabriel Charmes, \textit{Politique extérieure et coloniale} (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885); Louis Vignon, \textit{Les colonies françaises} (Paris: Guillaumin et cie., 1886); M. E. Greffier, \textit{Empire coloniale de la France} (Paris: A. Pedone, 1896); Arthur Girault, \textit{Principes de la colonisation et de la législation coloniale} (Paris: Larose & Forcel, 1904); and Denise Blanchet, \textit{Cours complet d’histoire à l’usage de l’enseignement secondaire: Histoire contemporaine de 1815 à nos jours} (Paris: Eugène Belin, 1905), 390.}

The growing importance of these works was tied to the fact that France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War had tarnished Bonapartism and Napoleon III in the eyes of much of the population. Indeed, the republican government that came to power in the wake of 1870-71 defended its legitimacy by defining itself against the imperial government that preceded it. As the republicans embarked on their own overseas empire-building project in the years that followed, the ambiguity of “empire” and its referents became increasingly troubling. Napoleon III’s attempt to collapse metropolitan and overseas empire together into one unified theory of “empire” had to some degree discursively succeeded in the popular imagination. In the 1860s, when republican authors began to condemn empire as a “decadent,” “militaristic,” “corrupt,” and “oppressive” form of political organization, they did not differentiate between Napoleon III’s metropolitan and overseas empire any more than he did. The legacy of this conflation created problems for republican politicians in the first years of the Third Republic, as they looked overseas to restore French military prestige in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. Over the course of the next thirty years, they
struggled to redefine the idea of empire, free it from its Napoleonic legacy, and justify their colonial ambitions. Leroy-Beaulieu’s and Prevost-Paradol’s models for French colonial empire, which had both sought to separate “colonial” from “metropolitan” empire, would become central to this restructuring process.