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# Introduction

IT OUGHT to be a commonplace that, for most of the nineteenth century, France expanded chiefly by means of informal empire. After the fall of Napoleon's European empire, the formal, sovereign authority of the French state became confined almost exactly to the boundaries of modern metropolitan France and a handful of secondary islands and trading posts. Between 1815 and 1880, France acquired a few more *comptoirs*, but its sole significant territorial conquest was what is today the temperate part of Algeria, an outlying province of the Ottoman Empire. Yet throughout this period France is almost unanimously recognized as a major crucible of modern European imperialism, alongside Britain. This perception is not an illusion. Contemporary French society and politics made decisive contributions to the Orientalist and pseudo-scientific racist discourses that served to justify the colonial subjugation of Asians and Africans. Thanks to its economic, scientific and military wherewithal, France remained Britain's main rival overseas. France was the world's second imperial power, but without a colonial empire.

The main purpose of this book is to resolve this paradox, showing that mid-nineteenth century France acquired a vast empire while hardly expanding its territorial jurisdiction. Looking back on Britain's imperial experience in the era of decolonization, Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher claimed that neglecting the informal dimension of British imperialism was "rather like judging the size and character of icebergs solely from the parts above the water-line."<sup>1</sup>

1. John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 6 (1953): 1. On the early impact of the informal empire paradigm on British imperial studies, see *Imperialism: The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy*, ed. Wm Roger Louis (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976); on later debates about the concept's validity and usefulness, especially in the case of Latin America, see for example the exchange between Andrew

If anything, the proportion of the nineteenth-century French imperial iceberg that lay below the waterline was even greater. France's informal empire was also more sophisticated than Britain's, because it drew to a greater extent on "soft" cultural power, and used it in combination with conventional "hard" economic and military power. This sophistication prefigured, in some respects, the global projection of American "smart power" after 1945.<sup>2</sup> But France's informal empire upheld an aristocratic rather than a democratic ethos. It exported silk textiles and the comedy of manners rather than blue jeans and sentimental movies. Since velvet denotes softness and refinement, and was usually made out of silk in the nineteenth century, "velvet empire" seems an apt phrase to describe this cunning but courtly imperial strategy, and a fitting title.

This emphasis on the informal deployment of French power does not seek to diminish the significance of formal manifestations of French imperialism in the nineteenth century. It is especially not my intention to downplay the extraordinary violence employed by France in conquering Algeria after 1830. Not only did this violence profoundly affect later Franco-Algerian interactions, perhaps to this day, but French Algeria also proved to be the crucible of several significant features of France's system of colonial rule as its territorial empire expanded rapidly after 1880.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the book seeks to reappraise the informal dimension of French imperialism between the downfall of Napoleon's

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Thompson, "Informal Empire? An Exploration in the History of Anglo-Argentine Relations, 1810–1914," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 24, 2 (1992) and Anthony G. Hopkins, "Informal Empire in Argentina: An Alternative View," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 26, 2 (1994), and *Informal Empire in Latin America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*, ed. Matthew Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008). On the early use of this paradigm to highlight the imperial dimension of modern US foreign policy, see William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1959), and for a more recent appraisal of the achievements of Williams and the so-called Wisconsin school, see *Redefining the Past: Essays in Diplomatic History in Honor of William Appleman Williams*, ed. Lloyd Gardner (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1986).

2. On the concept of soft power and its articulation with hard power, see Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), and Ernest J. Wilson III, "Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616 (2008).

3. On the violence of the French conquest, see among others William Gallois, *A History of Violence in the Early Algerian Colony* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and Abdelmajid Hannoum, *Violent Modernity: France in Algeria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); on Algeria as a laboratory of French colonial rule, see for instance Emmanuelle Saada,

European empire and the rise of the Third Republic's colonial empire. During this period, it claims, France's resurgent imperial status relied far more on the global projection of its influence than on the expansion of its sovereignty. I hope that such an approach will help to draw a more comprehensive picture of the nature and scope of French imperial power by redressing the balance of a historiography that is still mainly preoccupied by the official aspects of French imperialism. Empires in world history have tended to rely not on a single mode of domination, but rather on "repertoires of rules", or combinations of various methods to assert their authority.<sup>4</sup> The French repertoire in the nineteenth century included a formal component which prevailed in Algeria and became the main form of French expansion after 1880. Yet by several political, economic and cultural measures, this informal component may be considered to have had an even greater impact on the world and on metropolitan France, at least until the colonial frenzy of the late nineteenth century.

As several historians of empire have noted, the very dichotomy between formal and informal can be as problematic as it is "seductive."<sup>5</sup> There are different types of formal rule, ranging from full annexation to protectorate regimes: recent histories of the concept and practice of sovereignty have dispelled the illusion that it was ever one and indivisible, especially in a colonial context.<sup>6</sup> If anything, informal rule was even more multifarious, as it relied on extremely varied combinations of cultural, economic, legal and even military elements. When we think theoretically about empire, it may be more accurate to speak of a spectrum or gradients of imperial rule.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, such sophisticated modelling risks detracting attention from the informal side of

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*Les enfants de la colonie: Les métis de l'empire français entre sujétion et citoyenneté* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), esp. 111–25.

4. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3–17.

5. Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Histories of the United States in the World," *American Historical Review*, 116, 5 (2011): 1374–76.

6. See, among others, Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Culture: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property and Empire, 1500–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); on the slipperiness of sovereignty in a French imperial context, see Mary Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

7. Ann L. Stoler, "On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty," *Public Culture* 18, 1 (2006); on efforts by political scientists to define informal imperial power, see Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), esp. 32–39, 135–36.

the spectrum, because it is by nature more elusive than the formal side. Crucially for the historian, it leaves fainter archival traces than colonial administrations. Even critiques of the dichotomy between formal and informal empire have lately found it necessary to recall that the “narrow definition of empire as territorial control” could result in dangerous elisions.<sup>8</sup> When we consider the dynamics of a specific imperial formation, dispensing with informal empire can cause more problems than it solves. This book seeks instead to address some of this concept’s limitations, especially the mechanistic equation it often assumed between economic and imperial power. Drawing on new approaches towards the history of economic life, it pays due attention to the roles played by ideas, culture and laws, alongside those of trade and finance, in shaping informal imperial power and the effects it had.

For the sake of a clear argument, this book mostly treats the French informal imperial repertoire as a distinct form of imperialism, or another empire. Edward W. Fox, in his classic work, did not deny the existence of the centripetal forces emphasized by most historians of the French nation-state, but also sought to discern another, outward-looking France. The echo here of this approach is deliberate. There are noteworthy overlaps between Fox’s “other France” and the other empire examined in this book, not least the role of transnational connections in moulding modern French economics, politics and society.<sup>9</sup> France’s other empire in the nineteenth century may be less immediately visible than its colonial ventures. Yet it was global in scope, and although exploitative in subtler ways, imbued with a similar cultural and racial arrogance.

## Forgotten Empire

There is a widespread notion that, after the fall of Napoleon, France withdrew into itself and renounced empire for the next seventy years. Historical surveys of French colonialism concede that the period saw the first tentative steps towards the constitution of what would become France’s “second colonial empire” after 1880, with the conquest of Algeria and the acquisition of small territorial footholds in Africa and Indochina. But most stress the hesitations and

8. Paul Kramer, “How Not to Write the History of U.S. Empire,” *Diplomatic History* 42, 5 (2018): 913–14.

9. Edward J. Fox, *History in Geographic Perspective: The Other France* (New York: Norton, 1971).

incoherence of French empire building in those decades.<sup>10</sup> Such views, this book claims, rely on a narrow conception of empire as an exclusively territorial enterprise and on the teleological premise that the colonial empire of the Third Republic should have been the goal pursued by French empire builders before 1880.

The main lesson drawn by the regimes that succeeded Napoleon's empire was arguably not that imperial pursuits should be forsaken, but that imperial grandeur was crucial to the preservation of domestic stability. This lesson was frequently articulated by French political elites and found validation in the cult of Napoleon that spread across France after 1815.<sup>11</sup> Post-revolutionary governments frequently turned to imperial ventures as a means of healing domestic divisions. Such ventures could be formal, as in the case of Algeria.<sup>12</sup> Yet they could also be informal, as demonstrated by the erection of the Luxor Obelisk in 1836, on the renamed Place de la Concorde—formerly Place de la Révolution, where Louis XVI was executed in 1793. The Obelisk served as a souvenir of France's brief occupation of Egypt in 1798–1801, but this gift from the Egyptian pasha Muhammad 'Ali also symbolized the renewal of French domination by economic, cultural and scientific means over what remained, formally, a province of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>13</sup>

Another vivid illustration of how contemporaries hoped to revive French imperial grandeur by informal means was the pompous painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Reception of Siamese Ambassadors* (see figure 0.1). Completed in 1864, the work represented a ceremony held in 1861, during which representatives of King Mongkut (or Rama IV) of Siam (modern Thailand) presented several sumptuous gifts to the French emperor Napoleon III and the empress

10. Instances of this teleological neglect include Denise Bouche and Pierre Pluchon, *Histoire de la colonisation française*, 2 vols. (Paris: Fayard, 1991), esp. vol. 2: *Flux et reflux (1815–1962)*; Bernard Lauzanne (ed.), *L'aventure coloniale de la France*, 5 vols. (Paris: Denoël, 1987–97), esp. vol. 2: Jean Martin, *L'empire renaissant, 1789–1870*; Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Jean Meyer, Jacques Thobie et al., *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 2nd edn., 3 vols. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1996), esp. vol. 1: *La conquête*; and Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996).

11. Sudir Hazareesingh, *The Legend of Napoleon* (London: Granta, 2005).

12. On hopes that the capture of Algiers in 1830 or the conquest of the rest of the Regency under the July Monarchy would sustain domestic stability, see Jennifer Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

13. Todd Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism, 1798–1836* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 13–41.



FIGURE 0.1. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Reception of Siamese Ambassadors by the Emperor Napoleon III at the Palace of Fontainebleau, 27 June 1861* (1864). Source: Château de Versailles, MV 5004; © RMN-Grand Palais. Reproduced by permission of RMN-GP (Château de Versailles).

Eugénie, in their summer residence of Fontainebleau. It also deliberately echoed the best-known pictorial representation of the first Napoleon's achievement of imperial status, Louis David's *Coronation of Napoleon* (1807).<sup>14</sup> Gérôme's works have often been derided as emblematic of the degeneration of neoclassical purity into a mediocre academic style, more concerned with the commercial potential of reproductions. Émile Zola argued that a painting by Gérôme was not a work of art, but "a fashionable commodity". The novelist claimed that "every living room in the provinces" contained a printed or engraved reproduction of a Gérôme.<sup>15</sup> *The Reception*, an official commission, cost the French state twenty thousand francs, but much smaller photomechanical prints could be purchased by any member of the public for just twenty francs.<sup>16</sup>

14. Meredith Martin, "History Repeats Itself in Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Reception of the Siamese Ambassadors*," *Art Bulletin*, 99, 1 (2017).

15. Émile Zola, "Nos peintres au Champ-de-Mars," *La Situation*, 1 July 1867; repr. in *Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904). L'histoire en spectacle*, eds. Laurence des Cars, Dominique de Font-Réaulx and Édouard Papet (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 357.

16. Reproductions (27 × 43 cm) of *The Reception* were sold until the end of the century; see *Gérôme et Goupil. Art & entreprise*, ed. Hélène Lafont-Couturier (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux and Bordeaux: Musée Goupil, 2000), 154.

According to Zola, the subject in Gérôme's works was "everything", while the art of painting was "nothing". The subject of *The Reception* deserves a close analysis, because it encapsulated several major features of the French project of informal empire.<sup>17</sup> This project was economic, and the gift-giving ceremony represented by Gérôme was designed to seal a treaty of commerce between Siam and France that was typical of nineteenth-century "free trade imperialism". Concluded under the threat of French gunboats in 1856, the treaty limited Siamese customs duties to 3 percent *ad valorem* and granted extraterritorial jurisdiction to French nationals in Siam.<sup>18</sup> This project was also cultural, as suggested by the central position in the painting of the figure of Abbé Larnaudie, a Catholic missionary who served as interpreter during the treaty's negotiation and the Siamese delegation's visit to France.<sup>19</sup> This project had distinctly racial and orientaling undertones, as did Gérôme's painting—and indeed, a great deal of his oeuvre.<sup>20</sup> The chronicler and novelist Prosper Mérimée, who attended the original ceremony, compared the Siamese diplomats to "monkeys" and "cockchafers,"<sup>21</sup> because of their deportment and features. A caricature of the painting by the popular cartoonist Cham (real name Amédée de Noé, a friend of Gérôme) also represented the Siamese ambassadors as monkeys leapfrogging over each other in the midst of a bemused Bonapartist court.<sup>22</sup>

France's informal empire was not merely an instrument of propaganda. By the mid-1860s, not least thanks to an aggressive commercial diplomacy, the export of French commodities almost caught up with export from Britain, despite the latter's reputation as the workshop of the world. In the same period, the government's encouragement to save helped French foreign investment

17. Zola, "Nos peintres."

18. Dominique Le Bas, "La venue de l'ambassade siamoise en France," *Aséanie. Sciences humaines en Asie du Sud-Est*, 3 (1999).

19. Adrien Launay, *Siam et les missionnaires français* (Tours: Alfred Mame, 1866), 191; on French Catholicism and empire building, see *In God's Empire: French Missionaries and the Modern World*, eds. Owen White and J. P. Daughton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

20. On Gérôme, whose *Snake Charmer*, also painted in the 1860s, was used by Edward Said for the original dustjacket of *Orientalism* (1978), as the quintessential Orientalist painter, see Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 33–59.

21. Prosper Mérimée, *Lettres à une inconnue*, 2 vols. (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1874), vol. 2, 163–65.

22. Cartoon repr. in *Jean-Léon Gérôme*, 344.

surpass British capital export, despite the famed supremacy of the City of London. In the late eighteenth century, French was an international language only among Europe's courtly aristocracies. But by the 1870s it had become the lingua franca of old and new elites in Europe, the Middle East and Latin America. Restored French imperial grandeur in the mid-nineteenth century was almost certainly more profitable than the Third Republic's formal empire, the benefits of which have often appeared dubious to economic historians.<sup>23</sup> Colonial expansion after 1880 did little to prevent the decline of French as the language of international diplomacy, which began in the interwar period with the 1919 Peace Conference, in recognition of the American contribution to the Allies' victory during World War I.<sup>24</sup> So why has this informal empire—at least as profitable as the old Bourbon monarchy's colonial possessions in America and India, longer lasting than Napoleon's European empire, and a more evident source of power than the Third Republic's Empire in Africa and Indochina—been almost entirely forgotten by the public and historians alike?<sup>25</sup>

23. Henri Brunschwig, *Mythes et réalités de l'impérialisme colonial français, 1871–1914* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1960); Jacques Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français: histoire d'un divorce*, 2nd edn (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005). This is not to suggest that this formal empire was a significant burden for metropolitan France, or that its effects on economic development were benign; see Elise Huillery, "The Black Man's Burden: The Cost of Colonization of West Africa," *Journal of Economic History*, 74, 1 (2014), and the important ongoing research programme, "Public Finance and Investment in the French Colonial Empire," led by Denis Cogneau, Yannick Dupraz and Sandrine Meslé-Somps at the Paris School of Economics.

24. Vincent Laniol, "Langue et relations internationales: le monopole perdu de la langue française à la Conférence de la Paix de 1919," in *Histoire culturelle des relations internationales. Carrefour méthodologique*, ed. Denis Rolland (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 79–116.

25. For calls to reappraise the informal dimension of French imperialism, see J. P. Daughton, "When Argentina Was 'French': Rethinking Cultural Politics and European Imperialism in Belle-Époque Buenos Aires," *Journal of Modern History*, 80, 4 (2008) and David Todd, "A French Imperial Meridian, 1814–1870," *Past & Present*, 210 (2011). Some French historians of international relations invoked the concept of informal empire, but mostly in an attempt to test the validity of the Marxist conception of imperialism for the period after 1880; see Jean Bouvier, René Girault and Jacques Thobie, *La France impériale, 1880–1914* (Paris: Megreli, 1982) and *L'impérialisme à la française, 1914–1960* (Paris: La Découverte, 1986). Conversely, hostility to dogmatic Marxism led Raymond Aron to condemn the notion of "empire clandestin" as a conspiratorial view, in *Guerre et paix entre les nations* (Paris: Calman-Levy, 1962), 263–79, but Jean-Baptiste Duroselle took a more balanced view, although still focused on the period after 1880, in *Tout empire périra: une vision théorique des relations internationales* (Paris: Université Paris 1, 1982), 347.

A general cause of this neglect is the limited attention that has been accorded to the transnational and imperial dimension of French history.<sup>26</sup> France is still primarily viewed as a nation-state, even *the* original nation-state, in some accounts. In this traditional view, imperial ventures were a peripheral aspect of French history: distractions from its national and European destiny, or misguided aberrations that do not help us to understand the making of modern France. Since the 1990s, historians have reappraised the contributions of empire building (and unravelling) to the fashioning of modern French culture, society and politics. Yet such efforts have met with resistance, and few historians would yet subscribe to Frederic Cooper's pronouncement that France ceased to be an empire and became a nation-state only when Algeria gained independence in 1962.<sup>27</sup> Recent efforts at synthesis still tend to portray France as the least imperial, and the most national, of empires—as an “imperial nation-state”, in a phrase that has gained in popularity.<sup>28</sup>

A limitation of this work of reappraisal has been its focus on the democratic phases of French history, the Revolution (1789–1799) and the Third Republic (1870–1940). The apparent contradiction between French revolutionary ideology on the one hand and the inequities of colonial rule on the other make this focus understandable, because a paradox needed explaining. Yet despite the global significance of the first abolition of slavery, following a successful slave insurrection in Saint-Domingue (modern-day Haiti), endeavours to reframe the founding event of modern France as a product of global rather than national forces continue to meet with skepticism.<sup>29</sup> Efforts to underline the Third

26. On this relative neglect, see Nancy L. Green, “French History and the Transnational Turn,” *French Historical Studies* 37, 4 (2014) and Stephen Sawyer, “Ces nations façonnées par les empires et la globalisation. Réécrire le récit national du XIXe siècle aujourd’hui,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 69, 1 (2014). However, some more recent grand narratives of French national history have begun to incorporate this transnational dimension; see for instance Aurélien Lignereux, *L'Empire des Français, 1799–1815* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2012) and Quentin Deluermoz, *Le crépuscule des révolutions, 1848–1871* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2012).

27. Frederick Cooper, “Alternatives to Empire: France and Africa after World War II,” in *The State of Sovereignty: Territories, Laws, Populations*, eds. Douglas Howland and Luise White (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 94–123.

28. Krishan Kumar, *Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 387–464.

29. On the global significance of the Haitian Revolution, see Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004) and on broader efforts to globalize the history of the French Revolution, see *The French Revolution in Global Perspective*, eds. Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt and

Republic's commitment to colonialism, including the emergence of a genuine imperial consciousness after the First World War, have encountered less resistance.<sup>30</sup> Yet it seems unlikely that this republican colonial empire, with around one million settlers and fifty million subjects in 1914, can ever serve to globalize the history of France as persuasively as the way in which the British Empire, with its over fifteen million settlers and four hundred million subjects, has been used to globalize the history of Britain.<sup>31</sup>

Repairing the neglect of France's informal imperial past therefore not only fills a significant gap in the history of French and European imperialism, but also contributes to ongoing efforts to understand how the world created France and Europe. France after Napoleon did not renounce empire. Instead, it became less interested in formal conquest and experimented with novel techniques of imperial domination. Yet, disturbingly for historians who tend to see democratic republicanism as the natural—if delayed—conclusion of the 1789 Revolution, this empire was far from an attempt to export revolutionary ideals. French proponents of informal empire usually looked back on the Revolution with a mixture of disillusion and dismay, while its collaborators outside France were mostly conservatives bent on reconciling economic modernization with the defence of their privileges. This informal civilizing mission was, in many respects, counter-revolutionary.

## Counter-Revolutionary Empire

Being counter-revolutionary does not imply a reactionary longing for past institutions, or a blind adherence to traditions. As noted by Christopher Bayly, the autocratic regimes that emerged from the age of global revolutions and

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William Nelson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); on skepticism towards such approaches, see David Bell, "Questioning the Global Turn: The Case of the French Revolution," *French Historical Studies*, 37, 1 (2014).

30. See for instance Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Négritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); on the penetration of colonial culture in France, especially in the interwar period, see *Culture coloniale en France: de la Révolution française à nos jours*, eds. Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire and Nicolas Bancel (Paris: CNRS, 2008).

31. On the significance of Britain's large number of settlers, see John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), esp. 41–44, and James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

dominated the politics of Europe and the world between 1815 and 1865 were not resurrections, but “revamped” versions of old regime monarchies, which incorporated many innovations of the revolutionary era.<sup>32</sup> Christopher Clark made a similar point in his reappraisal of the decade that followed the failure of the 1848 Revolutions: far from constituting a “decade of reaction,” as has often been asserted, the 1850s were a “high-water mark in political and administrative innovation across the [European] continent.”<sup>33</sup> This phenomenon was transnational, global even, in some respects.<sup>34</sup> But because it had been so affected by the revolutionary turmoil, France may be seen as a key laboratory of counter-revolutionary modernity, and this exemplary role inspired and facilitated the spread of informal French imperial power by making France a protector of choice for modernizing conservative regimes.

This vision runs against the common perception of nineteenth-century France as being dominated by revolutionary outbursts, concluding with the advent of a democratic republican regime in the 1870s. Such a view has understandably appealed to historians of a republican persuasion, because it affirmed France’s republican essence or destiny. It may also find support in a superficial reading of François Furet’s conception of the Revolution as a one-hundred-year process and of the Third Republic as consecrating “a lasting victory of the French Revolution.”<sup>35</sup> But the global and transnational perspectives cited above suggest another, less teleological interpretation. In reality, between 1799 and 1875, France remained almost continuously a monarchical regime, mostly *de jure* (First Empire, Bourbon Restoration and July Monarchy of 1804–1848, Second Napoleonic Empire of 1852–1870), sometimes *de facto* (Bonaparte’s consulate of 1799–1804, his nephew’s stint as prince-president in 1851–1852) and sometimes *in absentia* (royalist governments during most of the Second Republic, 1848–1851, and at the beginning of the Third Republic, 1871–1876). During this period, sincere republicans only governed the country twice, for ten months in 1848 and for five months in 1870–1871.<sup>36</sup>

32. Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: Global Connections and Comparisons, 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 125.

33. Christopher Clark, “After 1848: The European Revolution in Government,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 22 (2012): 174.

34. Miles Taylor, “The 1848 Revolutions and the British Empire,” *Past & Present*, 166 (2000).

35. François Furet, *La Révolution*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1988), vol. 1, 9.

36. On the significance and limits of monarchical solutions to the problem of post-revolutionary political stability, see Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le moment Guizot* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985) and *La monarchie impossible: les Chartes de 1814 et 1830* (Paris: Fayard, 1994).

If one ceases to view the Third Republic as the inevitable outcome of the French Revolution, the major requirement for historians of nineteenth-century France is to understand the enduring prevalence of the monarchical model: seventy-five years is a very long time in French politics. The contingencies of domestic politics no doubt played a part, but the ceaseless reinvention of the monarchy—by Napoleon, the Bourbons, Louis-Philippe d'Orléans and Napoleon III—calls for a more structural explanation. Domestically, the fear of revolutionary disorder was almost certainly the primary factor, but this book contends that the monarchical form also survived for as long as it did in France because the latter managed to maintain its status as great global power, which it chiefly did by informal imperial means. It is probably not a coincidence that the decline of this informal empire, from the collapse of a French-backed monarchy in Mexico in 1867 until the waning of French influence in Egypt in the 1870s, went together with a faltering of domestic support for monarchical institutions. This influence of the global on the domestic would mirror the better-known role played by international humiliation during the crisis of the old pre-1789 monarchy, or the role of decolonization in bringing down parliamentary republicanism in the 1950s.<sup>37</sup>

Because the nineteenth-century informal empire was essentially built by monarchies, the republican teleology of modern French history has significantly contributed to its neglect. One of the more striking features of G r me's *Reception* is its courtly setting, which echoed not only David's *Coronation* of the first Napoleon, but also representations of a Siamese embassy at the court of Louis XIV in 1686, which G r me consulted.<sup>38</sup> This is not to suggest that the reinvented French monarchies were replicas of the pre-revolutionary order, but they did succeed in reviving those instruments of government that historians tend to associate with the early modern era, and they redeployed them to great effect. A case in point is that of the court itself, whose function was not only symbolic or political, but also economic. Historians of early mod-

37. On the geopolitical causes of the 1789 Revolution, see Timothy Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London: Longman, 1986), 36–68, and Bailey Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution: A Global-Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14–61; on the impact of decolonization on French political culture in the 1950s, see Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), and Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French West Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

38. Martin, "History Repeats Itself": 97.

ern France have long acknowledged the important role played by the court and associated institutions in stimulating demand, especially for luxury goods.<sup>39</sup> After 1800 this function was amplified as the court, relocated from Versailles to Paris, saw its influence on the stimulation of consumer desire multiplied by new commercial infrastructures in the capital city—from arcaded passages, to department stores and universal exhibitions. This neo-courtly complex underlay a commercial boom that turned France into the great procurer of semi-luxury commodities for the global bourgeoisie, a socio-economic function that facilitated the recruitment of foreign collaborators of French power.<sup>40</sup>

One should neither paint too simple a picture nor exaggerate the monarchical proclivities of nineteenth-century France. *Légitimisme*, Orleanism and Bonapartism were not one and the same thing, and there were republicans in France before 1871. This book only claims that national historiography has not paid sufficient attention to the resistance to republicanism, nor to its contribution to the creation of modern France. The emphasis on the neo-courtly features of nineteenth-century France's economic development is not meant to suggest that there was a consensus around economic specialization along such lines—in an earlier work I underlined the intensity of political tensions between support for free trade, which became dominant only among the national elites and certain export-oriented regions, and the prevalence of protectionist sentiment among local notabilities and large swathes of public opinion.<sup>41</sup> Economic openness and democracy do not always go hand in hand, as the protectionist direction of the democratic Third Republic would confirm at the end of the century.

Conversely, distrust of democracy is compatible with the adhesion to modern capitalism, and the latter should not be equated with British-style large-scale manufacturing. The courtly foundations of French economic power were no more archaic than the dependence of Britain's exportation of cotton textiles

39. William H. Sewell, "The Empire of Fashion and the Rise of Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France," *Past & Present*, 206 (2010).

40. On the global aspects of the emergence of a "middle class" or bourgeoisie after 1800, see *The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire*, eds. Christof Dejung, David Motadel and Jürgen Osterhammel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019)

41. David Todd, *Free Trade and Its Enemies in France, 1814–1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

on slave labour in the American South until the 1860s.<sup>42</sup> From a twenty-first-century perspective, many strengths of the mid-nineteenth-century French economy, from the preeminent role of immaterial commodities to highly flexible modes of production, seem to foreshadow the post-industrial age. French economic prowess did not rely on steam power or the bundling together of hundreds of spinning jennies under the same roof, but science and technology played an important part in the extraordinary French propensity to commodify and export, albeit in a more diverse and incremental fashion.<sup>43</sup> The most significant example of this technological sophistication was undoubtedly the Jacquard loom (1804) and its ingenious card-punch system, that powered the phenomenal resurgence of the French silk industry after its severe decline in the 1790s.<sup>44</sup> From the 1820s until the 1870s, silk textiles became France's leading export item, making up a fourth of the total value of French exports around 1860.

The finest silk textiles were velvet, fabrics obtained through the simultaneous weaving of two thicknesses of fibre, mostly silk, until synthetic fibres became more commonly used in the late nineteenth century. It is therefore tempting to think of France's other informal empire as the product of what may be termed *velvet imperialism*, a phrase that simultaneously denotes France's preference for a soft and concealed style of domination and its specialization in the procurement of conspicuous commodities. A vivid illustration of the connections between France's neo-courtly model of economic growth and the resurgence of its imperial status in the nineteenth century was the crafting of scenes or portraits, woven in silk by the most skilled French silk manufacturers, to celebrate the glory of French rulers. Few specimens of such silk *tableaux* have survived in good condition, owing to the fabric's fragility and the discontinuing of this tradition after 1870, but several examples can be found in the rich collections of the Musée des Tissus in Lyon, including two imperial portraits of Napoleon I and Napoleon III, which were made for the universal exhibition held in Paris in 1855.<sup>45</sup> The neo-courtly model of French

42. Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), esp. 83–135.

43. Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, "Historical Alternatives to Mass Production: Politics, Markets and Technology in Nineteenth-Century Industrialization," *Past & Present*, 108 (1985).

44. James Essinger, *Jacquard's Web: How a Hand-loom Led to the Birth of the Information Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 27–43.

45. Maison Furnion père et fils aîné, *Portrait de l'empereur Napoléon* and *Portrait de l'empereur Napoléon III*, in chiselled quadruple velvet, 1855, Lyon, Musée des Tissus, MT 42745 and MT 42746, <http://www.mtmad.fr> (accessed 10 Jan. 2019).

development generated large profits but required limited domestic capital investment, which helps account for the rapid growth of French foreign investment, especially in the form of loans to friendly or client states in Europe, Latin America or the Middle East. Since the work of John A. Hobson gave “imperialism” its modern meaning in the early twentieth century, capital exports are commonly seen as a crucial feature of modern-style imperial expansion.<sup>46</sup> In this respect, France’s informal empire also comes across as uncannily modern—all the more so as foreign lending to protected states, via the commodification and dissemination among the French public of foreign states’ bonds, attached hundreds of thousands of middle-class savers to the fortunes of France’s expansion. French statesmen and writers on political economy explicitly viewed transnational lending as a means of consolidating a new kind of domination based on asymmetric connections, rather than the exercise of sovereignty. During his American exile in the 1790s, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, the mastermind of French diplomacy up until the 1830s, formed the opinion that extensive credit, especially to former colonies, was an essential means of maintaining quasi-colonial domination.<sup>47</sup> Twenty years before Hobson denounced modern finance as “the taproot of imperialism,” Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, France’s most influential economist post-1870, came up with the concept of “colonisation des capitaux” (investment colonization) as an ingenious means of levying “a tribute” on the rest of the world without incurring the costs of sovereign rule or the demographic losses of settler emigration.<sup>48</sup>

Talleyrand, Leroy-Beaulieu and most other advocates of this politico-economic model were skeptical, if not frankly hostile, when it came to democratic republicanism. Instead, they favoured a monarchical system of rule, although they were relatively indifferent to whichever dynasty would sit on the throne. But their ideal monarchy was one strongly committed to capitalism,

46. Richard Koebner and Helmut Dan Schmidt, *The Story and Significance of Imperialism: A Political Word, 1840–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 221–49.

47. Doina Pasca Harsanyi, *Lessons from America: Liberal French Nobles in Exile, 1793–1798* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 84–105; on British informal domination in the early American republic, see Hopkins, *American Empire*, 158–85.

48. Dan Warshaw, *Paul Leroy-Beaulieu and Established Liberalism in France* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), 78–105; the late Donald Winch pointed out to me the significance of this contribution of Leroy-Beaulieu and other French economists during the discussion of his paper “The Political Economy of Empire,” given at the Institute of Historical Research, London, 5 November 2014.

devoid of nostalgia for feudal paternalism and ardent in its defence of private property rights. This politico-economic project was not only an attempt to heal the domestic divides inherited from the 1790s, but also a shrewd strategy for taking advantage of global economic integration. Partly by design and partly as a result of changes in the rest of the world, it tended to turn France into the centre of a global web of regimes which were committed to an authoritarian and counter-revolutionary style of modernity.

## Collaborative Empire

Counter-revolutionary commitment to capitalism went hand in hand with a collaborative style of imperialism. Associating capitalism with imperialism runs the risk of evoking Leninist tropes, but the only intellectual debt to the Marxist view of empire that needs to be recorded here is Karl Kautsky's intuition, much vilified by Lenin, that empire was a collective endeavour of European capitalism and that greater significance should be attached to trans-imperial collaboration.<sup>49</sup> This association should not be seen as a denigration of capitalism. The words "empire", and even "imperialism", are not used here pejoratively. They merely serve to designate a mode of political organization, viewed by many scholars as alternative, and by some as preferable, to the nation-state.<sup>50</sup> However, creating markets requires political agency. Nation-states have long been recognized as creators of national markets, but historians of empire have reappraised their role, especially the British Empire's, in the acceleration of global economic integration.<sup>51</sup> This book's claim is merely that France's largely informal empire also made a significant contribution to nineteenth-century globalization, even if it employed subtler mechanisms of coercion and collaboration than the more formal British empire ever did.<sup>52</sup>

49. Karl Kautsky, "Ultra-Imperialismus," *Die Neue Zeit*, 11 Sep. 1914; on Kautsky's ideas and their afterlife, see Holm A. Leonhardt, *Kartelltheorie und Internationale Beziehungen. Theoriegeschichtliche Studien* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2009), 408–77.

50. See for instance Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 1–3.

51. Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003); Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

52. Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 436–41, 450–61.

Empires are rarely, if ever, entirely coercive. Even the most formal of colonial ventures, the British Raj in India, relied extensively on indigenous collaboration, while British settler colonists have been described as “pre-fabricated collaborators” of imperial rule.<sup>53</sup> From this perspective, informal empire is merely a system of collaboration that leaves intact the external layer of sovereignty of foreign, colonized states.<sup>54</sup> Robinson and Gallagher contended that British officials favoured this mode of domination because it was more economical: “paramountcy” was upheld “by informal means if possible” and “by formal annexations when necessary.”<sup>55</sup> In the case of France, the preference for informal expansion was reinforced by two specific constraints. The first was Britain’s global naval supremacy that rendered quixotic the notion of a new territorial challenge to the old imperial rival. The second was France’s quasi demographic stagnation after 1815, which reduced its capacity for settlement emigration. France’s imperial expansion therefore required two complementary kinds of collaboration: one a tacit partnership with Britain overseas, somewhat obscured in existing scholarship by a sensationalist focus on rhetorical outbursts of Anglophobia in France (and Francophobia in Britain); the other an original effort, based on the appeal of the French modernizing monarchical model, to create collaborators among the foreign elite.

The notion that British and French imperial policies were inspired by deep mutual animosity in the nineteenth century remains widespread. It cannot be denied that Britain and France’s ambitions overseas sometimes collided between 1815 and 1880, most notably in the Middle East and the Pacific. However, too much attention has been paid to these clashes. Claims that Britain and France were on the brink of war in 1840 (in a dispute over Egyptian expansion) or in 1844 (in a quarrel about Tahiti) are grounded for the most part in the bellicose speeches of opposition newspapers and MPs and should be treated

53. Ronald Robinson, “Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration,” in *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, eds. Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (London: Longman, 1972), 117–42; and on collaboration in informal colonies, see Ronald Robinson, “The Excentric Idea of Empire, with or without Colonies,” in *Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities*, eds. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Jürgen Osterhammel (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 267–89.

54. On the layering of sovereignty as a chief characteristic of imperial formations, see Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, 16–17.

55. Gallagher and Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade”: 3.

with skepticism.<sup>56</sup> In practice, the French government, mindful of its inferior strategic position overseas, could be relied upon to pull back from the brink. This remained true even after territorial rivalry intensified after 1880, for instance in the famous case of Fashoda in 1898, when the French government merely sought to save face and never seriously contemplated going to war with Britain.<sup>57</sup> Given that between 1689 and 1815 Britain and France were at war with each other for a total of fifty-six years, in a series of eight military conflicts in which colonial issues loomed very large, it seems more pertinent to try and explain how the two imperial powers succeeded in avoiding another war after 1815.<sup>58</sup>

We could go further and note that after Waterloo, Britain and France frequently embarked on military expeditions or full-scale wars overseas, but always as allies: in support of Greek independence against the Ottoman Empire (1827–1828); to prevent the annexation of Uruguay by Argentina through the blockade of the Rio de la Plata (1845–1847); to assert their supremacy in the Ottoman world against Russian encroachments during the Crimean War (1853–1856); to confirm the opening of China to Western trade and missionaries during the Arrow or Second Opium War (1856–1860); in a military occupation of Lebanon to protect Eastern Christians (1860–1861); and in the initial stage of a European intervention in Mexico (1861–1862) that resulted in the creation of a French-client Mexican monarchy. Other instances of significant geopolitical cooperation included the joint patrolling of the Atlantic to repress the slave trade in the 1830s or the adoption—after mutual consultation—of a policy of non-intervention in the American Civil War (1861–1865).<sup>59</sup> Cooperation even extended to each other's colonial possessions, as in the efforts of the

56. On France's bluff during the crisis of 1840 and the lack of real damages to Anglo-French relations, see Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 736–56.

57. Martin Thomas and Richard Toye, *Arguing about Empire: Imperial Rhetoric in Britain and France, 1882–1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 65–80.

58. François Crouzet, "The Second Hundred Years War: Some Reflections," *French History*, 10, 4 (1996).

59. Paul Michael Kielstra, *The Politics of Slave Trade Suppression in Britain and France, 1814–1848: Diplomacy, Morality and Economics* (Houndmills: MacMillan, 2000), 163–206; Howard Jones, "Wrapping the World in Fire: The Interventionist Crisis in the Civil War," in *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s*, ed. Don. H. Doyle (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 34–57.

British government to suppress the smuggling of weapons to ‘Abd al-Qadir, France’s leading adversary during its war of conquest in Algeria (1839–1847).<sup>60</sup> Against this backdrop, the curious death of the Bonapartist pretender Louis-Napoléon, son of Napoleon III, as a British officer during the Anglo-Zulu war (1879) may be construed as the tail end of nineteenth-century military cooperation overseas between the two western European monarchies.<sup>61</sup>

Anglo-French imperial collaboration was neither perfectly balanced nor stable. Thanks to its naval and economic superiority, Britain remained the stronger of the two partners throughout this period, although the steam and iron cladding revolutions of the mid-century enabled France to reduce the gap in maritime power by the 1860s.<sup>62</sup> Even proponents of “realism” in International Relations Theory, who tend to uphold “balancing” models of state behaviour (that is to say, a propensity to form coalitions against potential hegemons), admit that states may opt for “bandwagoning” in relation to greater powers in special circumstances. The three main circumstances favouring such outcomes—a significant gap in raw power, the lack of potential allies against the greater power, and the perception of the latter as pursuing moderate goals—can be identified in the case of France vis-à-vis Britain after 1815: Britain’s naval supremacy was uncontested, other major European powers remained wary of French ambitions, and Britain did not seek to undermine French continental security.<sup>63</sup> This configuration encouraged France tacitly to hitch its imperial wagon to Britain’s rather than confront British power, while the preference for informal domination reduced tensions by enabling the co-existence of British and French imperial interests in informally colonized

60. Raphael Danziger, *Abd al-Qadir and the Algerians: Resistance to the French and Internal Consolidation* (New York: Homes & Meier, 1977), 230.

61. Ian Knight, *With His Face to the Foe: The Life and Death of Louis Napoleon, the Prince Impérial, Zululand 1879* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2001).

62. Michèle Battesti, *La marine de Napoléon III: une politique navale*, 2 vols. (Chambéry and Vincennes: Université de Savoie and Service Historique de la Marine, 1997), vol. 1, 246–7, and vol. 2, 765.

63. Additional contributory factors include ideological affinities, which may be discerned between the two capitalist monarchies between 1815 and 1870, and economic aid, which Britain provided under the form of large-scale investment in France’s public debt and railways between 1815 and 1850; Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 29–49, 173.

territories.<sup>64</sup> What rivalry remained can often be better understood as emulation. For instance, the actual result of the Anglo-French naval “arms race” between 1840 and 1870 was to increase the two countries’ capacity to project their power overseas, at the expense of extra-European countries.<sup>65</sup>

French collaboration with the indigenous elite of territories which were under informal influence bore a resemblance to Anglo-French imperial cooperation, not least in the way tensions occasionally flared up during attempts to modify the terms of the partnership. The foreign elite who collaborated with French (or British) imperial power retained their own agenda. The reception of Mongkut’s emissaries, orientalized by Gérôme, was also a Siamese diplomatic success, as close relations with France helped stave off British supremacy and weaken a regional rival, Cambodia. Tellingly, Mongkut had a copy of Gérôme’s painting made that still hangs in the Thai royal palace.<sup>66</sup> As the growing technological gap meant that military confrontations with European powers were doomed to failure, many extra-European polities in the mid-nineteenth century adopted strategies of collaboration.<sup>67</sup> Although Britain may have seemed the most natural imperial protector, a large number of foreign governments favoured collaboration with France. This may have been in part because France represented a lesser threat for their autonomy; in Egypt, Muhammad ‘Ali actively sought to develop ties with France only after the fall of Napoleon had confirmed British hegemony in the Mediterranean.<sup>68</sup> Yet ideological affinities also played a part. The conservative and authoritarian version of modernity propounded by France often appealed more to the governing classes than the aggressively liberal version promoted by Britain. A case in point was the troublesome question of coerced labour. Britain’s virulent abolitionism alienated many potential collaborators among elites whose economic and social status depended on the exploitation of servile or semi-servile labour, while the relative French indifference to the persistence of

64. Conversely, in the eighteenth century the relative balance between British and French power prevented effective cooperation between the two countries; see John Shovlin, *Trading with the Enemy: Britain, France, and the Eighteenth-Century Quest for a Global Order* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, forthcoming in June 2021)

65. C. I. Hamilton, *Anglo-French Naval Rivalry, 1840–1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

66. Martin, “History Repeats Itself”:121–4.

67. Daniel R. Headrick, *Power over Peoples: Technology, Environments, and Western Imperialism, 1400 to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 177–225.

68. Khaled Fahmy, “The Era of Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. M. W. Daly, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), vol. 2, 152–53.

slavery and *corvée* facilitated cordial relations with the Brazilian and Egyptian governments.<sup>69</sup>

Although France's imperial allure relied on ideological factors until the 1870s, it had little to do with its revolutionary or republican political culture. Even in Britain, the Tories were far more inclined than the Whigs or Liberals to endorse a cooperation with France, while British radicals forged the word "imperialism" to decry the authoritarian and militaristic style of the French Bonapartist monarchy.<sup>70</sup> In the Americas and the Ottoman world, and as far as Japan, it was the least liberal faction of the elite who proved the most susceptible to French influence, from slave plantation owners to conservative Tokugawa shoguns.<sup>71</sup> This web of global conservative connections echoed France's specialization in luxury and semi-luxury commodities—its informal imperial power can be construed as the external facet of the domestic, counter-revolutionary modernizing project.

Despite these positive (from a conservative perspective) incentives, this global project can still be deemed an empire because coercion, or the threat of coercion, was frequently employed, in combination with persuasion. Informal empire also requires a powerful military, and French informal imperialism often proved compatible with the pursuit—if not always the attainment—of military glory on an unprecedented global scale. French influence in the Middle East owed a great deal to memories of the occupation of Egypt between 1798

69. On the contrast between British and French attitudes towards slavery, see Seymour Drescher, "British Way, French Way: Opinion Building and Revolution in the Second French Slave Emancipation," *American Historical Review*, 96, 3 (1991); on the Francophilia of the Brazilian conservative elites, see Jeffrey Needell, *The Conservatives, The State, and Slavery in the Brazilian Monarchy, 1831–1871* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 77–80, 167–22, and on its cultural imprint see Jeffrey Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque: Elite Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); on the dispute between Britain, France and Egypt on the use of *corvée* labour, especially in relation to the construction of the Suez Canal, see Nathan J. Brown, "Who Abolished Corvée Labour in Egypt and Why?," *Past & Present*, 144 (1994).

70. Koebner and Schmidt, *The Story and Significance of Imperialism*, 1–26; Jon H. Parry, "The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851–1880," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11 (2001).

71. On the appeal of the French conservative and authoritarian model beyond slave-owning elites in the Americas, see Edward Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America, 1820–1867: Equilibrium in the New World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 157–95; on French support for the conservative Bakufu in Japan in the 1860s, see Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000), 306–8.

and 1801, while military interventions in Latin America culminated with the French invasion of Mexico between 1861 and 1866. French gunboats served to impose treaties that conceded special privileges, both legal and economic, from Haiti in the Caribbean in the 1820s to several East Asian states in the 1850s. And the rapid waning of French influence after 1870 was in large part a product of France's defeat against Prussia, which dented its military reputation and diminished its capacity to coerce overseas. The case of Algeria confirms that collaboration and coercion were complementary, rather than mutually exclusive, aspects of French expansion, since it was only after hope of collaborating with 'Abd al-Qadir's regime collapsed in 1840 that the French resorted to territorial conquest, the most extreme form of coercion.

Such French international *rayonnement* should be considered imperial because it was conceived as such by contemporary French intellectuals and statesmen (chapter 1, on the political economy of informal empire), because it could relapse into formal colonization (chapter 2, on the failure of informal domination in Algeria) and because the commercial, financial and legal connections drawn with Europe, Latin America and the Middle East enhanced the leverage of the French government in the domestic and foreign affairs of other countries (chapters 3, 4 and 5, on French commodities, capital and law as instruments of domination). French domination often met many of the ten features of the ideal type of informal empire listed by Jürgen Osterhammel in reference to the British experience in *fin-de-siècle* East Asia; in the case of Egypt and Mexico in the 1860s, it arguably met all of them.<sup>72</sup> In some important ways, the French model of informal empire also foreshadowed what Victoria de Grazia identified as the five chief features of the United States' "irresistible" empire in twentieth-century Europe: free trade in cultural as well as material commodities; the forging of direct ties between the imperial and dominated civil societies; the power of making the norms that governed exchanges; a consumer ethos that enlarged access to new, often conspicuous

72. The features are the existence of a "power differential," a "veto" over domestic policy-making, the imposition of "basic guidelines for foreign-policy orientation," "some sort of military establishment," "a substantial economic establishment," a monopoly or quasi monopoly in the most dynamic sectors of the economy, control of public finances by foreign banks, significant imports of foreign capital, "collaboration of indigenous rulers and comprador groups," and adhesion of the collaborators to the "cosmology" of the dominant power's elites; see Jürgen Osterhammel, "Semi-Colonialism and Informal Empire in Twentieth-Century China: Towards a Framework of Analysis," in *Imperialism and After*, eds. Mommsen and Osterhammel, 290–314.

commodities; and a claim to peacefulness that masked the crucial role played by military force. Yet France's irresistible empire relied on the narrower "bourgeois regime of consumption" that American mass consumerism displaced in the twentieth century.<sup>73</sup>

This emphasis on the mechanisms of domination, notably those made possible by an asymmetric economic development, helps make the concept of informal empire feel less elusive. However, an even greater challenge than elusiveness, when studying informal imperialism, is the diffuseness of sources. Relevant evidence ranges from diplomatic ultimatums, backed up by naval or air power, to advertisements for commodities that convey an adhesion to certain imperial values, such as champagne or Coca Cola. We need to consult state archives for this, because informal empires are, in part, political constructs. While conducting research for this book, I found the rich archives of the French ministry of foreign affairs in La Courneuve to possess the most crucial government papers—from the dispatches of plenipotentiaries to extensive documentation on extraterritorial jurisdiction. Yet nation-state officials were not the only builders of informal empires. This book takes a close look at the role of economic actors, from silk or champagne merchants within France to expatriate adventurers who sought to make a quick fortune in regions under French influence. Information on these agents of informal empire is more widely scattered, but much can be gleaned in the economic and social archives of Roubaix. Perish the cynical thought that historians have always preferred to study French formal imperialism solely because the archives of French colonies are located in beautiful, sunny Aix-en-Provence, whereas the grey Parisian *banlieue* of La Courneuve and Roubaix in the northern rustbelt offer more melancholy settings for archival research.

The book places an emphasis on the economics of France's informal empire, because economic motivation and asymmetric relations have underpinned our understanding of imperialism since the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>74</sup> An analysis of velvet imperialism confined to its political or cultural

73. Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005), 6–9, 11; for a systematic comparison between twentieth-century American imperial power and another nineteenth-century empire, Britain's, see Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

74. Jeremy Adelman, "Introduction," in *Empire and the Social Sciences: Global Histories of Knowledge*, ed. Jeremy Adelman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019).

aspects risked reducing it to a rhetorical enterprise, or dismissing it as the vaguest type of influence. It deserves to be considered as an empire, I contend, because it combined wealth-extracting practices with claims to universal dominion, and because it affected the economic life of millions of men and women, in France itself and in parts of the world subjected to informal French colonialism.<sup>75</sup> This economic thread takes several forms in the book, including the conceptual framework and conventional tools of economic history, such as statistics. In addition, however, it borrows the instruments of intellectual history to reconstruct the political economy of informal imperialism, those of cultural history to highlight the intensity of commodification processes in mid-nineteenth century France, and those of legal history to examine how such influence distorted markets in favour of French agents. The book is far from an exhaustive investigation of French informal imperialism—for want of space and linguistic aptitude it rarely considers this empire from the perspective of its many non-French collaborators and victims, although I hope it will inspire others to do so. It remains first and foremost a book about France, but one which seeks to contribute to a new, global history of France, as both an instigator and a product of nineteenth-century globalization.

75. On political ideas and law as constituents of economic life, see Jeremy Adelman, *The Republic of Capital: Buenos Aires and the Legal Transformation of the Atlantic World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1–15; on economic life in France, from the 1760s until the late nineteenth century, see Emma Rothschild, *An Infinite History: The Story of a Family in France over Three Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming in January 2021).

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