

# **“Algeria and the Ideas Prevailing in France Concerning Colonization”**

**by Doctor Gustave Le Bon**

*Revue Scientifique* – October 2, 1887

Robert K. Stevenson – Translator and Editor



Berber of Algeria

## Algeria and the Ideas Prevailing in France Concerning Colonization

In the economic battle between the Western world and the Orient, a battle which undoubtedly will be one of the heaviest preoccupations of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and will inevitably lead to more destruction and spilled blood than the most calamitous wars of passed times, the colonies will clearly be called upon to play a first-rate role. One can hardly dispute the interest that we have in keeping the small number of them that we possess, and we therefore should not remain indifferent to that which affects them.

When one closely examines the administration of the colonies established by diverse European peoples, one sees that it is based on a small number of very plain principles. These principles, necessarily engendered by experience, and which consequently ought to be the same everywhere, vary on the contrary in a considerable manner from one people to another. “From one people to another” is perhaps too much to say because, with regard to the ideas concerning colonization, one can distinguish among the European nations two classes—one made up by we French alone, and the other comprising all the other nations. This latter—the other European nations—established colonies in order to keep them and to draw profit. Superior to these shabby preoccupations, and not unmindful that divine Providence has given us the role to convey to different peoples of the world the benefits of our civilization and the institutions that the world envies us for, we try to govern them with out institutions and ideas. Institutions and ideas are unfortunately rejected with complete unanimity. Certain of our good duty, we nevertheless have kept persisting in our doctrines, with the result being that up to this day a sufficient number of disastrous operations have occurred that convincingly prove that, with respect to colonies, our grand principles are, as much from the theoretical point of view as from the practical point of view, lamentable errors.

In an article published several months ago by this Revue,<sup>1</sup> I showed what the guiding principles are that have directed England in its conquest and administration

---

<sup>1</sup> *L'Inde moderne. – Comment on fonde une colonie, comment on la garde et comment on la perde* (November 20, 1886). In publishing this article in a scholarly revue, and writing it mainly for scholars, I have hardly counted on this article having a similar impact on Indians. Reproduced and discussed in most of the journals of the peninsula, it has given rise to interminable polemics. The indigenous journals have certainly not been in agreement with my opinions; but the Indian journals put out by the British have little contested the accuracy of my conclusion.

of its colonies, and notably the ones applied to India; how this latter colony has been able to be subjugated solely by silver and the men of the conquered people; with what sagacity it has been administered; and how, through the application of a single erroneous philosophical principle, this gigantic empire will perhaps one day escape its conquerors. Today I wish to investigate what the current ideas are in France concerning the administration of our most nearby colony, Algeria, and to what results the application of these ideas might lead.

Books concerning Algeria are innumerable; but, two very recent works, penned by two extremely competent authors, indicate to us in the clearest way the main ideas presently circulating on this question. One has as its author the eminent economist, Professor Paul Leroy-Beaulieu;<sup>1</sup> the other was written by a French consul, Louis Vignon.<sup>2</sup> Both books have appeared simultaneously and therefore can hardly have borrowed ideas from each other.

I have great esteem for the works of Professor Leroy-Beaulieu, and if today I have occasion to combat most of his ideas, it is precisely because they well represent the average of the currently-held ideas on Algeria—ideas whose application I am convinced will prove disastrous to our country.

I also oppose, although to a lesser degree, some of the ideas of Monsieur Vignon; but, from now on, I must say that if his book is less methodical and complete than the one by Professor Leroy-Beaulieu, it is much superior with respect to its political conceptions, accurate insights, and wise judgments. It is, in addition, superior by the fact that Monsieur Vignon has perfectly understood the completely capital importance of the religious question in the Orient, whereas Professor Leroy-Beaulieu, just like most of the rest of the authors, does not seem to have even surmised it. Monsieur Vignon's book, with its well-chosen documents and clear exposition, make it the best work that one can consult in order to obtain sound ideas on Algeria and comprehend the extraordinary failings and weakness of our colonizing system.

It is by no means my object in this article to examine in detail the results of our colonization of Algeria; instead, my intention is only to study the fundamental ideas that have directed and appear to be still directing into the foreseeable future

---

<sup>1</sup> *L'Algérie et la Tunisie*, by Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, professor at the College of France, member of the Institute, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> *La France dans l'Afrique du Nord*, by Louis Vignon, French consul and former principal private secretary of the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1887.

our administration of this colony. My criticisms will therefore bear solely on philosophical principles and not at all on the men who apply them. Of course, it is not philosophical principles, but rather political necessities that steer government officials; now, political necessities are daughters of opinion; it is therefore opinion that must be apprehended, not the persons forced to sustain it and who would not be sufficiently powerful enough to govern without it. Opinion: sometimes people can change it. In France this is not easily accomplished because if we amount to the most revolutionary of peoples in form, we perhaps amount to the most conservative at heart.

Everyone knows that if Algeria is a country just as vast as France, it is also definitely a land with rather few people. It is inhabited by 3,200,000 Moslems. These disciples of the Prophet are devoted to our institutions, at least from what the official reports assert; but, in fact, this devotion has the need of being consolidated by an army of 50,000 men, that is to say, by an army almost equal in number to the one that the British have employed in India in order to maintain under their obedience 200 million Hindus, along with 50 million Moslems who are certainly just as redoubtable and difficult to handle as their coreligionists in Algeria.<sup>1</sup>

Besides this Moslem population in Algeria, one finds a population of 400,000 Europeans of which only half is French; the other half is composed on Spaniards, Italians, Maltese, etc. These European elements of such diverse origins do not interbreed with the Moslems, but do amongst themselves, and the day is not far away where from these *mélanges* a new population with quite different determined characteristics will result, and its interests will naturally be those of Algeria while encompassing very little of those of the mother country. Already France is beginning to be considered in Algeria as some sort of natural banker whose role is to bestow on the country railroads, public establishments, and various subsidies.

As for the 3,200,000 Moslems who form the largest part of the population, they are descendants of the conquerors of North Africa, two-thirds of whom appear

---

<sup>1</sup> Many Moslems in India are, in addition, pure Arabs. They are numerous above all in the Nizam empire. In Hyderabad they comprise a population so fanatical and dangerous that the English government has been compelled to absolutely prohibit Europeans from traversing the streets without authorization and escort. Moreover, it is a general principle to the Indians to prevent as much as possible contact between the Europeans and themselves. Each city always contains two parts which are often separated by several kilometers: the town for the natives and the European town; this latter forms what is called the cantonment.

mainly to be Berbers and about a third Arabs. The differences that they present between themselves are, in a word, slight; the only difference possessing some importance is the division between the settled peoples and the nomads. As we shall see later on, contrary to a very widespread opinion, both Arabs and Berbers supply parts of these two classes.

The book by Professor Leroy-Beaulieu seems to well summarize in a word the ideas prevailing in France concerning Algeria: “Frenchify the Moslems;” the one by Monsieur Vignon is much more sensible: “win the Moslems over morally.” Unfortunately, the political system followed up to now in order to Frenchify or win over these Moslems is a barbarity reminiscent of the methods employed by the early Americans with regard to the Redskins whereby the former captured the latter’s hunting territories, leaving them the full liberty of choosing between dying from famine or being methodically mowed down by gunfire.

Our administrative system of repression in Algeria has been very well documented by Monsieur Vignon:

“The administration,” he points out, “seeing the military commanders confiscate part of the lands of the tribes after each insurrection, thinks that it can rightfully award the best properties to the colonists and expel the native inhabitants. As the European element expands, the indigenous people are sent away from the heritage of their forefathers, with entire tribes often being transported far from the region that is in some way their native land. The results of such a policy implemented for over 30 years cannot be ambiguous: here, the Arab is incessantly repressed, always quite uncertain of reaping the fruit of his labor, neither dreaming to successfully cultivate nor to improve the soil; deprived of the arable lands of his tribe and even of the enjoyment to access to streams, he is unable to harvest sufficient grain for his sustenance and sees his herds diminish or disappear; everywhere, finally, these thousand sufferances feed the hatred of the indigene against the colonist and digs deeper, instead of filling, the already vast chasm which separates the two races.

“The Senate decree of 1863 which declared the tribes owners of the territories that they had possessed has not put an end to the system of ‘resettlement,’ but it has changed in form and in name. Today it is called the ‘expropriation for the cause of public benefit’ plan. Two essential traits characterize this plan: firstly, it procures land for the colonists by only taking it away from the indigenes, forming in the process exclusively European zones where the indigenes are carefully set aside as owners; secondly, it condemns to misery the dispossessed indigene. The original owner of the soil receives an

indemnity in silver that is determined by the courts; it generally varies from 50 to 60 francs per hectare. The indigene therefore finds himself exchanging the 30 or 40 hectares on which he comfortably lived for a sum of 1500 to 2000 francs, that is to say, instead of an estate of land sufficient to meet his needs for his entire life, he now has nothing more than capital that he will exhaust in one or two years.

“One may well ask whether given these conditions, the expropriation is not more like a spoliation, whether this system is, in fact, exactly the reverse of what ought to be followed. Now, a policy of condensing the indigenes on territory that they own whenever it is disproportionate for their number, offering for free to the colonists broad fields and thus favoring the establishment of European groups, will bring to the tribes in the midst of where they are settled the material benefits of civilization, water, roads, the conduct of European culture, and at the same time European ideas and customs. Instead of implementing this humane policy, beneficial to the fusion of the races as well as so favorable to the conquered people’s being able to forget their hatred and resentments, the Algerian administration seems to prefer a system which under the appearance of justice ‘expels’ the indigenes, chasing them from their homes, making them exiles or vagabonds unless they agree to remain as hirelings on the soil of which formerly they were masters.

“This especially grievous system is unceasingly enforced! The ministries, Parliament, Governor General, elected Algerian councils, and the colonists themselves do not seem to see the danger! Every year both Chambers of Parliament pass a bill providing a credit for the ‘expenses of colonization’ and often Parliament helps in part pay the indemnities for expropriation; each year the Governor General announces in the *General Situation Report* on Algeria the opening of new centers to European people, that is to say, the ‘expropriation of new indigenous families!’”

Can one be astonished that with such an unintelligently ferocious system in place, it is necessary for us, in order to maintain the peace among 3 million Moslems, to station an army equal in size to the one which suffices the British in India for restraining 250 people, among which there are 50 million Moslems?

In spite of his official position, Monsieur Vignon does not hesitate to lay bare the disastrous manner in which we govern Algeria; he does so with moderation, but also with firmness. True patriotism does not consist of hiding the evils of the country that one loves, but rather in trying to cleanse them. Monsieur Vignon does not conceal these evils, and no current prejudice prevents him from

disclosing them. It is thus that he does not hesitate, notwithstanding our egalitarian theories and the present-day power of the sons of Israel, to point out the most stupid mistake we have committed by naturalizing en bloc the Jews of Algeria, a population of usurers who are treated with the heaviest contempt as much by the Arabs as by the Berbers and who are regarded as evil, and whose naturalization has not at all made the Arabs and Berbers our allies. “How do you maintain under your obedience 250 million men?” I asked one day in India an English general. “Solely by our moral prestige,” he replied to me. It is not otherwise that one can retain a colony. This prestige, one need not live for a long time in our colonies to see that we hardly suspect its importance, and no other measure has made us lose more of it in the eyes of the Arabs in Algeria than the naturalization of the Jews.

When one reads the history of our colonies, one catches himself unwillingly thinking that the harshest experiments are just as powerless to change the qualities of a people as it is for a vertebrate to rid itself of its vertebrae. We have with the utmost sincerity conveyed in Algeria the idea—an idea cherished by revolutionaries of all schools and one which we have not rid ourselves of despite a century of disastrous experiences—that the individual cannot at all manage himself at all without the aid of the State. Whether it’s a matter of constructing a port, establishing a railway of purely local interest, building a school, etc., it is to the State and always the State that we address ourselves. This profound vice of our mental constitution has for a long time astonished people, like the English and the Americans, who are accustomed to what some have so justly called “self-government.” Never would the idea occur to an Englishman of Birmingham or Madras of appealing to the government in London to dig out a port or establish a school. By contrast, one will never be able to persuade a resident of Le Havre that if there is a need for a school or port there, he ought to appeal to his fellow local residents and not to the government.

One of the strangest applications of omnipotent State intervention carried out in Algeria has been the official colonization program, the lamentable history of which Monsieur Vignon details in his book. One will see there what has resulted from the gratuitous distributions of land to low-class rejects of all sorts (people as apt as a professor of Sanskrit to till the soil), how the creation of official villages have today become deserts, etc. The results of this disastrous experience and the excessive expenses that it has entailed were not, however, sufficient to enlighten our administrations because, for example, in 1883 the Governor General sought 50 million francs in order to dispossess Arabs and to create new official villages destined to replace previous ones that had so miserably expired. It is fortunate that

both Chambers have rejected this project, for if enacted, it would certainly bring about a new revolt of the Moslem population as well as a new way for billions of francs to be swallowed up. That such a project has been able to be proposed, discussed, and then failed to come about shows to what point French public opinion has reached with respect to colonization.

One can understand, given the above-mentioned experiments, how excessively costly Algeria has proven to be to France; Monsieur Vignon estimates that we have so far paid out 3 billion 600 million francs for it. At the cost of so many sacrifices, have we at least pacified the country? We try to convince ourselves this is so, but we also continue to not understand that, in order to nearly maintain the peace among 3 million Moslems, it is necessary for us—a point I shall repeat for the third time—to field an army as considerable as the one which suffices England to very peacefully govern 50 million Moslems and 200 million Hindus who reside in the gigantic empire of India.

Since the conquest of Algeria two fundamental principles, ones which have alternated in accordance with changes in opinion, seem to have exclusively directed our policy in Algeria. The first consists of expropriating land from, and then trying to drive into the desert, the Arabs; the second is to Frenchify indigenous Algerians and impose on them our institutions. As one might surmise, the Arabs do not permit themselves to be expelled to the desert, this being so for the excellent reason that the desert isn't able to feed and sustain anybody; not surprisingly, before consenting to allow themselves to die from hunger, the three million Moslem people in Algeria began vigorously opposing and resisting the resettlement-to-the-desert policy. The Algerian Arabs, in addition, are no more inclined to allow themselves to be Frenchified as resettled, for there has never been up to now a people who has changed its mental constitution in order to adopt one of another people. The two schemes—resettlement and Frenchification—are therefore equally detestable to the Arabs, and it is only by successively fading from one to the other that we shall have opportunities of rendering them less detestable. Now, by waiting for opinion to become well established on this point we will undoubtedly continue running our ruinous experiments in Algeria, doing so until the day arrives when we finally understand that leaving to a conquered people its institutions, customs, its way of life and beliefs, as all the other colonizing peoples have done (notably the English and Dutch), is the simplest, least costly, and wisest of solutions.

Today in the West we have almost liberated ourselves from the influence of



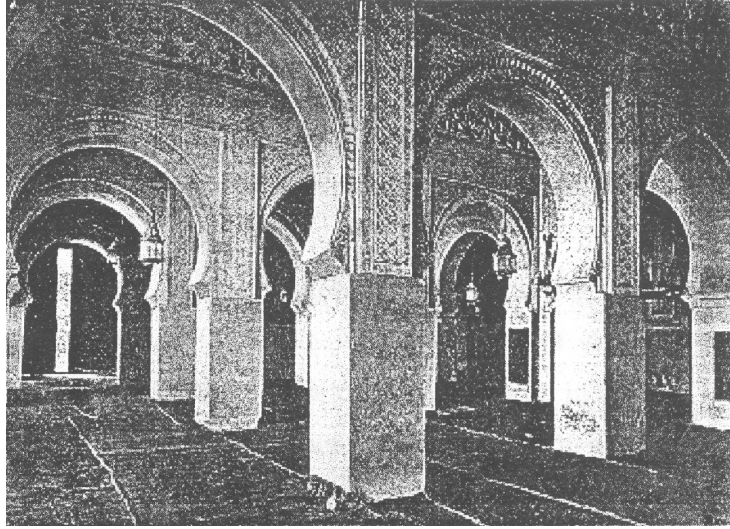
religious beliefs, and we naively believe that it is the same everywhere else. Very few European authors have succeeded in comprehending that for the Orient the religious question transcends all the others: civil and political institutions as well as public and private life are for the disciples of Mohammed, as much as for the followers of Siva or Buddha, solely governed by religious law. Eating, drinking, or sleeping, sowing their fields with seed, and gathering the harvest are for the people of the Orient religious acts. The English understand this fact so well that in India, despite their rigid Protestantism, they restore at their expense the pagodas, fully supporting the priests of Siva and Vishnu, and do not at all countenance the zeal of their own missionaries. It is not in the British Empire that one will find advocates for maintaining that a colony must rather perish than a principle.

Protecting the Moslems' religion, supporting especially the influential congregations, fortifying, instead of battling and trying to weaken, the authority of the Moslem clerics: such are the very wise counsels of Monsieur Vignon. Our former resident of Tunis, one of the rare Frenchmen who it can be said quite well understands Oriental ways, gave proof of his very deep and astute political judgment when he convinced the bey of Tunis to have religious decrees drafted in order to affirm to the eyes of the believers the legitimacy of the measures that he wished to impose.

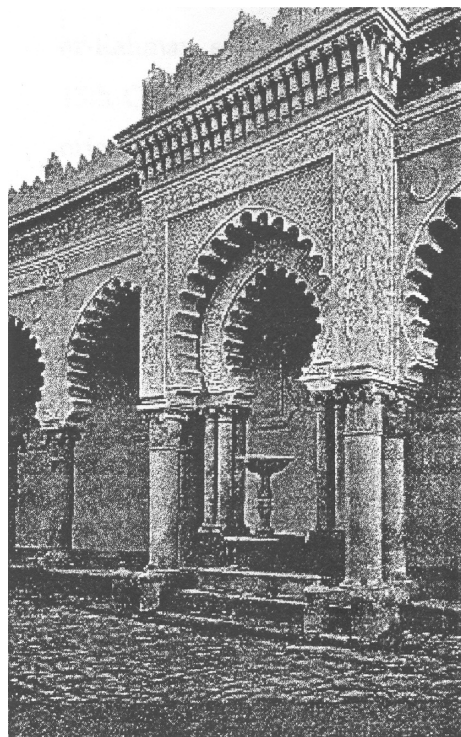
To respect the religious customs of the Arabs means that one must respect all their institutions, because these latter are solely derived, as I have previously stated, from their religious beliefs. Professor Leroy-Beaulieu disapproved of this policy—a policy that qualifies as a policy of abstention—and defined it very well when he said that it consists of “the complete respect of the customs, traditions, and morals of what has been called the *Arab nationality*. If this course were followed and carried out to its logical conclusion, I should add, it would require that our army and colonies leave Africa.”

Why ought our army and colonies leave Africa if we respect the morals and customs of the Arabs? This is what Professor Leroy-Beaulieu wholly wishes we believe will happen. I believe that he will have to go to great trouble to provide a single serious reason to support his opinion, because it is sufficient to respond to him that this policy is the one that the English follow in India with regard to the Moslems, and they do not at all appear disposed to abandoning their immense empire.

The policy Professor Leroy-Beaulieu recommends is, notwithstanding the



Interior of the Mosque of Sidi Bu-Medin (near Tlemcen)



Façade of the Mosque of Djama el Kebir (Algiers)

Protecting the Moslems' religion and fortifying the authority of the Moslem clerics should be a top priority for us in Algeria.

smooth expressions that he employs, completely radical and conforms well to our ideas of universal equality: it consists of “the fusion of the indigenous element with the European element.” He defines this fusion as “a state of things where two populations of different origin will be placed under the same economic and social system, obeying the same general laws, and will follow the same impulse in the nature of production.”

On paper the above picture is attractive. It presents the egalitarian dream held by our theoreticians a century ago as well as those of today; one may say without exaggeration that this unrealistic vision would bring a smirk to the face of the most ordinary civil servant in India. It shows that while one might be a remarkable scholar, he may at the same time be completely unable to surmise the chasm that separates the ideas and sentiments of Oriental man from Western man.

Professor Leroy-Beaulieu clearly sees some obstacle towards the realization of his fusion policy, but believes they can be easily overcome. First of all, he asserts—and I certainly wish to know on what grounds he supports his assertion—that “the Kabyles only differ from Europeans on one point: religion.” I believe that one will be much closer to the truth in stating that between the civilized European and a present-day Berber there is considerably more difference than what would exist between a Gaul of ancient times and a current inhabitant of Paris.

With the Berbers, according to Professor Leroy-Beaulieu, being identical to Europeans, nothing more remains but to Frenchify the Arabs. The thing is quite simple for the author: “It will be necessary,” he says, “to radically modify the system of the tribe, collective property, and the polygamous family. These three points obtained, only details will remain at the end for us to sell over the course of time.”

These few transformations that the most unalloyed radical would surely rejoice in must seem to Professor Leroy-Beaulieu very easy to bring about, for he does not even consider it useful to tell us how one must go about to perform them. I believe, however, that for all persons who have tried to fathom the Arabs’ mental constitution, effecting such transformations will not prove any much easier than changing an Australian aborigine into a professor at the College of France.

Professor Leroy-Beaulieu, moreover, has little affection for Arabs who he appears to regard as a collection of pure savages: their organization is simply, according to him, “the old constitution of all the shepherd peoples.” Clearly, the

author believes that all Arabs are shepherds, and Berbers are sedentary people. I can assure him that there are both nomads and sedentary persons in each group. For example, the purest Berbers—the Tuaregs—are exclusively nomads, and if Professor Leroy-Beaulieu truly wishes to read what Ibn Khaldun wrote in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, he will learn that this division of the Berbers of Algeria, with a significant percentage being nomads and the rest being sedentary, does not date from yesterday.<sup>1</sup>

The differences between Arabs and Berbers that some authors formerly expressed from the point of view of aptitude to civilization are based on very superficial observations and are not maintained anymore today. There are, I shall repeat, nomads and sedentary people among the Berbers, just as there are among the Arabs. One's mode of existence depends on the environment; accordingly, these two forms of social life result, not from race, but rather from the nature of the soil. As evidence of this fact, we see in Algeria that in the sandy plains Arabs and Berbers are nomads; in the fertile regions they are sedentary people. There are, as previously indicated, Arab nomads and Arab sedentary persons in Algeria, as is also the case in Egypt, Syria, and Arabia.

If we compare the sedentary Berbers to sedentary Arabs, I can hardly see that one group surpasses the other in intellectual development. If it were necessary to incline to one side, it will be rather towards the Arabs because once upon a time they possessed a very high civilization, whereas the one of the Berbers had never

---

<sup>1</sup> "From the earliest times," says Ibn Khaldun, "this race of men (the Berbers) has inhabited the Maghreb, where it has peopled the plains, mountains, plateaus, maritime regions, countryside, and towns. They construct their dwellings either in rock, clay, reeds and bushes, or entirely in cloth made from camel hair. Those among the Berbers who possess power and dominate the others devote themselves to the nomadic life and with their flocks travel through pastures to which a short voyage might lead them; they never leave the interior of the Tell Atlas Mountains in order to go into the vast desert plains. They earn their livelihood by raising sheep and oxen, usually reserving horses for the saddle and the propagation of the species. Some of the nomadic Berbers also engage in the trade of raising camels, thus giving them an occupation that is rather like the one of the Arabs. Berbers of the poor lower class obtain their subsistence from the product of their fields and from the livestock that they raise; but the upper class, those who live as nomads traversing the countryside with their camels, and always with lance in hand, likewise occupy themselves with multiplying their flocks as well as in robbing travelers."



Berber mountain village



Berber woman making a kouskous dish

In the fertile regions of Algeria the Berbers are sedentary people.

been well-elevated.<sup>1</sup>

The reform upon which Professor Leroy-Beaulieu insists the most—but always omitting to indicate to us the way to effect it—is the suppression of polygamy. He explains to us the advantages of monogamy and reveals to his contemporaries that “the household is the domain of the female only; without her the spirit of the family is lost and the means of the household’s prosperity is absent. This is one of the great causes of the stagnation that afflicts Arab society.”

I do not wish to go into detail on this question and try to show Professor Leroy-Beaulieu that if all Orientals are polygamous, there clearly ought to be some reasons for this custom. I shall certainly not tell him that the legal polygamy of the Orientals contains any less merit than the hypocritical polygamy of Europeans and the numerous illegitimate births that are its consequence. In fact, one needs hardly to go out of his way to demonstrate that the polygamous woman in the Orient is at least as happy as the monogamous woman is in the West. I shall not try either—it would, however, be easy—to furnish Professor Leroy-Beaulieu proof that it is Islam, and not at all Christianity, that has extracted the female from the position of inferiority where from the most remote times she has been maintained. One will find sufficient coverage of these questions and several others in my 750-page-long book, *Histoire de la civilisation des Arabes* (Paris, Didot, 1884). Now, one will see there most notably that under the domination of the Arabs, the harems have produced as many illustrious literary and scholarly women as have our lyceums for women. The only thing I wish to convince Professor Leroy-Beaulieu of is that polygamy has not produced, as he believes, the Arabs’ stagnation. As he should well know (being a professor at the College of France), it was the Arabs alone who revealed to us the Greco-Latin world, and European universities, including the one in Paris, have for six hundred years exclusively lived off the traditions of the Arabs’ books and the application of their methods. The Arab Civilization was one of the most brilliant known to History. It died like many others; but, I’ll not content

---

<sup>1</sup> From the moral point of view, the Berbers seem even more inferior to the Arabs. Since antiquity the former have been renowned for their perfidy. They were undoubtedly numerous in the Carthaginian armies and certainly ought to have contributed to the low regard in which Punic trustworthiness was held. When Musa, the Arab conqueror of Spain, was interrogated by the Caliph in Damascus about the Berbers inhabiting the provinces which form present-day Algeria, he provided the following description that many persons still find to be very accurate: “They strongly resemble Arabs in their manner of attacking, fighting, and standing firm; they are patient, sober and hospitable amongst themselves; but they are the most treacherous men in the world; neither promises nor one’s word are sacred to them.”

myself with such a superficial explanation as attributing to polygamy what resulted from factors possessing quite another importance.

In addition, one cannot see clearly the grounds for Professor Leroy-Beaulieu's animosity towards polygamy, given that it only manifests itself in the wealthiest families, and also that its practice is losing ground. If polygamy now is so rare and has so little influence, why therefore should it be suppressed, and how can it be justified to be "one of the great causes of the stagnation that afflicts Arab society?"

Professor Leroy-Beaulieu is perfectly in accord with Monsieur Vignon on the point that one of the principal means of action that we must concern ourselves with respecting the Arabs is the necessity for arranging their education. This is, moreover, a generally-held opinion today, one that like everybody else I once shared, and one which required me to make many research trips and observations in order to divest myself of completely. Undoubtedly, I do not have the faintest chance of converting to my ideas a single French reader; however, the matter is too serious for me to not thoroughly discuss my thoughts on this point.

Now, if we accept the following as a starting point, that whatever country establishes a colony generally has as its aim the retention of it, we must try to find out whether imposing European instruction on the indigenous inhabitants is a way of fostering the preservation of a colony, or on the contrary is a way that facilitates its loss. Let us look at one real world experience of the above.

The experiment of providing European education has for the past 30 years been conducted in India on an immense scale, having been performed on the Hindus as well as on the Moslems. If my readers wish to refer to my above-mentioned 1886 article (*L'Inde moderne*) published in this journal, they will see that the only serious enemies that the English presently consider as such are those exclusively recruited from Hindus who have been educated in English schools in India, and that the increasing size of this class of Europeanized Hindus constitutes the greatest danger menacing the British power in the peninsula. Further, they will see that, far from improving the condition of the natives, this kind of education has no other result but to render them morally and materially completely destitute.

It is easy to understand the psychological reasons for the deplorable effects that our European education can produce on relatively inferior races or, if one prefers, on races profoundly different from those of Europe. This education,

adapted by secular transformations to our own sentiments and needs, is not in accord with different sentiments and needs. Its primary results to a Hindu or an Oriental are to abruptly destroy any of the hereditary ideas upon which his institutions are founded as well as the beliefs that form the base of his existence. It brings on him a profound malaise, creates artificial needs for him without providing him the means to satisfy them. It shows him in each line of our history that there is hardly anything more humiliating for a people than to support a foreign domination and that it must entirely try to shake it off. "India for Indians" is today the password used by all the indigenous Indians who've received an English education. "Algeria for Arabs" will no doubt soon be chanted throughout Algeria. If the dream of Professor Leroy-Beaulieu and all the authors who sermonize for a European education for Arabs is realized, Algeria will soon become for us what Venice was for Austria, what Ireland is for England, and what Alsace-Lorraine will be for Germany.

One surely ought not to draw from the preceding the conclusion that Orientals are incapable of utilizing our European instruction. Indeed, one they've taken from it is the know-how about making weapons to use against us. The Chinese presently translate our books, those on military art above all, and are not at all ignorant regarding our methods of fabricating cannons. All these different peoples—Arabs, Hindus, Chinese—upon which the Western world is hurling itself under the rather hypocritical pretext of making them enjoy the benefits of our civilization, come back in their turn to exploit us. In the terrible economic battle that is in preparation between the East and West, and which I have tried here to lay out the immediate causes and future effects, in showing that the future will inevitably belong to people and nations who at the time possess both a very strong ideal and very weak needs; in this battle against people whose needs compared to our own are nearly nonexistent, and who will soon inundate the West with products costing twenty times less than those produced by our factories; in this battle where we shall have against us the entire weight of a terrific debt—the one of permanent armies—and above all the yoke of our artificial needs and refinements of well-being; in this formidable battle we shall not have much of our western science in order to defend ourselves. Is it wise and beneficial for us to furnish weapons to our adversaries and to thus hasten the approaching collapse of the Old World? This is a question for politicians who are concerned about tomorrow to answer.

More than one reader will undoubtedly only see in my preceding comments the expression of theoretical views, and will not admit to the harmful influence of



our European instruction and institutions on the Orientals unless this adverse influence is well proven by comparative experiments. For example, in the eyes of such a person it will be necessary to take a large group of similar people (such as the Hindus in India), divide it in two parts, one part left to itself and its own ways, the other subjected to European instruction and institutions, and then over time compare the results. In fact, the attention of the English ought to be fixed on this question, for out of every 100 Hindus who have been educated in English schools, there are exactly 100 who only dream of driving the British out of India, whereas out of every 100 Hindus receiving traditional education by fellow Hindus one finds very few who feel troubled by the English domination.

However, one might point out with respect to the above that it is a matter here of English instruction and not of French instruction, and that we teach in our schools great principles that our neighbors are ignorant of.

Fortunately for the ideas that I am defending, the experiment of our French instruction and institutions applied to an identical population, divided in two parts, has been performed on a sufficient scale in order for the results to be appreciable. One will search in vain in any book for these results because few observers up to now have risked acting with enough independence to publish them. I have not, however, found among all the persons placed in the requisite conditions for being able to make the same observations a single one who has been in disagreement with me and my conclusions.

Our miniscule colony of Pondicherry, a coastal enclave in the gigantic empire of India, contains about 150,000 inhabitants. As the population here is extremely pacific, we have been able to impose here without opposition our institutions and our ideas. The colony therefore possesses a compact army of functionaries and magistrates, stationed at great expense to the mother country; it has universal suffrage, a municipal council and mayor, schools, and up to now a deputy and a senator in Parliament who, of course, have never set foot in the land that they represent. If you return to Pondicherry after spending several months in the interior of India, and no matter how slight an observer of human nature you may be, it will not take you a long time to ascertain the strong contempt and complete antipathy the natives of Pondicherry have for Europeans. Study them a little and you will quickly see that with our institutions and ideas, we have only succeeded in overthrowing all their social conditions of existence, sowing a complete anarchy in this small and formerly so peaceable population, and as a result rendering these people thoroughly miserable. When you pass through several kilometers of Frenchified Pondicherry and reach the English frontier—needless to

say, it begins just at the point where the native Indian respects the European and is happy with his lot—you will see what two different systems have produced on two identical populations; one system leaving to the indigene his institutions, customs, and practices; the other desiring just the opposite, compelling all the indigenous people to be subjected to the same egalitarian standard. On one hand, a ruinous army of functionaries governs several thousand people; on the other, a single European governs a million indigenes; in the first case a profound anarchy of incessant local rivalries reigns; in the second, a peace no less profound. For a long time I have been rid of the propensity to be easily moved, but I confess to having been stricken by a painful emotion when, after having traveled all throughout India and observed the absolute respect the native Indians in the countryside have for the European, I arrived—by an accident of navigation which was necessary for me to put up with—at our small colony of Pondicherry. The virtues and deficiencies of these two large groups of colonized people became strikingly apparent to me with an intensity that no book would be able to render to my eyes. I now clearly understood the principal causes of our astonishing inability to maintain colonies, consoling myself only then regarding the loss of India that we have been conquered by the spirit of General Dupleix. Governed in the same way that we govern Pondicherry and our other colonies, India would soon be put to fire and the sword and would not delay in getting out from under our rule. We are in Indochina yet again beginning to make exactly the same dumb mistakes which render our domination so intolerable and ruinous everywhere.<sup>1</sup> We send over to the Orient French administrators who govern the people there in the same way that they manage a department in France, employing a small army of French functionaries who are replaced every six months, and who do not possess the vaguest notions of the manners and customs of the people who they administer and offend at each instant. In a colony which, according to the assertion of Monsieur Harmand, the former General Manager of Tonkin, ought to yield a net profit of 200 million francs per year to the mother country, we continue spending millions on it annually and stationing soldiers there without any result but to make us deeply hated by the indigenous people, losing all prestige in the process and demonstrating moreover to the world our distressing incapacity to understand anything about the needs, sentiments and ideas of foreign races—in short, demonstrating our complete inability to effectively govern such people.

---

<sup>1</sup> In Indochina and everywhere else, too. I recently read in a journal a series of articles on Senegal and the Sudan by Doctor Colin, in which the author pointed out the sad results of our incurable mania of wishing to impose our institutions on all peoples. “By our assaulting prematurely the organization of Negro society,” states Doctor Colin, “we will have war, perpetual war without mercy, and we will find opposing us all the fetish-worshipping peoples and Moslems, let alone the slaves themselves who will also be against us.”

\*

\*

\*

In this paper I have indicated the dangers that exist in wanting to impose on a people the institutions, ideas, and needs of different peoples. I shall add, moreover, that this task is an absolutely impossible one and that no European nation will ever succeed in realizing it. The polish that a European education might temporarily give to a native modifies him very little in the European sense. One only needs to chat a short while with Hindu scholars educated in Anglo-Indian schools and receiving instruction nearly equal to that of European Bachelor's degree holders in order to verify the point that the gulf between their ideas and ours is immense. Indeed, it took centuries for the Barbarians to create out of the debris of the Roman world a civilization, language, and arts adapted to their needs. These great transformations, only time can accomplish them.

The causes of the obvious inability of Europeans to transform the institutions of the Oriental peoples are too numerous and involved for me to expound upon here; it suffices me to point out in a few words that two very different civilizations brought face to face will never combine themselves, and that the only conquering peoples who will be able to have an effect are those whose sentiments, ideas, institutions and beliefs do not possess very large differences from those of the vanquished. Orientals easily produce an effect on other Oriental peoples, but Westerners have never been able to obtain even the smallest impact on these peoples: this then is the secret behind the immense influence exercised by the Arabs in the Eastern world, an influence which they still continue to exercise in Africa, China, and India. Everywhere they have made their appearance, they have succeeded without effort to make the people they have conquered adopt the most fundamental elements of their civilization: their religion (Islam), language (Arabic) and arts. Wherever implanted, the Moslem civilization appears to be firmly established there forever. In India, for example, it has caused the retreat of very ancient religions, while in Egypt it has rendered completely Arab the land of the Pharaohs upon which the Persians, Greeks, and Romans ended up having so little influence. Islam counts 50 million followers in India, 20 million in China, and this number increases each day with astonishing rapidity, whereas all the efforts of the European missionaries in these two countries have failed miserably. In addition, Islam is winning the hearts today of most of the people in continental Africa; indeed, everywhere that the European explorer penetrates with great difficulty into the center of Africa, he runs into caravans of Arabs who leave behind them their religion, arts, and often their language.

Europeans may be skillful colonizers; but, since the Romans, one can say

that the only peoples who can be called civiliziers have been the Moslems. They are, in fact, the only ones who have succeeded in making other peoples adopt what constitutes the foundation of a civilization: the religion, institutions, and arts.

Europeans might with some competency succeed like the English in India to rule over an inferior people; but to make them accept our ideas, institutions, in a word our civilization, it is foolish to entertain such a dream. The difference between our sentiments and needs and those of Orientals is so large that the staging points that separate the two cannot be abruptly passed over. In brief, civilization adapted to our needs is not at all one suitable to the needs of Eastern peoples. Our unnatural life, perpetual anxieties, frequent revolutions, our artificial needs and the incessant work necessary to satisfy them, the difficult life of the factory or mine worker subjected to hard labor with little or no say over his work conditions is not at all the life that tempts Orientals, and I have always been struck in my travels to observe that above all it is among Oriental scholars who have visited Europe that our civilization attracts and charms the least. I do not know anyone who has not maintained to me that Orientals are happier, more honest and moral than Europeans, as long as they don't have contact with us, and that the only result of our civilization is to deprave them and render them miserable.

I do not wish to spend a long time stressing my preceding point; in an article such as this one I can only briefly examine ideas whose full development would require a volume. To return to Professor Leroy-Beaulieu, though, I shall say to him that the idea of Frenchifying a semi-barbarous people and giving them our education and institutions—a theory still universal in France—is indeed no longer supportable today by a scholar such as him. Can he truly be ignorant of the fact that the institutions of a people possess and reflect a necessary enchainment, that a nation cannot choose at will its institutions, but instead must submit to those that are in rapport with its needs and which its evolution imposes on it? It is not a matter of knowing what institutions are theoretically the best for a particular people, but rather of knowing which are the ones that the people in question can support. I have also emphasized this important concept in other works of mine.<sup>1</sup>

If in a hundred years a researcher in the library, rummaging through old books, falls upon this article, he surely will be astonished by all the trouble its author went in order to demonstrate truths that appear to him quite commonplace. He will undoubtedly regard ideas currently held in France concerning colonization

---

<sup>1</sup> See especially my book *l'Homme et les Sociétés, leurs origins et leur histoire*, Vol. II, chapter 12: *Influences des institutions politiques et de l'action des gouvernements*.

in the same dim way we now regard the ideas about primitive man that Rousseau and his school propounded a hundred years ago. Opinions such as those Professor Leroy-Beaulieu defends unfortunately are still all-powerful in France; indeed, the idea that one can remake societies and institutions by issuing decrees is the *Creed* of all our political parties. If one finds this idea expressed in the works of our most learned professors, can we really be astonished that with such teachings so prevalent we have witnessed recently an administrator issue and publicly declare in a barbarous country that he will be governing the proclamation of the Rights of Man in an attempt to win over the invaded populations and make them appreciate the benefits of our institutions? I do not desire to vouch for the reality of history, but the above example represents very well the exact measure of the ideas regarding colonization that in France are currently being subscribed to by the intelligentsia.

Long ago the gods intervened unceasingly in the affairs of man. Were we still living in those ages, we no doubt would ask if there truly did not exist some maddeningly jealous divinity to mislead us. Suppose, for example, that such a god wished for us to lose Algeria in 25 years; what oracles would this jealous divinity have rendered up for us? Precisely the counsels that Professor Leroy-Beaulieu has provided us and which sum up too well, unfortunately, the generally-held ideas in France on colonization: “We shall educate the indigenus Algerians, give them our language, emancipate them, make a place for them in the organization of our home country, and provide them our administrative services.”

My advice, on the contrary, is just the opposite. Firmly focus on the results obtained by those peoples who have successfully maintained their colonies and made them prosper, results which clearly tell us: Allow the natives to keep their institutions, customs, usages, and beliefs; as much as possible avoid all contact with them, and occupy ourselves as little as possible in their affairs. Let them remain in their schools and never try to introduce them into ours. Reduce enormously the number of functionaries, but guarantee the natives great stability (an important situation), and do whatever we are able in order to enhance their prestige. Let us recall that the Spaniards have lost their colonies because they too deeply intermixed with the conquered peoples, whereas the English, despite the philanthropic theories of their books and the teachings of their schools, carefully maintain in India and analogous colonies a vast separation between the minority conquerors and the conquered crowd. Lastly, we absolutely must not forget that the exact moment when the final decline of the great Roman Empire began was when Rome extended the rights of citizenship to the barbarians.