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Cultural and Literary Representations of the Automobile in French Indochina:

A Colonial Roadshow

Stéphanie Ponsavady

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Preface

Getting Started: Taking Cars and Metaphors for a Spin Through History

Etymologically, “metaphor” is a Greek term signifying “transport” or a “carrying from one place to another.” In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau notes:

> In Modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes “a metaphor” – a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories. (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall. [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011], 115)

Certeau’s observation elevates stories to the status of *metaphorai*, claiming that they are “spatial trajectories” and that narrative structures function as “spatial syntaxes”. Shared stories of collective memory thus become vehicles of mass transportation.

This book will take you on some stories, metaphors, or spatial trajectories by following the history of cars in French Colonial Indochina. Cars and stories are both metaphors, in the purest sense of the term, instruments that humans have used in order to produce a displacement. In France, the rise of the automobile coincided with another movement,

the nation's expansion overseas in the late nineteenth century. How did cars and literature power France's mobility? This is the question that has animated my research on the experience of driving or being driven in a car. I situate my approach in relation to John Urry's definition of automobility as a system:

> Automobility can be conceptualized as a self-organizing autopoietic, nonlinear system that spreads world-wide, and includes cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum supplies and many novel objects, technologies and signs. (John Urry, "The 'System' of Automobility," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21 [4–5], 27)

The late sociologist draws our attention to how cars are a technology embedded in and shaping our everyday lives: for as long as humans have been driving automobiles, so too have automobiles been driving humans. This conceptualization of automobility as a system of reciprocal influence invites us to consider the spread of the use of cars in the world, yet also warns us against embracing simplistic diffusion theories, as he stresses its nonlinear, self-creating, and self-organizing features. If the car has become ubiquitous, it did so in location- and culture-specific manners. Thus, understanding the automobile's place in French and Southeast Asian colonial history requires delving into both historical documentation and literary representation. We will look not only at the movement of people and the physical transport of objects, but also at imaginative travel, the vehicles and metaphors that have enabled and coerced some to live mobile lives, and others to remain immobile, in France and in its colonial empire. French mobility was driven as much by technological innovation as it was by emotion, feeling, and myth. Relying on both historical material and literature to capture what fueled French mobility throughout the colonial and postcolonial period, this book invites you to take cars and metaphors for a spin through history.

Middletown, USA — Stéphanie Ponsavady

Acknowledgements

Writing this book has been quite a journey. I would not have gotten to the destination, let alone on the road at times, without the support and help of many. First, I would like to thank Stéphane Gerson, Judith Graves Miller, Herrick Chapman, and the professors from the Department of French Literature, Thought and Culture and the Institute of French Studies at New York University, who read the first iterations of this project in my doctoral dissertation. I am also indebted to the early help and guidance of Jack Yeager, David Del Testa, and Jean-François Klein, who helped me to carve and to take my own intellectual path, when I was only getting started, struggling to find my footing in both literary analysis and history.

Funding from the Elaine Brody Fellowship and the Lagaffe Fellowship at NYU allowed me to conduct research in France and Vietnam while in graduate school. I would like to thank the Association for the History of Transport, Traffic, and Mobility (T2M) for the opportunity to attend their first summer school in Berlin in 2011 and the introduction to the field of mobility studies that came to shape this present work. I felt welcomed in a community of like-minded junior researchers and supported by senior scholars and inspiring models of research, in particular, Hans-Liudger Dienel, Mathieu Flonneau, Gijs Mom, Massimo Moraglio, Peter Norton, Gordon Pirie, and Mimi Sheller.

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I am grateful for the friendship of fellow researchers Mitch Aso, Aline Demay, Caroline Herbelin, and Hang Lê. At Wesleyan University, my colleagues, Jeff Rider, Typhaine Leservot, Catherine Poisson, Catherine Ostrow, Andrew Curran, Michael Armstrong Roche, Bo Conn, and Ellen Nerenberg, have provided guidance at all the stages of bringing this project to publication. In Paris, Lisa Fleury and Diara Touré at Reid Hall offered me the space and time to see this project to the finish line. The John and Catharine MacMahon fund of the Romance Languages and Literatures Department at Wesleyan University helped me secure permissions and licenses for the book's illustrations. In France, I would like to thank the staff at the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence, the volunteers who run the Renault Archives in Boulogne, and the archivists at the Archives Départementales de l'Aude, for their help. In Vietnam, I wish to thank the staff of the National Archives I in Hanoi for their diligent work and gracious help. I owe an immeasurable debt of thanks to Susan Dixon for her thorough reading and editing of the first drafts of this book.

This project started with a collection of family memories: a photograph of my glamourous Laotian grandmother posing next to a Citroën DS, a picture of my mother and her siblings lined up for a family portrait in front of a Citroën 2CV, and a lullaby in Lao about a Frenchman on a motorbike. Family has been the driving force of my journey. I am grateful for my parents, my brother, and my sister's love and care. Finally, I want to thank my companion, Samuel Kowalsky, for his kind support, love, and trust.

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Notes on Terminology and Diacritics

There were numerous colonial-era variations for the spelling of places and people. As often as possible, I have reproduced the terms as they were spelled in the original texts. I have tried to adapt the standard orthography of Vietnamese in a consistent manner for this publication, therefore limiting my use of diacritics. Although current convention holds that "Vietnam" is usually preferable to "Annam", in *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), Christopher Goscha showed that the very term "Vietnam" itself represents an anachronism when applied to the period before 1945. I have used the terms "Vietnam" and "Vietnamese" despite this inadequacy and I have restricted the terms "Annamite" or "Annamese" to quoted passages and direct discussions of these sources or archives in accordance with the era's terminology, in particular when contrasting with Cambodians and Laotians. I have used the terms "Native" or "native" as the translation of "*indigène*." My use of the terms of "Annam," "Tonkin," "Cochinchina," "Cambodia," and "Laos" generally refers to the geopolitical entities defined under French rule. In the organization of colonial administration, Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, Cambodia, and Laos were each governed by a *Résident Supérieur*. A *Résident de France* was at the head of each province. A mayor would be heading each city. This colonial system was superimposed on an indigenous system run by mandarins at the province, city, or town level. For a detailed description of the administrative organization of the *Union Indochinoise*, see Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery,

Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858–1954 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). I use the term "Indochina" to refer to the *Union Indochinoise*. Although only Cochinchina was a colony while the other regions of the *Union Indochinoise* were protectorates, in the archives and the sources consulted, the term "colony" is often used indistinctly to refer to a part of or the whole of Indochina. For the sake of consistency, I have used the term "colony" to refer to Indochina as a whole but I have also maintained the distinction between protectorate and colony when relevant.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Minding the Gaps of Colonial Automobility

Following the tracks of the automobile, this book traces a spatial trajectory that runs across Europe and Southeast Asia. It takes the reader on a Certeauian metaphor, a story[1] that links together France and its former colony, Indochina, the present-day sovereign nations of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. It is a story of good and evil, a story of glory and failure, a story of glamour and grit. It is the story of cars and colonialism. Take this iconic image from the popular movie *The Lover* (1992), inspired by Marguerite Duras's 1984 novel *L'Amant* (Fig. 1.1).

A young European woman is sitting next to a handsome Chinese man in the back of a black limousine, driven by a Vietnamese chauffeur. The French girl and the Chinese man look at each other, exchange a few words, and their hands touch while their bodies, enclosed in the car, are rocked and lulled by the bumps of the road. Later, the shared car ride leads to a shared bedroom isolated from the tumults of colonial life. An automobile, a woman, and a man: sex and glamour in the midst of racial and social discontent.

How can we fully consider the range of reflections, emotions, and feelings attached to the car and colonization in Indochina? The experience of driving or being driven in a car, an experience now almost universal, pervades all aspects of modern life, but it has its own particular history. The formation of the French and Southeast Asian experience of the automobile links together the history of transport and the history of

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Fig. 1.1 In the Morris Léon Bollée (*The Lover*, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud [1992; MGM Home Entertainment, 2001], DVD)

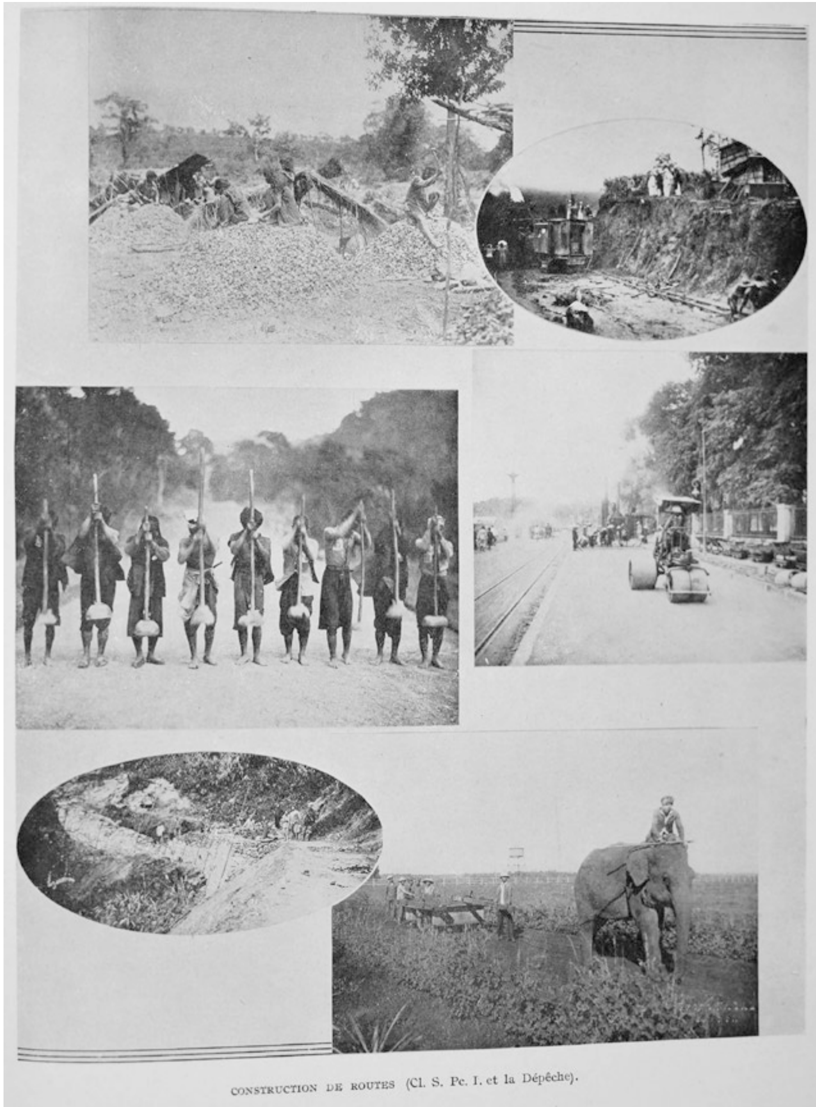
colonialism. John Urry conceptualized automobility as "a self-organizing autopoietic, non- linear system that spreads world-wide, and includes cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum supplies and many novel objects, technologies and signs."[2] I argue that in French Colonial Indochina, the system, experiences, and representations of automobility had political, economic, social, and psychological aspects, all of which helped to maintain beliefs in the colonial empire and the French Republic at times when the French were questioning both. As such, this book's ambition is comparable to Cotten Seiler's cultural history of automobility in America, *Republic of Drivers* (University of Chicago Press, 2008). Seiler demonstrated how driving became essential to modern American conceptions of the self and the social and political order, reconciling corporatist and consumerist forms of life with national ideals of liberalism in the American political imaginary. Similarly, I argue that automobility played a central role in the French colonial imaginary, promoting the notions of self-mastery, of modernity, and of its *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission). This imaginary drew inspiration from as far back as the Roman conquest of Gaul all the way to the then-fresh French defeat in

the Franco-Prussian War, and automobility allowed French colonizers to recapture a sense of lost superiority in the wake of military defeat and to affirm the nobility and inherent goodness of the colonial enterprise.

The role of colonial automobility remains pregnant in French contemporary politics. Recently, the introduction of cars by the French in Southeast Asia has fueled public debates on the "positive effects of colonization." On December 23, 2005, then-Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy appointed a lawyer, Arno Klarsfeld, to undertake a detailed study of "the law, History and the duty of memory" of French colonization. A few days later, in an interview published in the newspaper *Libération* (December 30, 2005), Klarsfeld listed the beneficial effects of colonization ("*les bienfaits de la colonisation*"): "France built roads, health centers, brought culture, administration… I'm not a specialist of the topic, but to deny it would be historical blindness."[3] In French politics, there is a sense—a hope or a suspicion—that history, and the history of technology in particular, can decide once and for all if colonization was a good or an evil. In this context, automobility becomes a symbolic capital produced, cultivated, and used to political ends. In my view, the importance of automobility in this debate must be traced back to colonialism's three pathways: "*mise en ordre*," "*mise en scène*" and "*mise en valeur*" order, staging and development, which in turn served to measure colonization as a technical, aesthetic, and ethical endeavor (Fig. 1.2).

Just as there were parts of the road that were never completed, there were gaps between these three processes. What were these gaps? Road-building was done by forced labor and the displacement of local populations. Ordering colonial automobility thus implied violence and domination. Car expeditions in Indochina circulated images of exotic landscapes back to metropolitan France. Colonial automobility helped to stage Indochina as a land frozen in time. French engineers adapted road surfaces and materials to local conditions. Developing colonial automobility opened new opportunities in the colony. Colonial era works on the history of Southeast Asia mostly sustain the myth of the positive effects of colonization, stressing how even the name of the geographic entity was the work of a French intervention.

The introduction to Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery's aptly titled *Indochine, la colonisation ambiguë* (first published in France in 1994 and translated in English as *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*), provides a general background on the history of French colonization in Southeast Asia and does not eschew dealing with the more complicated aspects of



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the history of "Indochina," in the Western mapping of the region. Until the twentieth century, the peninsula mostly registered as a bridge connecting the gap between India and China, "little more than a peripheral zone of contact between them,"[4] an area defined by the nature and the intensity of its cultural exchanges with these two powers. Colonial Indochina then resulted from the conjunction of geopolitical forces that put an end to the old Asian order. Brocheux and Hémery argued that "it was an enterprise governed not only by the strengths of a Western dream but also by the new rationality of the modern world, which was increasingly imperial and conquering" (14). The introduction of the automobile embodied the irruption of such new rationality. The history of Colonial Indochina joins the history of the global power relations, from which our contemporary world emerged. In particular, this present book situates Indochina in the history of global automobility. Heeding Gijs Mom's prescription[5] that technological change should be studied as a whole, a global phenomenon, I highlight the interconnectedness of global automobility and stress how French colonial history and French history of the automobile were intrinsically linked, decentering France's history of the automobile by showing how its colonial territories served as testing grounds for new technologies.

Postcolonial historiography of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia generally insists on the artificial and ephemeral nature of French Indochina and on France's lack of a coherent colonial project in the region. Administratively, geographically, linguistically, and anthropologically, Colonial Indochina was characterized by its heterogeneity. Under the official names *Union Indochinoise* (after 1887) and later *Fédération Indochinoise* (after 1947), or the common terms Colonial Indochina, French Indochina, and simply Indochina, came to be designated by the different territories that fell to French conquest or domination between 1858 and 1907. From the mid- to the late nineteenth century, the French in Indochina vacillated between two options: the extension of structures of direct administration, following the African model, or the maintenance of a protectorate based on the British model of "indirect rule." When the first modern automobiles arrived in the region in the 1900s, Indochina comprised the colony of Cochinchina (now Southern Vietnam) under direct French rule, the protectorates of Annam and Tonkin (Central and Northern Vietnam), the protectorate of Cambodia, the protectorate of Laos, and the leased territory of Kouang-Tchéou-Wan (Guangzhouwan) on the southern coast of China. Over these diverse and heterogeneous territories, French colonial rule was never

fully legitimized, almost always contested, and often spotty. Yet, in the French imaginary, these diverse territories and situations came to be all evoked under the same name "Indochina."

Therefore, I must warn you: This book takes its reader on a bumpy road, packed with gaps. It is precisely by exploring these gaps with the tools of history and literary criticism, with extensive archival work conducted in France and in Vietnam and a close reading of colonial and postcolonial literature, that I believe we can make sense of them and understand how they still fuel the French imagination, Francophone cultures, and the French relation to Southeast Asia.

1.1 The Ongoing Staging and the Original Ordering of Colonial Automobility

The first major gap on our road is the one between today's representations and past practices, a tension that stands between the ongoing staging and the original ordering of colonial automobility (Fig. 1.3).

Even maps and statistical tools have long painted a heroic picture of the spread of cars by presenting a unified and harmonious view of car usage. Time and time again, French publications[6] recounted the epic of French road-building and car driving in Southeast Asia. Voicing the official colonial propaganda, Pierre Cordemoy wrote in the pages of *Bulletin de l'agence économique de l'Indochine* that "[t]hanks to this magnificent road network of 35,000 kilometers and a fleet of 26,000 automobiles, of which more than 4,600 are used for mass transportation, on land traffic is very intense in Indochina"[7] in 1934, despite the economic crisis. Then, French officials boasted that Indochina was covered by over 26,600 kilometers of roads that could be used by cars, including 16,700 kilometers that were practicable in all seasons and 9900 kilometers of leveled dirt roads that could be used half of the year. Furthermore, official estimations added 8000 kilometers of penetrations trails that served to facilitate exploration and prospection in the hinterland. The French press would intimately associate road development and automobile traffic with economic growth. Cordemoy, for instance, found "natural that the road, a new organ, allowing easy movement of individuals and goods, would help immensely a growing and, for the most part, increasingly well-off population, that the West had awakened from its millennial sleep."[8] The trope of an immobile pre-colonial Indochina sustained French colonial drive and helped glorify the introduction of the automobile.

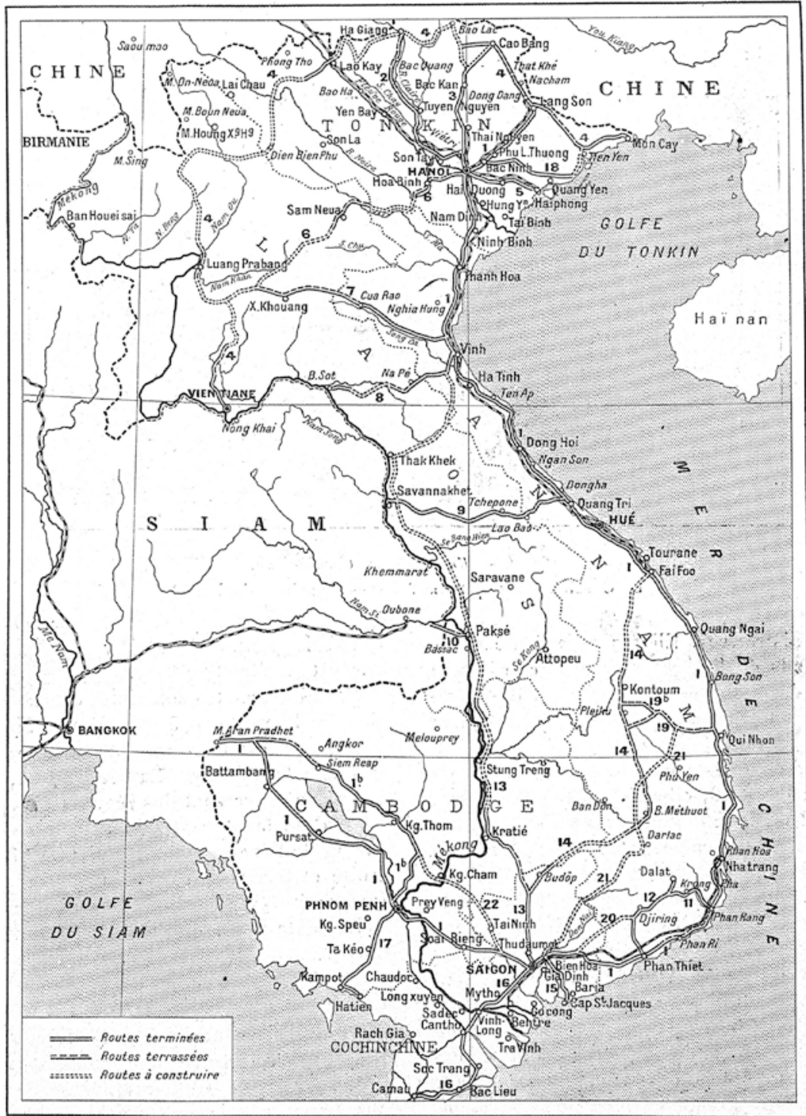

Fig. 1.3 The road network in 1920s French Colonial Indochina (*La Nature: revue des sciences et de leurs applications aux arts et à l'industrie*, no. 2797 [November 15, 1928]: 433. Courtesy of the Cnum—Conservatoire numérique des Arts et Métiers—http://cnum.cnam.fr)

France's road-building project has often been presented as rational and well-planned. Up until 1912, each territory of French Indochina (Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, Cambodia, and Laos) proceeded independently according to its own budget and needs. After 1912, Governor Sarraut implemented an ambitious program for building a highway network, which would comprise a system of 22 colonial roads (*routes coloniales*) of general interest for the colony, maintained by the general budget, a series of local roads (*routes locales*) maintained by each province, and trails (*pistes de pénétration*), the most important of which were opened and maintained on the general budget. The density of the network varied greatly with the geographical configuration and economic and colonial development of each territory. It ranged from Cochinchina's 7000 kilometers of roads over 66,000 square kilometers to Laos's only 4000 kilometers of roads over 214,000 square kilometers. Officially, colonial roads were designed to "link up diverse territories and populations, separated by natural obstacles, to ensure the safety and valorization [*mise en valeur*] of a vast colony, whose interior contained very rich regions, for which one had to create outlets to the exterior."[9] In 1934, there were 8500 kilometers of colonial roads, 6700 of which were metaled roads and 1800 leveled dirt roads. The prestige of this road network extended well beyond France and the French-speaking world. Surveying a number of American governmental publications of the time, Ryan Mayfield, a student of historian David Del Testa, summarized this impression: "With the exception of possibly the American-held Philippines or British Malaya, French Indochina had the finest system of roads in the Far-East."[10] Roads and their representations played a key role in the staging of Indochina as the "jewel" of the French Empire, what was then nicknamed "*la perle de l'Extrême-Orient*."

By extension, in the French public opinion, the automobile became "the precious and indispensable auxiliary to the modern colonizer,"[11] as encapsulated by the journalists of the popular motoring magazine *Omnia*. At the International Colonial Exhibition of Paris in 1931, automobiles were part of the so-called resources and technologies that the French government presented in the *Palais de la Section Métropolitaine*. They featured in a specific section, alongside wireless telegraphy, railways, the metalworking industry, or agricultural machinery. Electric and gas-engine automobiles also ran across the exhibition, taking visitors from one pavilion to another or to tour a circuit around the whole area. These modern vehicles would run together with rickshaws pulled

by Vietnamese people brought about for the exhibit. These multi-modal mobilities juxtaposed contrasting visions of progress (Fig. 1.4).

The automaker Citroën was featured prominently in the Colonial Exhibit. On the right side of the main entrance of the *porte d'honneur*, a few steps from the *Cité internationale des informations*, an official propaganda building, stood Citroën's pavilion. It was one of the largest, visible from the street outside the perimeter of the Exhibition. It displayed cars, photographs, and artifacts collected from the 1924–1925 Croisière Noire, Citroën's expedition from Colomb-Béchar, Algeria, to Tananarive, Madagascar. The pavilion also held a small movie theater. Once the expedition was completed, it became the best-known French-crossing expedition and was recorded in the most famous documentary film of the era, simply entitled *La Croisière Noire*, which premiered in 1926 and was featured at a number of prestigious venues in France, including the 1931 Colonial Exhibition. On some maps of the exhibition, the pavilion is designated as "*Pavillon Croisière Noire*," identifying Citroën with the cruise and the documentary. The privately funded expedition had been rerouted to end in Madagascar instead of South Africa at the request of President Doumergue. The privileged location of the Citroën pavilion in the 1931 Colonial Exhibition reminds us that the line between state-sponsored and private sector initiatives was often blurry in the industrial development of the colonies (Fig. 1.5).

The image of the alliance between the automaker and the State traveled far and wide, as even those who did not make the trip to the French capital could receive such official postcards of the exhibition from friends and family. Standing at the forefront of the photograph, the pavilion featuring the "Citroën Expeditions" reads like a preamble to the exhibition's "International City of Information" situated further along the convergence line. Although absent from the caption and title of the postcard, the name of Citroën on the pavilion clearly stands out. The Colonial Exhibition not only served as a demonstration of automobility's role in supporting French colonialism in the eyes of Parisians and visitors, but it also became a propaganda vehicle that reached all over France through the publication and circulation of postcards, brochures, and catalogs.

Besides *La Croisière Noire*, visitors of the Citroën pavilion could also see recent photographs and updates from a new automobile expedition. Three weeks before the official opening of the Colonial Exhibition in Paris, André Citroën launched the *Mission Centre-Asie*, also known

8. C'est par cet échange de bons procédés que s'établit l'accord des races : mais quand on voit se promener Rodin et Loïe Fuller en pousse-pousse, et le roi Sisowath en automobile, on se demande lequel, de la France ou du Cambodge, est en train de civiliser l'autre.

Fig. 1.4 Early comparison of colonial modes of transportation at the 1905 Marseille Colonial Exhibition (*La Vie parisienne: mœurs élégantes, choses du jour, fantaisies, voyages, théâtres, musique, modes*, no. 33 (August 18, 1906), 715. *Source* Bibliothèque nationale de France)

Fig. 1.5 Citroën's pavilion and the *Cité internationale des informations* at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition (Postcard from author's collection)

as the *Croisière Jaune* (the yellow cruise), his brand's third motorized expedition overseas, after the 1922–1923 expedition from Touggourt, Algeria, to Timbuktu, Mali, and the 1924–1925 trans-continental journey in Africa.[12] Over ten months from April 4, 1931, to February 12, 1932, two teams drove Citroen's half-track prototype cars across Asia from Beirut, through the Himalayas, to Saigon. Their many trials, political and technical, in strife-torn countries, were reported by telegraph in the French press. Then, at the very end of the road, one of their leaders, Haardt, caught the flu and died in Hong Kong. The return of the expedition to France in May 1932 was met with a certain coldness because of this tragic ending and because it coincided with the assassination of President Paul Doumer, who had also been Governor General of Indochina. However, a photographer[13] had shot 230,000 feet of film and 5000 photographs, of which the vehicles were the stars. Popularly known and screened as "*La Croisière Jaune*," the film vindicated the geographical institutions which backed it and gave the French manufacturer Citroen an opportunity to "test" and advertise its vehicles, even if the hybrid models would not be sold retail. In fact, reopening up the

"Silk Road," the overland route between the French imperial anchors at either end of Asia, on the footsteps on Marco Polo, never met the needs of regular car travelers. Instead, filling and filming that geographical gap closed the symbolic gap between failure and glory. It built a stage for sentimental legend and colonialism. Moreover, the vehicles themselves matched the cinematographic technique, filling a temporal and spatial gap between Metropolitan France, where the images were consumed, and Greater France, where they had been produced. In his book *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), Peter J. Bloom examines the role of the automobile as the foundational mode of transportation, which, in turn, became intricately associated with the film camera. He argues that the crossing vehicles themselves, like the mechanisms of a watch, were cued to the temporal structuring of the motion picture camera in their kinematic functionality.[14] For Raoul Girardet, Citroën's colonial crossings of the interwar period and played a key role in popularizing Greater France, during the interwar period characterizes the interwar period as:

> "the Black Cruise" which crosses Africa in 1925, the "Yellow Cruise" which links the Mediterranean to the Pacific in 1933 [*sic*], arouse the passionate interest of a very large audience, enamored with technique, record, and exoticism.[15]

Guy de Larigaudie went on a more individualistic expedition in 1937. The French Boy Scout inaugurated the first road link between Paris and Saigon by car, driving an old Ford, nicknamed Jeannette, over 17,000 kilometers with his friend Roger Draper. Young readers of the Christian newspaper *La Croix* followed their adventures through what was then held as "the unknown," for the lack of information or accurate maps. Arriving in Saigon in 1938, they were received by a Boy Scout celebration inside the municipal stadium. Back in France, Larigaudie wrote an account of his transcontinental journey, *La route aux aventures*.[16] He gave lectures all over France to young boy scouts and radio interviews[17] exalting sportsmanship and adventure. Mobilizing a new medium that reached far inside French homes, thus further inhabiting the French imaginary, colonial automobility became charged with the ideals of solidarity and world citizenship.

Chapter 3 of the book explores how such pioneering, self-conscious and self-promoting, started in Indochina as early as 1908, when the

Duke of Montpensier drove from Saigon to Angkor. "Unfolding the Road: Automobile Pioneers" shows the construction of an ideal of autonomous mastery in the car and demonstrates the role of automobile narratives in shaping road practices. Colonial concerns shifted from finding the right vehicle for the colony to defining the right way to drive and conduct oneself as motorist. Writing and reading automobile travelogues, driving and riding in cars helped craft colonial actors as autonomous driving agents in constant contact with indigenous subjects and landscapes on the ground. Furthermore, automobile pioneering in the colony became a response to the military humiliations of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–1871 as this chapter demonstrates with its focus on the figure of Ferdinand d'Orléans, Duke of Montpensier, potential heir to the French throne and automobile pioneer who drove from Saigon to Angkor in 1908 to reclaim "Cambodia's Alsace-Lorraine."

Conspicuous and romanticized instances of car use paint a false image: Glamorous, daring, or long-distance motor trips did not fully represent the range of car uses and, far from being glorious, they often ended badly and required outside help or rescue, and their meanings were shaped and distorted by visual, radio, and print media. Besides the gap between iconic car expeditions and their realities, between their staging and their ordering, we must turn our attention to an even wider gap on our road. The literature and the media record of these iconic expeditions associate automobility almost entirely with personal adventure, but they are far from exhausting the diversity of car uses in Indochina.[18]

1.2 Staging and Developing Colonial Automobility

The second major gap on our road is the one between iconic uses and the many other colonial uses of cars, utilitarian and quotidian, which represent a tension between the staging and the development of colonial automobility. In Indochina, colonial car use itself expanded by filling or maintaining a variety of gaps. First, quite simply, for early colonists, the availability of a car was reason enough to clear a minimal track and then petition for its improvement. Writing up rides was then the best way to get roads built and fill the gaps on the map. In Cochinchina and Tonkin, the southern and northern parts of Indochina, motorist associations such as the automobile clubs created in 1922 immediately launched their own magazines. Chapter 4 ("Sharing the Road: Road Users") of the book explores how European Automobile clubs in Indochina encouraged

their members to lobby for road construction and maintenance by writing up itineraries and accounts in the pioneering vein of the Duke of Montpensier. Quickly, road reconnaissance, road planning, and car travel writing became inseparable. French drivers wrote like they drove: with speed and determination. Writing not only took the form of itineraries, but also detailed accounts with local color titles such as “Coolies, Pai Waiwai,”[19] the freer forms of essays on “the psychology of landscape”[20] for example, or long poems such as the “smile of Buddha.” Colonial automobility became charged with symbolic and aesthetic value. At the same time, newly formed associations of Vietnamese drivers entered competitive and collaborative relationships, using French language to stake their claims to the road. In order to facilitate the movement of a variety of people and goods on colonial roads, the automobile encouraged and released the public expression of all its users, thus opening new cultural conduits and the circulation of modern ideas.

Besides gaps on roadmaps, cars filled the literal gaps of the railway system. Trains were conceived as the modern transport of choice for indigenous long-distance travel. For tourists who rode 1st class, side trips from train stations broke the monotony and confinement of compartments and allowed access to remote sights. The trip from Hanoi to Hue and back by journalist Saumont in 1918 in Chapter 3 illustrates how riding in cars helped passengers feel the gaps that make up the Indochinese landscape. In the car, they can feel the three dimensions of the region that are distance, time, and terrain. The automobile becomes an extension of the French body and contrary to the train: It allows them the opportunity to feel the gaps that shape the land. As such, the automobile became a prosthesis of the colonizer’s body. Ideally, colonial transportation was to facilitate mobility and keep the disagreeable things and people away. For many French, the automobile did just that. It allowed for freedom and individuality. It contracted the space in Indochina, making it wholly accessible for the senses while keeping away the unpleasant, leaving a gap with the indigenous exterior never to be fully closed.

A major instance of such colonial automobility involved senior civil servants using cars in the course of administration, filling geographical gaps to administer, control, and police the colony.[21] One case in particular captures the ironies of such use. Governor Albert Sarraut initiated a program in 1911 to accelerate exploitation via the road. But one trip involved a rather unpleasant episode. On July 17, 1918, Albert Sarraut, the most powerful man in Indochina, was run over by his own car. While

he had stepped out of the car a few minutes earlier to walk across a frail bridge, his Vietnamese chauffeur approached at high speed. An incoming car was already on the bridge, forcing the chauffeur to steer rapidly to the left, hit the Governor General and drag him over a dozen meters. Sarraut miraculously survived, with a few bruises. This incident was quickly classified as an accident by colonial authorities. The account Sarraut wrote personally to the Minister of the Colonies in France made explicit his benevolent attitude toward the Vietnamese:

> Superior Resident Charles and my Cabinet Director Pasquier, witnesses of the accident, have given up explaining the miracle. The Annamite (the Vietnamese), who like to draw easy conclusions, saw the intercession of Buddha for their protector and friend.[22]

The automobile, which facilitated colonial mobility as well as secured Sarraut's prestige by maintaining a symbolic gap, carried the risk of the accident, the integral accident to the new technology. Who is to blame or rather how can we name the forces that caused it? It is not the Vietnamese chauffeur, not the Western machine. Incapable of dealing with the circumstances of the accident, we are witness to a miracle by Buddha! Colonial automobility allowed for a closer contact with local populations, as accidents closed the cultural gap, blurring the distinction between pre-modern and modern explanations. Chapter 2 explores the meaning of road-building and its relationship to ideas of civilization and modernity in Indochina the indigenous populations as well as the French. "Paving the Way: Road and Empire Builders" highlights metropolitan re-imaginings of the French as inheritors of both Roman builders of empire and colonized Gauls, after the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871. On the ground, this translated as a reordering of the colony toward a system of transport of both people and goods, administrators engineering landscapes to pacify regions, using the "civilizing roadway" and "association" to assuage anxieties both at home and in the colony. As roads became integral parts of a new regime of control, touring roads and travel writing also became part of the official propaganda. This chapter focuses in particular on the figure of Albert Sarraut, Governor General, instigator of the road-building project, survivor of a car accident in Vietnam, and future Minister of the Colonies. Sarraut's 1923 work entitled *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises* outlined French policy toward its colonies and provided an immensely influential moral justification for their exploitation.

At first, cars were the transportation of choice for the French in Indochina. By seeking independent and private vehicles, the French removed themselves from the shared spaces of mass transport, such as trains, and the sense of cooperation they implied, while Colonial Administrators and French bicycle manufacturers had deemed cycling the modern mode of individual transport for the indigenous populations. The gaps between modes of transport first appeared as racial gaps. Historian David Del Testa has stressed the multiple purposes of the colonial transportation system in French Indochina and its many social and economic consequences. He has coined the concept of "Imperial Corridors" to designate the "linear zones or environments of cross-cultural contact and political struggle that emanated from the railroad lines and roadways in a colonial context."[23] It was often in the environment of modern transportation, and roads in particular, that many Vietnamese, Laotians, or Cambodian first encountered the French and that they would have their most frequent interactions with them. Colonial automobility in Indochina kept progressing. For colonists and tourists, where roads existed and were good enough, cars filled gaps by substituting for a march with porters, elephants, or rickshaws. Yet these roads were not cleared of other traffic. The number of pedestrians, mostly Vietnamese, killed on the roads of Indochina, evidenced the alarming mismatch between speedy modern motor vehicles and the colonial road network. With automobiles, trucks, and tramways running alongside ox-drawn carts, man-pulled rickshaws, and peasants with or without cattle, colonial roads were plagued by increasing confusion, as diverse types of road users attempted to negotiate each others' places and paces. Local populations paid the human price of colonial automobility. But the colonists took notice. As early as 1924, the French expressed concern over the growing number of car accidents involving animals and pedestrians, to the point that the motoring press nicknamed the 6000 kilometers of roads in Cochinchina the "*écrasodrome*" (the smashtrack).[24] In the northern part of Indochina, Tonkin, Captain Trémeau, commanding the detachment of gendarmerie, reported on what he named "the problem of the road in Tonkin" in 1935:

> The Tonkinese road is no longer safe and, if nothing comes to stop the current danger, it is in 10 years more than 5,000 people who will have been sacrificed in vain, and over 3,000 more or less seriously injured.[25]

In response to this collective crisis, an ad hoc alliance of local bodies including colonial administrators and interest groups tried to ameliorate traffic by organizing the movements of its components, focusing on mass transport rather than individual mobility, as I discuss in Chapter 6. "Overtaking the Road: Careless Pedestrians" locates the demise of car travel in French Indochina. As the economy collapsed in the early 1930s, the position of the French was undercut by social anxiety and they retreated to individual transport, while the Vietnamese turned to buses en masse. As traffic increased, so did road accidents. Road safety campaigns collected critical surveys from all provinces, officially undermining the prestige of "*mise en valeur*." Discontented Vietnamese reclaimed the roads as walking signs of otherness. Ultimately, this chapter brings our attention to pedestrianism in the colonial automobility era as an act of protest and resistance.

In fact, the automobile privilege was still too strong to resist. The relatively lower costs of the colony allowed French people to own cars and drive them poorly, or to have Vietnamese chauffeurs, whom they would ask to drive at high speed, inconsiderate of public safety. The French in Indochina enjoyed disproportionate access to the tools of modernity compared to their metropolitan peers: By 1940, there was one car for every four Frenchmen in the Union, against one car for every twenty persons in France. In colonial Indochina, cars were embedded in a web of manufactured desire. With the promise of freedom and accessibility, the automobile is the choice vehicle for the leisure of the European population. The holiday road trip forms a specific category of colonial automobility. Many urban residents traveled locally on daily outings during the refreshing "Tour d'inspection" or over holidays and weekends, for "beautiful Sundays with a 15 Horse Power Delahaye," as advertisement put it.

The vacation diary of 19-year-old Claudie Beaucarnot, discovered by historian David Del Testa in 2002 in the "Archives d'outre-mer" in Aix-en-Provence, fleshes out the leisured car journey. This diary[26] fills the gaps of the most intimate dimensions of colonial automobility. It invites us into the layers of a colonial society. A society that is geographically mobile, as her family drives down the Mandarin Road in 1943, as well as socially and racially mobile as the mother is a "métisse," half-Vietnamese. From the back of the automobile, we witness the transformative aspects of female automobility. The young woman becomes a technical assistant to her father. She is also the documentarian of the family, entrusted with

the memory of the trip. Finally, she tests her own identity as she crosses boundaries, both geographical and social. The diary journals a life experience—a coming of age—and an experiment—the road trip. A time capsule, Beaucarnot's self-reflecting text releases emotions connecting the automobile and the female experience in an unstable age.

1.3 Closing the Mobility Gap

Colonial times were unstable. In the development of automobility, all these material mobility gaps, on which French colonialism was relying, were always already closing. The privileged access to the automobile was always a tenuous one. The automobile object itself was reaching different markets. From its humble beginnings with 68 cars first imported by the French in Cochinchina in 1902, it spread very rapidly as it was adopted by most Europeans and diffusing to the Asian[27] and Indigenous populations. From 1919 to 1930, the number of motorcars (private vehicles, trucks, or buses) grew from 1200 to 25,000.[28] Even after the slow down caused by the economic crisis of 1929, there were 26,000 motor vehicles in circulation in Indochina, including 4600 employed by 3500 public transport companies, which had boomed in Cochinchina and Tonkin. Driving became easier, less dangerous, and more popular. Roads were better marked and their surfaces upgraded, automobiles became more robust and reliable, and car imports, travel, and services increased. Rapidly, car use extended to all parts of the population, including colonial subjects. Vietnamese chauffeurs had long been trained by the Colonial administration and European car dealers to serve colonists. They organized themselves in Associations, pleading for better comfort and narrating their own journeys in French publications. Soon, they were driving buses, for Vietnamese and Chinese owners, transporting indigenous subjects. A local transportation industry was born, crisscrossing Indochina. The development of colonial automobility inevitably undermined colonial car privilege. The mobility gaps on which the French had built their colonial occupation were inexorably closing. More accessible, the automobile, a symbol of speed, modernity, and mobility, also became the object of desires of the new generation of Vietnamese raised under French colonial rule.

The car became an icon of kinetic modernity, especially in Vietnamese literature in French. In 1921, in Nguyen Phan Long's *Roman de Mademoiselle Lys* (Hanoi: Imprimerie Tonkinoise, 1921), the first

Francophone novel published by a Vietnamese, it distinguishes the acculturated female protagonist from her rivals, "left in the dust." Yet it finally drives her back to her Vietnamese origins. The development of automobility was catching up with its staging as Vietnamese writers engaged directly with French expression. In the production of Vietnamese writers and journalists in Vietnamese language, the car became the indispensable vehicle for the criticism of colonialism, as Chapter 5 demonstrates how the automobile facilitated their mobility as well as embodied the excesses of consumerism. "Writing the Road: Journalistic and Literary Passages and Passengers" shows how French passengers in the colony, such as Henri Dorgelès and Andrée Viollis, and even Marguerite Duras, used the liberating potential of automobility to write close-up critiques of the rationalization, contradictions, and excesses of French colonization. In particular, Viollis and Duras's texts address issues of gendered empowerment in colonial automobility, as do Vietnamese writers such as Tam Lang and Vu Trong Phung with the rise of the reportage genre and social realism in Vietnamese writing, which I argue is related to the introduction of a new mobility regime, embodied by the rickshaw and the automobile.

The gap was closing. A new mobile identity was created. The car rejected the passive and static image of the colonial subject for a new one that resisted colonial administration and served for movement and action. On colonial roads, the mass of indigenous subjects was taking to buses while an elite of Vietnamese bourgeois and Chinese businessmen was gaining access to the private car. The owner of the black car in *The Lover* (1992) is a member of this elite.

And now, we circle back to our first encounter with colonial automobility. Duras had presented this same encounter a number of times, all different except for the description of the car. In the first published depiction, in *The Seawall* (1950), the white female protagonist meets the rich businessman on a night out with her brother and mother. They notice the large black car before the man, who is described as ugly but ethnically unidentified as I discuss in Chapter 5. In the novel *L'Amant* (1984) and the movie *The Lover*, the owner of the car is Chinese and they meet while crossing a river on a ferry. In *The North China Lover,* the owner is Manchurian. Critics have long debated his identity, and this instability points to the historical permeability of car ownership and free mobility in Indochina.

The same story, the same car, is figured and owned differently under various conditions, a symptom of the instability of automobility, and its meanings, from colonial rule to postcolonial nostalgia. Through Duras's figurations of car ownership, we are also witness to the ever-changing value of colonial automobility. In the 1992 movie *The Lover*, film director Jean-Jacques Annaud staged the automobile as intimate colonial space. The audience looks at the inside of the car as a site of deeply felt mobility, as the camera follows the jolts of the bodies inside, inexorably drawing them closer. As spectators, we realize and experience the closing of this last colonial mobility gap between French and Asian passengers, one that because of the political, sexual, and racial charge accumulated by colonial automobility crosses colonialism's last gaps.

Bridging the gaps between past and present, between staging, ordering, and development of colonial automobility, is an act mediated by visual, audio, and print documents with the tools of history and literary analysis. In the context of current debates over the legacy and meaning of colonialism, reading the entering of the gate of Angkor, listening to the Boy Scout's account of his adventure and watching a reconstituted encounter in a car, the researcher's task is to spot, chart, and mind these gaps. The five following chapters provide a chronological overview of the technological and moral issues, challenges, and complexities, involved in the French colonization of Indochina. They represent high moments of colonial automobile history or stops on a colonial roadshow that tell the fascinating story of how cars were much more than just means of transport, more than just literary vehicles, or rather that they were powerful metaphors in the purest sense of the word. They are stories that critically fill in the gaps in the narrative of French conquest in Southeast Asia. Ultimately, they also challenge the reader to mind the historiographical gap between the histories of metropolitan and colonial France and to recognize that the colonial history of Indochina is also the history of France.

Notes

1. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 115.
2. John Urry, "The 'System' of Automobility," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, nos. 4–5 (October 2004): 27.
3. All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

4. Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858–1954* [English-language ed.] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 2.
5. Gijs Mom's, *The Electric Vehicle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) reassessed the place of the battery-powered car in the history of the automobile. His book resurrects the competition between the electric and the gasoline car. By combining disciplinary approaches and using a comparative history, Mom reveals how technical, economic, and social concerns gave an edge to the internal combustion engine.
6. See, for instance, Victor Forbin, "L'éveil de l'Indochine. I – Les progrès de l'automobilisme," *La Nature*, no. 2795 (October 15, 1928): 357–59; "L'éveil de l'Indochine. II – Comment la route a vaincu la jungle," *La Nature*, no. 2797 (November 15, 1928): 433–37.
7. Pierre Cordemoy, "Le réseau routier indochinois," *Bulletin de l'agence économique de l'Indo-Chine* (September 1934): 333–38, 334.
8. Cordemoy, "Le réseau routier indochinois," 335.
9. Cordemoy, "Le réseau routier indochinois," 336.
10. Ryan S. Mayfield, "The Road Less Traveled: Automobiles in French Colonial Indochina," accessed June 1, 2017, http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/history/projects/beaucarnotdiary/documents/ryan_mayfield_paper.pdf.
11. A. Capuio, "L'automobile à l'exposition coloniale," *Omnia: revue pratique de locomotion*, no. 135 (August 1931): 134–43, 134.
12. These two expeditions were part of Citroën's larger plan to develop tourism in the Sahara. See Alison Murray, "Le Tourisme Citroën Au Sahara (1924–1925)," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 68 (October–December 2000): 95–108.
13. Guillermo Giucci, *The Cultural Life of the Automobile: Roads to Modernity* (University of Texas Press, 2012), 68.
14. According to Bloom, "From traversing space to mapping it, the French colonial crossing films of the inter-war period embody a classificatory gaze, projecting geographic itineraries across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The automobile served as a mobile platform of geographic mastery, traveling along a network of carefully plotted coordinates that territorialized human difference. From this point of origin ethnic and cultural stereotypes were rep-resented in the omniscient realism of cinema." *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 65.
15. Raoul Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1972), 121.
16. Guy de Larigaudie, *La route aux aventures: Paris - Saïgon en automobile* (Paris: Plon, 1948).

17. Part of the interview is still preserved online on the *Toile Scoute* association website. See “Interview de Guy de Larigaudie,” accessed June 1, 2017, http://www.latoilescoute.net/IMG/mp3/itw_guy_larigaudie.mp3.
18. My work on Colonial Southeast Asia owes a great deal to Gordon Pirie, who in the case of Africa, drew our attention to the gaps between epic narratives of motoring expeditions, popularized and diffused around the world, and the many daily uses of automobiles in colonial Africa. See Gordon Pirie, “Non-Urban Motoring in Colonial Africa in the 1920s and 1930s,” *South African Historical Journal* 63, no. 1 (March 2011): 38–60. According to Pirie:

    Fragmentary evidence, much of it necessarily anecdotal rather than systematically surveyed, suggests that personal road motor transport in Africa in the 1920s and 1930s played a significant part in colonial display and imagination, and in conducting the affairs of colonialism, whether administrative, commercial, scientific, or recreational. The ‘thick’ accumulation here of reports and memoirs of passenger trips shows that motor vehicle use extended beyond cities and towns, and was more intensive than a handful of audacious trans-continental motor expeditions. Motoring was evidently also associated with colonial work and leisure, with colonial propaganda (notably technological modernity), and with gendered and racialised colonial social formations. (56)

19. Antonin Baudéane, “Coolies, Pai Waiwai. Notes hâtives entre Vinh et Luang-Prabang (Décembre 1920–Janvier 1921),” *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois*, no. 15 (August 10, 1923): 20–21. The title roughly translates from the Lao into “Coolies, go fast!”
20. Rolly, “La psychologie du paysage,” *Tourisme, Revue d’études indochinoises, de l’Automobilisme et du Tourisme R.E.I.A.T*, no. 104 (May 29, 1925), 2.
21. Other senior colonial administrators were less scrupulous with their official cars, using them for their own leisurely rides or ordering roads built for them only.
22. Archives départementales de l’Aude (ADA), 12J280, “Lettre d’A. Sarraut au ministre des colonies commentant son accident d’automobile, le rôle et la valeur de certains de ses collaborateurs et la situation politique en Indochine,” Saïgon, August 25, 1918.
23. David Del Testa, “Automobiles and Anomie in French Colonial Indochina,” in *France and Indochina: Cultural Representations*, ed. Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 63–77, 65. In particular, he has demonstrated how trains were first emblematic of the French policy of “association” in the eyes of the Vietnamese, and how they progressively became a symbol and vehicle of disappointment.
24. “Un enfer évité,” *La revue du tourisme indochinois* (February 22, 1924): 20.

25. Archives Nationales du Vietnam I (ANVI), Résidence Supérieure du Tonkin (RST), 77762-10, "Lettre no. 339/2, du Capitaine Trémeau au Résident Supérieur à Hanoi," May 19, 1935.
26. Accessed June 1, 2017, http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/history/projects/BeaucarnotDiary/intro.shtml.
27. Here, I am distinguishing between categories Asian foreigners, such as Chinese and Indigenous subjects, such as Cambodians and Laotians. One source notes, for example, that in 1921, there were about 1700 motorcars registered in Cochinchina, including 500 owned by Europeans, 300 owned by Chinese residents, and over 700 used vehicles that were sold by French owners to Indigenous owners. In 1931, over a total of 8010 automobiles, 4836 were owned by Europeans, 1045 by foreigners, and 2129 belonged to Indigenous owners. See Agence économique de l'Indochine, *Communiqué de la presse indochinoise*, May 1931.
28. Cordemoy, "Le réseau routier indochinois," 337. For reference, French presence grew from an estimated 23,700 over 16,000,000 inhabitants in 1913 to 34,000 for a total of 22,655,000 inhabitants in 1940.

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CHAPTER 2

Paving the Way: Road and Empire Builders

As an epigraph to his 1880 report on the state of public works and the transportation network in Cochinchina, engineer Jean-Thévenet-Le Boul, the first head of the Department of Public Works in Cochinchina, placed this quotation by Admiral Jauréguiberry:

> The time has finally come to assert our sovereignty through creations of general utility, which prove to the Annamites that we want above all to be their benefactors. From this point of view, the maintenance of canals, the creation of roads, the construction of bridges, the study of railways, the founding of hospitals and schools must be the object of our concern.[1]

The engineer pays homage to the politician and military officer for his actions both in France and in the colony. Technical and technological work in the colony was born of political and strategic decisions. While the epigraph explicitly expresses the message of "*mise en valeur*," it serves also as a reminder of what colonization owes to the Third Republic and its actors. The quotation is dated May 29, 1879. Two days prior to the above statement, Admiral Jauréguiberry had been elected a permanent Senator of the Third Republic, while retaining his position as the minister of the Navy in the Waddington cabinet, a position he would keep under Freycinet. A key figure in these early days of the Republic and of the colonial endeavor, Jauréguiberry had participated in the

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military campaigns in China and Cochinchina at the end of the 1850s, had been named Governor of Sénégal in 1861, and was considered a hero of the Franco-Prussian War.[2] The trajectory of Jauréguiberry illustrates how, from 1871 to 1880, nationalist ideology aligned itself with the colonial project and the course of French imperialism became one with that of the Republic.

At first, this alignment seemed paradoxical. One of the greatest contradictions of the era of "high imperialism" is that nations that built vast colonial empires ruled them with an authoritarian hand, while their populations at home enjoyed an unprecedented expansion of their democratic rights. In this paradoxical era from 1875 to 1914 that Eric Hobsbawm called the "Age of Empire,"[3] France, the only Republic among the great colonial powers, failed to extend the Republican regime to the populations of its colonies, despite its revolutionary rhetoric. On the contrary, authoritarian and repressive politics characterized French colonial administration under the Third Republic, as Alice Conklin[4] has demonstrated. For contemporary historians, "colonialism"[5] was the result of a trend of thought that regarded the general functioning of French society, the future of the nation, and colonial developments as closely linked.

In this context, roads and road-building played key roles in the development of colonialism. After 1871, colonization progressively became a central element in a collective vision of a national future, while the French imagination was reworked to include a conception of a shared past. In particular, the efforts of colonization were redefined as a duty to both develop and build roads and as a heritage of a remote past, in effect carrying the torch of the Roman Empire. As such, French colonialism was shaped by a collective memory, a vision of the past and an origin myth centered around the construction of empires. The link between these diverse elements that were first the Third Republic and Antiquity, then France and Indochina, separated by time and space, was the road. The French reinvented themselves as inheritors of Roman ways by absorbing the contradictions of their own national history to recast themselves as both colonized and colonizers: Gallo-Romans. The construction of roads and French discourses surrounding means of communication contributed to this readjustment, at the cost of contradiction. This reading of the Roman heritage was directed to French public opinion in metropolitan France as well as in Indochina, when the French examined the means of integrating their interventions into local history.

2.1 Building New Roads and Following Worn-Out Paths: The Myths of Roman Ways, Republican Modernization, and the Colonial Conquest

In 1937, American anthropologist Virginia Thompson published one of the first English-language works on what was then called "Indo-China" (*Indo-Chine*). In this collection of information on the history, religion, society, and economy of the region, the author was struck by "the orgy of road building" resulting from French occupation: "The French have inherited the Roman tradition of road building, to such a degree that it has been called *la folie des routes.* Roads appeal to the eye by their symmetry, and to the imagination by bringing to life whole regions that were formerly suspended in isolation."[6] The eye of this American observer in the French colony captures the symmetry that is the tangible result of years of rational planning and reconstruction of an immobile local past, or at least a past perceived as static and frozen. Even if this description were far from true from the complex and uneven colonial reality, it picks up on the two parts of the French road-building project. Creating a network of roads in Indochina implied both work on the ground—recruiting and organizing indigenous manpower and then exploiting it to build colonial public works—and mythical work, the work of imagination and images, to the point of reinventing a sleeping Indochina waiting to be reawakened by the thrust of French technology.

What Thompson recorded in the 1930s is the result of a series of road-building projects initiated by the French in the 1880s that not only sought to transform local infrastructures but also to cast French colonists as civilization builders. Pierre Cordemoy summed up the government's official claim on the Roman lineage of these projects in an article[7] of the *Bulletin économique de l'Indochine* published in 1934, with this opening observation:

> The history of civilizations, and in particular, that of the Latin civilization, that France represents in the Far East, proclaims the importance of the role played by the *Road* [his emphasis] in the pacification, union and development of Peoples.
>
> This role, significant in the past, has prodigiously grown in our time, as a result of the invention and diffusion of the automobile. (333)

Not only did he place French colonization and road-building in the tradition of the Roman Empire, Cordemoy also insisted on the role of the automobile in pursuing this legacy. He relayed the colonial

government's boasts of having achieved an extraordinary transformation and a remarkable road network after half a century of French occupation over an "immense naturally fragmented territory, whose kingdoms and provinces were living since Antiquity in isolation and immobility" (333). Cordemoy continued with a mythological description of a sleeping region in the middle of the nineteenth century, where "roads were then almost inexisting," where the "main centers of population, agricultural deltas, had between them and with the exterior only an insignificant trade," and where trails on firm land only allowed "elephants, palanquins, carts, pedestrians in single-file balancing their burden on a bamboo flail across their shoulder to pass slowly" (333). This fantasmatic view of enclosed deltas and dormant paths long held a stronghold in the French popular imagination.[8] On land, colonial propaganda could be summed up in simplistic contrasting formulas:

> Rudimentary organization and construction, low and slow traffic, those were the characteristics of land routes in the Indochina of yore.
>
> Methodic organization, robust construction, dynamic and fast traffic, these are the characteristics of today's road network. (334)

We should deconstruct these bold claims. Like all technologies, roads resulted from ambitious political and sociocultural projects. When they arrived in Indochina, the French were confronted with a landscape that was not only exotic but also variable in nature and time. Tonkin, for example, which resisted French conquest for quite a long time, was as mountainous as Cochinchina, partly conquered, and rich in waterways with its network of rivers and canals. Until the end of the nineteenth century, Cochinchina remained the point of entry for most colonial journeys to Indochina. It was in Saigon that the great explorers, scientists, officials, and administrators who worked to expand the empire started their colonial adventure. Rivers and waterways provided the main routes and means of communication, to such an extent that even administrators who had ventured or were stationed far from the colonial capital were not aware of events unfolding elsewhere in Indochina. Recalling his initial impressions, the first Governor of Cochinchina, Charles Le Myre de Vilers expressed his surprise about the situation: "As our district managers[9] were for the most part officers of the Navy, they had dedicated all their care to the improvement of waterways and thought it useless to take care of land communications."[10] When the conquest progressed

northwards and inland, roads and pathways quickly attracted French attention. The obvious priority was to ensure the accessibility of the colonies and the mobility of French troops, and from the beginning of the 1880s to the 1920s, the French used roads to pacify Indochina. In 1888, although he deplored the lack of funding, Governor General Richaud wrote that the creation of a road network in Tonkin would "greatly advance full pacification of the country and have the best influence on the development of trade in the colony."[11]

For local populations, this was a moment of radical change and, more often than not, of great suffering. If their experience, like those of the French in Indochina, varied from one region to another, their first contacts with French colonials were often violent. As the French advanced in central and northern Indochina—exploring, conquering, and establishing colonial control—they placed heavy demands on local populations. Roads and pathways were often at the center of French claims. The French administration would levy taxes and requisition people to build and maintain roads, the importance of which went beyond mere transportation. It used roads and related public works as a guarantee and a measure of their domination and its acceptance. Thus, General Warnet, interim Commander of the Tonkin Corps in 1886, would "appreciate the zeal and activity that [Annamese populations] will display and that will be the best evidence of their dedication to the French cause, that is to say the cause of order and prosperity of the country."[12] Directly and indirectly, roads became a means of colonial control. From the beginning, the French displaced dominated populations as close to the road as possible in order to control them and used works related to the road to discipline these populations. These practices resulted in the identification of these roads with colonial domination.

The French passion for building a network of road transportation reinforces the negative image of their presence in the eyes of Vietnamese villagers.[13] In general, colonial administrators took pride in the impressive number of kilometers of roads built and canals dug as the key manifestations of France's "civilizing mission." Yet the road also constituted a central factor in the alienation of colonized peoples. Although roads and canals certainly improved travel, facilitated communication, and increased trade of goods and ideas, roads also introduced innumerable tensions and pressures on life in the country. First of all, roads or canals traversed fields or, worse, violated ancestral sites. Second, painful

expropriations created a deep resentment that was exacerbated by the fact that local manpower executed the work. Peasants were recruited for public works projects for low wages or *corvées*.

Initially, material conditions, a limited number of workers, and reduced finances dictated labor measures, but, very rapidly, colonial administrators saw the opportunity to impose political and social measures of control. For the Governor General, *corvées* symbolized a continuity with the prior state of Tonkin and Annam and could easily be interpreted as an indigenous tradition rather than a colonial import and constraint:

> The time has seemingly come when it is possible to demand from the Annamites the totality of charges to which they are obliged by local customs. We would not be inventing anything in doing so, especially if we proceed like the king of Annam used to, that is to say by demanding corvées for the works of public utility, and what work could be more useful than the creation of a great network of roads that would put all the parts of the territory in communication?[14]

In order to develop the road network, the Governor based his program on traditional Vietnamese practices of *corvées* to provide local manpower and finance, the latter coming from individuals and villages who would pay a given sum to avoid the enforced labor. For the French road-builder at the turn of the century and his successors in Colonial Indochina, roads constituted the idea-stage for the implementation of the policy of "association," summed up by historian Raymond F. Betts as a "strong type of cooperation between colonial and native"[15] in which "economic cooperation and development could take place under peaceful, even harmonious, conditions."[16] "Association" implied that the French, on the one hand, and the Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese on the other would work together without sacrificing their own cultural identities in order to achieve mutually beneficial growth. The idea of development had a paternalistic and Eurocentric connotation but was also a Republican concept, as it was applied simultaneously in metropolitan France through the Freycinet plan, a political and economic project that aimed to bring "progressive" ideas to "backward" territories in France.[17] However, in its translation to the tropics, development for colonized people still fell under the regime of *corvées*, a feudal concept that was never conceived to be egalitarian. This discourse of necessity and the idea

that the road network had to be built by the colonized, as subjects, with their own labor and money, imitated the history of the French labor and funds that constructed Roman ways (*viae romanae*), at the very time when these roads were rediscovered in France.

At the end of the nineteenth century, historians Fustel de Coulanges and Camille Jullian[18] renewed popular interest in Antiquity and its civilizations in France. On the ground, French people rediscovered Roman pathways by foot, thanks to the publicized hiking tours of the Touring Club and the inaugurations of newly unearthed and restored local Roman paths in numerous villages. The defeat of 1871 had provoked a national identity crisis in France. Weighing on French politics in the 1880s, doubts over the origins of the Republic were doubled down by a questioning of the origins of Antiquity. Under the Third Republic, political references to Gaul abounded. Even if in education, cultural, and ideological interest for Gaul had preceded 1871, the parallels between Gambetta and Vercingetorix in the press were numerous and references to the Gauls were common in political societies like the League of the Patriots[19] (*Ligue des Patriotes*). This insistence on reviving the memory of the Roman empire stood as a response to the interrogations about the causes of the French defeat. For example, for the members of the Commercial Geography Society of Bordeaux, forgetting their colonial past was to blame:

> In truth we ignore the colonial history of our fatherland. The catastrophe of the shameful peace of Paris in 1763, after which one hundred years of foreign wars or internal discord have left us disoriented, have made us lose the memory of our ancient grandeur on faraway seas and coasts. It is already too much. Let us not libel the expansive energy of our race and confuse the character of most French today, depressed by the circumstances, with the traditional tendencies of our forefathers, with the latent forces of true France. Let us not forget that we are the sons of the Gauls, an adventurous nation if there was one, and of the Romans, the colonizers and legislators of the ancient world.[20]

As the inheritors of a distinctly imperial history, the French felt themselves endowed with a colonizing duty, a capacity to inspire sympathy, and a comprehension of and passion for continuing the great project of Western civilization. At the same time, this cultural heritage compelled them to be open and adventurous abroad.

References to Antiquity and its influences entered the ideological apparatus of the Republic and of the colonial empire. They enabled the reconciliation of contradictions between French Republican ideals and colonial endeavors, as Coulanges and Jullian described how the Gauls were colonized by Rome:

> The populations of Gaul thus became Roman not by blood but by the institutions, the customs, the language, the arts, the beliefs, by all habits of the mind. This conversion was the result neither of demands from the victor nor of the servility of the vanquished. The Gauls had enough intelligence to understand that civilization was worth more than barbarity. It was less Rome than civilization that won them over.[21]

The French historians claimed that benevolent Rome brought civilization to the Gauls, who, by accepting it, willingly converted. It is indeed a question of wording:

> One must not say, "Romans civilized Gaul, put it in cultivation, cleared the forests, cleaned the swamps, built roads, erected temples and schools." But one must say, "Under Roman domination, by establishing peace and safety, the Gauls became cultivators, made roads, worked, and by their labor, they experienced wealth and luxury. Under the direction of the Roman spirit and by the laudable imitation of the better, they erected temples and schools."[22]

The discourse of France's colonial past uses the same terms as those of the policy of "association" in the *mise en valeur* of Indochina. Furthermore, to measure the gap between technological and social evolution in Vietnam and in France, French authors would not necessarily refer to the tools of contemporary anthropology or social theory, even if their practices actually reflected them. Instead, influenced by the orientation of French education, they explicitly turned to the tools of ancient history. In his dissertation on the influence of Fustel de Coulanges's *La cité antique*, Baugher[23] showed how recurring comparisons with this work helped to convince numerous actors, from Jules Silvestre to Pierre Pasquier, from colonial administrators to the researchers of the EFEO, that Vietnamese society resembled ancient societies and that the *Cité antique* was key to understanding the Vietnamese. Thus, even when journalist Louis Roubaud criticized the French presence in Indochina in his *Tragédie indochinoise*, he cannot deny that:

> We still find in our countryside some magnificent traces of the public works undertaken by the Romans: giant aqueducts fertilized the sterile fields of the barbarian, thermae taught him hygiene. Roads, whose pavement resists the passage of centuries, have circulated wheat and life from province to province. And, more than the stone of Rome, the genius of its poets, of its philosophers, of its orators, of its scientists, of its moralists, itself enriched by the Greek treasure, perpetuated itself in us. Former Roman originating from Roman culture, today I love my victor. Let us pay tribute to Vercingetorix! But let us thank Caesar![24]

In their mission to develop roads in Indochina, the French colonists[25] had reinvented themselves as inheritors of both the Gauls and the Romans.

Empire-builder Paul Doumer launched a vast public works project when he became Governor General of Indochina in 1897. He saw in the modernization of transportation a means to improve French and Vietnamese collaboration. In order to coordinate efforts and to allocate a budget for Tonkin, a “Superior Commission of the dykes, roads, and tramways of Annam and Tonkin” had been created in 1896[26] by joining together the services of the mines, roads, and railways of the 1895 Superior Commission of dikes.[27] Pacification started with a classification campaign intended to “rationally distribute the subventions dispensed by the Protectorate to the provinces for the perfect realization of the most important roads” between August 1896 and April 1897.[28] These measures complemented a first administrative effort from 1886 to spread French control and power on a large scale that had resulted in 126 roads and pathways, covering a total of 5643 kilometers.[29] In 1911, Governor General Sarraut (1911–1914 and 1916–1919) launched a program to accelerate the French exploitation of Indochina via the road, particularly to open up Laos and the high plains of Vietnam.

As they convinced themselves that they were Gallo-Romans, the French also had to convince local populations that France was a legitimate successor to the Annamese empire. In addition to organizing labor and construction efforts, Residents also assumed the tasks of disseminating propaganda among the indigenous populations and seeking the support of Annamese administrators.[30] Thus, the *tong doc* of Hung Yen province, who was involved in the classification campaign of 1886, insisted on help from the French administration. As indigenous

equivalent of a local governor in the colonial administration,[31] he wrote to the Director of Civil and Political Affairs in French:

> I am sure that if I do not go myself to monitor the paths they will not be perfectly beautiful, which is why I left Hung Yen some days ago for the huyen of Duyen Ho, Hung Nhôn, and Vien Hung, tonight I arrived in Conh Nông. […] By my orders from now on, all the villages have come out to prepare the paths with obedience and according to the indicated manner: 4 French meters (10 Annamese meters) of width and bridges as large as paths.
>
> Beforehand, there were very small and sinuous paths, but I ordered that they be made large and straight according to your print, but these are rather big things, which is why I think that after one month-and-a-half all the paths of my province will be completely finished. When they are finished, I will ask from you a French officer to go see them with me. If there is any path that does not please you, I will arrange it according to your opinion.[32] [*sic*]

Willing to conform to orders, the Vietnamese mandarin contrasted the past state of paths with the demands of French modernity: French meters are compared with Annamese meters; Vietnamese narrow and winding paths are opposed to wide and linear French paths. The Chief of province, while displaying his adherence to the French project, does not deny its foreignness any less. Unable to trust the villagers to execute the work in his absence—and thus to rely on his own political power—or to trust his own capacity to judge the "beautiful" and "pleasant," he asks for French help. Road-building projects relied on such interactions between indigenous and French administrators. In their plans for road-building in the 1880s, French politicians and decision makers favored association over the previous policy of assimilation, for it allowed indigenous populations to preserve the "valuable" parts of their local culture, and as a consequence, it promoted social cohesion and local political peace. The French would fulfill their duty as conquerors and protectors of the subjugated populations by enabling their entry in the global economy and their advancement into modernity.

Before World War I, representatives of the French government and Vietnamese reformers believed that the colonial road represented a positive example of the policy of association in action. Colonial roads implied technical modernity, political unity, and social promotion that would not force Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese to become French

but simply to become modern, in the same fashion that Roman roadways did not make Romans out of the Gauls but rather created a new hybrid identity. The road was meant to create the economic conditions required to relieve poverty and to unify a territorial body with the speed of modern transport and communications. Implicit in the idea of association, there is what Raymond Betts refers to as "'technology transfer'—the contemporary term describing the cultural process by which the rational, industrialized organization of production, and the managerial skills which direct it, are moved from one civilization to another."[33] Betts has claimed that this transfer did not take place on a large scale in the colonial world. However, evidence suggests that the social implications of the road did not remain a surface affair and had a profound impact on populations in Indochina.[34]

On their end, indigenous proponents of colonialism thus simply explained their own subjugation by invoking the superiority of French armies, of French science and technology, of French knowledge—of French civilization. From this viewpoint, colonized peoples had to consider themselves lucky to live under the protection of a nation that would put in their hands the power of its weapons, that would reveal to them the mysteries of its science, and that would confer to them the knowledge of its engineering, including that of modern transportation systems. Hoang Cao Khai, viceroy of Tonkin, thus advised his fellow Vietnamese not to get rid of the French.[35] In his view, the Vietnamese should not compare the French to previous Chinese invaders. If, in the past, the Vietnamese had been able to push back against the Chinese on several occasions to regain independence, this had only been possible thanks to the difficulty of land travel between China and Vietnam, even though the two countries were close. Yet, even if France was thousands of kilometers away from Vietnam and separated from it by vast oceans, the means of transportation had improved so quickly that France would be able to repress any attempted rebellion by sending military reinforcements to anywhere in the Indochinese peninsula in a few days. Moreover, war meant money, and the Vietnamese had close to nothing compared with the capital to which France and its allies had relatively easy access. The Vietnamese thus could not rely on the example of the 1905 Japanese victory over Russia to conclude that any small country could stand up to a world power. In addition, even if Vietnam were to ask for help from Japan, it would run the risk of being run over like Korea. Ultimately for

Hoang Cao Khai, there was only one path toward full independence: education.

To educate themselves, the Vietnamese had only one thing to do: accept France as its teacher. The metaphor of education is particularly present in the conceptualization of the relationship between France and Vietnam in the Vietnamese press. In *Colonialism Experienced*, historian Truong Buu Lâm describes an August 12, 1922, editorial of the Hanoi newspaper *Thuc Nghiep Dan Bao* according to which the French teacher will lead Vietnam to freedom as the French "have built all kinds of schools: trade schools, technical schools, agricultural schools; they have dug canals and widened rivers; they have split mountains; they have installed sewers; they have constructed bridges." It would then have been up to the Vietnamese to take advantage of the freedom brought by these innovations, but only in due time. Lâm continues his translation: "We must indeed study hard and follow the examples of our teacher. After we have graduated, then our teacher will hand over the freedom machine to us. But as long as we find ourselves in this apprentice stage, we should not play with the machine lest we botch it up; it would then be much more difficult to put it back together."[36] For the indigenous proponents of French colonialism in Vietnam, the Vietnamese must bide their time. Lâm further cites a September 19, 1922, editorial from the same newspaper: "The Vietnamese people and the French administration are in the same boat, which the French help to steer away from every obstacle toward a safe haven: the only thing the Vietnamese have to do is just row the boat."[37] Association is here conceived as a boat trip or as the borrowing of a machine. The metaphor of mobility involves colonizer and colonized in the same project. However, colonial exploitation embodies diverse forms, especially in the material form of transportation systems.

However, if the French had railways built, paths and forests cleared, and canals dug up, it was mainly for their own advantage. Public works were meant to improve the commercial exploitation of and trade in Indochina. Taking the example of railways, nationalist Phan Boi Chau compared the treatment of all passengers in Japan, where, as "human beings, they are treated with humanity," to the way the Vietnamese are treated on transportation systems introduced by the French:

> The French of course do not belong to the same race.
> Look at how they treat our people.
> Their automobiles carry nothing but putrid trash and rotten garbage.
> In their trains, our people have to sit in dirty and tiny corners,

> The sun shines directly on them, and rain falls on their head.
> If they become sick, they are left to their own devices.
> The [French controllers], furthermore, lavish on us contempt, humiliation,
> Making the most out of their authority:
> If you are too slow to show your ticket or pay your fare
> Their feet start kicking and their hands whipping.[38]

Mistreated and relegated to the second and third classes of trains, the natives are also subjected to colonial violence on board. Roads, however, have a more open function.

Besides their economic function, roads were also conceived to become a coercive and pedagogical environment where the French would help circulate goods and people and where the Indigenous populations would receive modern knowledge. Thus, the training of indigenous mechanics started as early as 1905. Later, in 1929, France's policy of association took the form of a train of agricultural demonstrations organized by Ernest Outrey (then senator of Cochinchina), the Financial Company for France and Abroad, and an engineer named Maurice Percheron. In this voluntarist campaign for the transfer of technology, a caravan of carts pulled by a tractor transported agricultural machines through the countryside of Cochinchina and made public stops to demonstrate the superiority of Western technology. Its results were reported in a monumental encyclopedia published in France in 1932, which celebrated how:

> In this caravan, subsidized by the general and local governments and the Chamber of Agriculture of Saigon, all the disparate nations [of Indochina] came together as neighbors [*voisinerènt*]. For four months, under the supervision of Mr. Carle, director of Agricultural Services, this caravan made brilliant demonstrations, which deeply interested the Annamite. The introduction, the following year, of animal-powered threshers, rice seeders, and tractors, showed the utility, long-unsung, of the live demonstration.[39]

As colonial administrator Charles Régismanset claimed in his preface, the encyclopedia itself represented a mobile expansion of the 1931 Colonial Exhibit in the Paris suburb of Vincennes:

> I know: the organizers of the Colonial Exhibit had anticipated the possibilities of oversight and tried to fix them in part by a series of luxuriously edited official publications, monographs, accounts from conferences, which made for an impressive report of the bygone Festivity.

> It appears that the authors of the "modern Indochina" wanted to accomplish more and to prolong in a way, as far as our possession of the Far East, the effects of the event at Vincennes and I have the feeling that they succeeded: their work, which represents a genuine "Encyclopédie" at once economic, artistic, and touristic, strikes us with the "practical" character of its composition. Mr. Percheron, engineer and doctor of physical sciences, charged with an investigation for the National Office of Liquid Combustibles, and Mr. Teston, creator of the Office of Propaganda in Hanoi were, by the way, well-prepared by anterior studies and the natural tendency of their spirits to realize the task begun under the sign of the best and most useful propaganda, an extension in a way of the colossal propaganda effort that took place in Vincennes, the work by Misters Percheron and Teston, conceived in a decidedly practical and modern spirit, is neither a dry report nor a conclusion. Recalling yesterday's effort, it makes tomorrow's effort possible and easier, it opens horizons, and it constitutes one of the most relevant demonstrations of the "French Miracle in Asia"![40]

Much like the itinerary of the demonstration train itself, the circulation of the images and texts produced around it embodied a demonstration of the extent of Greater France to the mainland (Fig. 2.1).

French engineers such as Percheron were keen to publicize back in France their work in Indochina. On the ground, these engineers worked with indigenous agents employed at several levels in the organization of the road system. From manual workers to engineers, the Vietnamese worked on the road network in diverse capacities, and they collaborated with French colleagues, although always under French supervision.

In addition, the colonial road system enabled a spectacular increase of local mobility. Local market economies, the exchange of ideas and growing urbanization all followed the construction of roads. The road network was to create a local culture of modernity, in short to become the "civilizing roadway."[41]

In France, a discourse on modernity also staged the policy of association. Looking back on his administration, former Governor General Lanessan (1891–1894) wrote this about roads:

> Is it not obvious that, to take advantage of an empire thus constituted, the first obligation that imposes itself is to link all portions by as many and as comfortable lines of communication as possible? The Annamites themselves have, for a long time, understood the necessity of connecting, by land communications, all the parts of their immense territory. I hold as evidence the so-called "Mandarin" road, built at the beginning of this

TRAIN ROUTIER DE DÉMONSTRATIONS AGRICOLES (Cl. Percheron).

Fig. 2.1 Caravan of agricultural demonstrations (Eugène Teston and Maurice Percheron, *L'Indochine Moderne: Encyclopédie Administrative, Touristique, Artistique et Économique* [Paris: Librairie de France, 1932], 843. Courtesy of Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer. FR ANOM BIB AOM/12674/1932)

> century by Gia Long and Minh Mang, between Hanoi and Saigon, passing through Thanh-Hoa, Vinli, Hué, Quang-Nam, Binh-Dinh, etc., following, from one end to the other, all the coast of the China sea, and stretching over 1,600 kilometers.[42]

Lanessan, despite this admiring tone, lamented the insufficiency of the Mandarin road. In order to conquer and manage this immense territory, the French needed their own transportation network to facilitate the transport of military personnel and supplies as well as the continued exploration of uncharted regions. Where a measure of colonial control had been established, the French wanted to be able to transport administrative mail and personnel along with daily foodstuffs while sending commercial goods destined for export, such as rice and rubber, to the coast. In addition, there was very little local production at the time, or at least little that would be desirable to the French. As a consequence, French

imports comprised large quantities of not only military and administrative materials, but also personal goods. Cartoons designed by the caricaturist Joyeux, for example, provide a satirical testimony to the priorities of transportation development in the colonies (Fig. 2.2).

The need to import most of the quotidian consumer goods used by the military, administrative, and civilian personnel saddled the transportation system with a heavy burden. To respond to this, the French had to create a system more reliable than the existing networks. In addition, they had to operate with relatively low construction and maintenance costs for the new colonial infrastructure in order to reassure French public opinion about the viability of the colony.

In their reconnaissance missions and surveys in Indochina, the French never failed to notice the presence of former imperial roads—in contrast with the perceived emptiness of the African continent—and decided very early on to follow them while constructing their own road system. Harmand and Pavie's exploration missions, for example, helped to

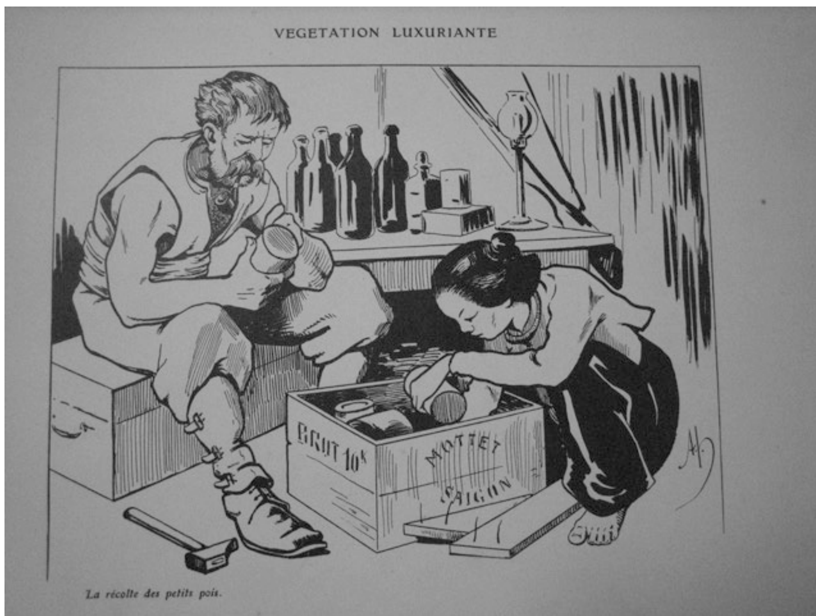

Fig. 2.2 Lush vegetation (André Joyeux, *La vie large aux colonies* [Paris: Maurice Blanche, 1912])

materialize the land and underscored the work of previous local empires. They reassured French public opinion by demonstrating that the exploration and exploitation of Indochina were materially and morally economical and viable, assuaging anxieties over a potential further loss of national energy at the end of the nineteenth century. To some extent, these explorers had realized a twofold reconnaissance, both geographical and historical. These material and symbolic aspects were key to the progress of colonialism. In contrast with what happened in colonial French Africa,[43] French official discourse quickly rejected the idea of building entirely new roads in Indochina. The work of the French would mainly consist in restoring roads and paths. According to the memories of first civilian Governor of Cochinchina Charles Le Myre de Vilers:

> The beautiful mandarin roads built by Emperor Minh Mang were falling apart in the rice fields for lack of maintenance. I reckoned, on the contrary, that the best way to ensure safety was to penetrate the land in all directions and to make contact with the natives. Thus, I had a great number of roads and paths traced; it was easier than building them. Luckily, the Annamites understood the advantages of my project.[44]

While they acknowledged the affirmation of French sovereignty as an endeavor requiring energy and work, an investment in human and economic capital, the colonial administrators were also prompt to underscore its inherent easiness, as contemporary colonization was also born out of local history. This geographical and historical reconnaissance process was a recurring idea in French colonial propaganda during crises of confidence in the public opinion, such as December 1879, when Le Myre de Vilers wrote his preface to *Choses de l'Indochine contemporaine*, and again when it was reprinted by Rondet-Saint in 1916.

Thus, the French had not built roads *ex-nihilo*. Roads were not French inventions, and they predated the French presence. By assessing existing networks, the French acknowledged a local past: Indochina had had local and long-distance road networks well before their arrival. Created and used by different regional peoples, these roads were integrated into local political, economic, and cultural contexts that varied considerably from the south in Cambodia to the north in Tonkin. As a result, the nature and uses of roads were distinct over time and space. When they arrived, the French recognized this variety and tried to make sense of it. For example, a part of Southeast Asia at the turn of the

century was characterized by a "galactic" arrangement of power, where roads were not linked to a central hub, but rather would radiate from different centers.[45] Such were the cases of the Lao and Khmer kingdoms that the French encountered. Roads played a key role in the circulation of power in this galactic order in Cambodia and Laos. Assessing the communication network, the French were surprised by the complexity of what they saw. Thévenet-Le Boul, chief engineer of public works in Cochinchina, remarked:

> One has little idea what an immense network of land routes were thus opened, and people of good faith are forced to acknowledge that the vicinal network of Cochinchina is already done, that all the cultivated regions are crisscrossed with paths, some of which do justice to the local authorities who had ordered them, and this network only lacks a methodical maintenance and a regular endowment.[46]

While underscoring the breadth of the pre-existing network, Thévenet-Le Boul solidly defended French participation as historical necessity and simple implementation, a matter of bricks and surveillance, an effortless colonization. The French only needed to provide what had been lacking and what was historically necessary and justified: regular care and maintenance. In Cochinchina, pacified since the 1860s, the main task for the Public Work service was less in building new roads than in repairing, maintaining, and classifying existing roads and in constructing bridges and ferries in order to facilitate commercial exchange in all seasons. In Tonkin, to the north, where the pre-existing situation of roads was different, road-building remained part of the military process and an essential component of the pacification campaign up until the 1920s.

2.2 Building Colonial Roads with the Natives: The Development (*mise en valeur*) and Ordering (*mise en ordre*) of Indochina

The use of *corvée*, justified as much by the image of the French reconstruction of Roman roads as by their approach to local history, represented the most obvious impact of road-building on indigenous societies. The French built roads—or rather, had roads built—with the extensive use of *corvée*, penal labor, and the hiring of workers at very low wages[47] in a labor market that was racially determined and that would ensure a steady supply of cheap indigenous manpower for the French. As

a colonial means of control, both directly and indirectly, roads played a key role not only in the physical penetration of the land and the delivery of diverse administrative services, but also in what James C. Scott called "legibility;" that is, a preoccupation of modern States with "arrang[ing] the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion."[48] A recurring sign of the political value of roads and paths is the frequency with which administrators wrote about them in their reports on the political situation, describing roadworks and the responses of local populations.

In certain regions, people resisted the recruitment efforts of the colonial administrators. In 1921, the Resident of Nam Dinh thus reports on the "bad attitude" of several villages that divert the road's modern goal by using part of it for drying out their harvests. He had given several orders to clean it, but they had refused and left the administrator helpless.[49] Often, the Residents of provinces were faced with the disobedience of villagers who regularly organized their markets on roads at the entrance of their villages. Easily accessible, flat, cleared, and relatively rainproof, roads offered an ideal location for commercial transactions. Moreover, in their social function, markets on these stretches of road enabled villagers to recover the pre-modern uses of the street. In fact, local populations resisted in many ways and did not run out of reasons to do so. After all, the French were looking to impose not only political control on them but also Western ways of living and thinking. Given how the French used roads—by taking advantage of existing paths, by transforming them into spaces on which they imposed labor, taxes, and control—roads also took on a strongly negative connotation associated with colonialism.

As roads became colonial spaces, off-road spaces became sites of evasion, places where one could escape or at least attempt to avoid colonial control. They became unofficial spaces and even anti-official spaces. Avoiding roads, and by extension colonial control, was possible in many parts of Indochina. This is what constituted the narrative thread of many military narratives, such as Guillemet's *Sur les sentiers laotiens* (On Laotian Trails) in which the officer recounts his journey pursuing Chinese pirates in Laos.[50] Indeed, off-road spaces became the realm of piracy and other "*Pavillons noirs*" (Black pavilions), a derogatory term used to refer to local resistance to colonization. According to Jean-Louis de Lanessan, the Vietnamese figure of resistance Dé Tham was particularly famous for kidnapping French workers along the roads at the end of

the nineteenth century.[51] The road became an open space for dangerous encounters between colonials and natives, who tried and failed to avoid each other.

The construction of roads was also an important aspect of official efforts to promote commercial trade and the development of mining and plantation agriculture.[52] In particular, colonials believed that an extended network of roads in northern Tonkin would facilitate access to the Chinese market, still holding onto the idea of making Indochina a gateway to this Asian Eldorado. However, the lack of manpower created an obstacle. The regions in question were located at high altitudes, on rough terrain, in insalubrious areas. They were indeed difficult to access. How then could the French recruit labor? To respond to this difficulty, the development of the road network, the "civilizing roadway," would take place in conjunction with the development of another colonial organization: the prison system. Thus, penitentiaries big enough to hold the laborers required for their construction and maintenance were located on two of the main roads from Cao Bang and Ha Giang that converge toward the Chinese border.[53] In the 1920s, French colonization of the central mountains in southern Annam again stimulated the demand for new roads and penal labor to build them.[54] Road construction thus reflected considerations that were administrative, military, economic, and social.

Since the beginning of the century, most of the funds allocated to transportation in the general budget of Indochina served to finance the costly projects of the north–south railway elaborated by Paul Doumer.[55] As a consequence, the effective responsibility of road construction fell onto local administrators who were the Residents of provinces and also at the head of provincial prisons. Given the chronic shortage of manpower, it was no surprise that they would resort to penal labor. Moreover, work conditions for these prisoners were not regulated by the labor laws in Indochina. Therefore, they could be used to work in regions where it was impossible to recruit or send regular workers, such as those infected with malaria. In the south and in urban centers that were more accessible, roadwork was also essentially done by prisoners. The close relationship between the development of a colonial road network and a colonial prison system amounts to a prison-colonial system. One can read Peter Zinoman's *Colonial Bastille*[56] from the viewpoint of road-building projects to highlight the interactions and complementarity of both colonial institutions. In the 1880s, the prisoners of the six provincial prisons of Cochinchina were hired to build roads and public

buildings, reinforce embankments, and dig up irrigation canals. All over Indochina, penal labor continued to be used mainly for public works until the end of the colonial era. Zinoman also notes that the organization and the objectives of forced labor on roads differed greatly from those of the penal system in metropolitan France. While prison labor was considered to be a reformation tool for urban prisoners in the *métropole*, labor was simply an economic resource in Indochina, especially in remote provinces far away from densely populated deltas. The association of the penal system with the development of the road network also greatly influenced mobility, as prisoners could be sent to areas with a shortage of manpower. Designed to facilitate the transportation of people and of goods, roads and their construction required human mobility, notably, that of convicts.[57] What was the impact of the constant circulation of prisoners in the penal system for roadworks?

Road-building was undeniably physically difficult and dangerous. In addition, the convicts were subjected to corporal punishment and food deprivation. They would be forced to sleep by the side of the road to save costs. Malaria and dysentery were rampant, especially in the insalubrious areas where they were the only available manpower. On roads, exposed to the eyes of all, prisoners were also subjected to public opinion. The lesson to the indigenous populations was clear, but the spectacle also undermined French self-representations and prestige in Indochina. Everywhere the road went, the ambiguity of the system of colonial domination could be seen as both a technological triumph and a source of human agony. The illustrations of the Teston encyclopedia would later circulate these ambivalent images to the *métropole* (Fig. 2.3).

The road network, as it was being built by convicts and as they were moved around Indochina to respond to the demand in manpower for public works projects, thus contributed to a new form of mobility, that of the prisoners themselves. It was not a desired form of mobility but it surely impacted the way the Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians saw French colonialism and the way they represented themselves. Zinoman compared their mobility to that of the circulation of students through the Franco-Vietnamese school system:

> Both systems uprooted individuals from their native places, removed them from their families and shepherded them through a hierarchical network of institutions that blanketed a new administrative landscape. During their journeys, they formed intimate attachments with fellow sojourners who came from faraway regions and spoke in unfamiliar accents.[58]

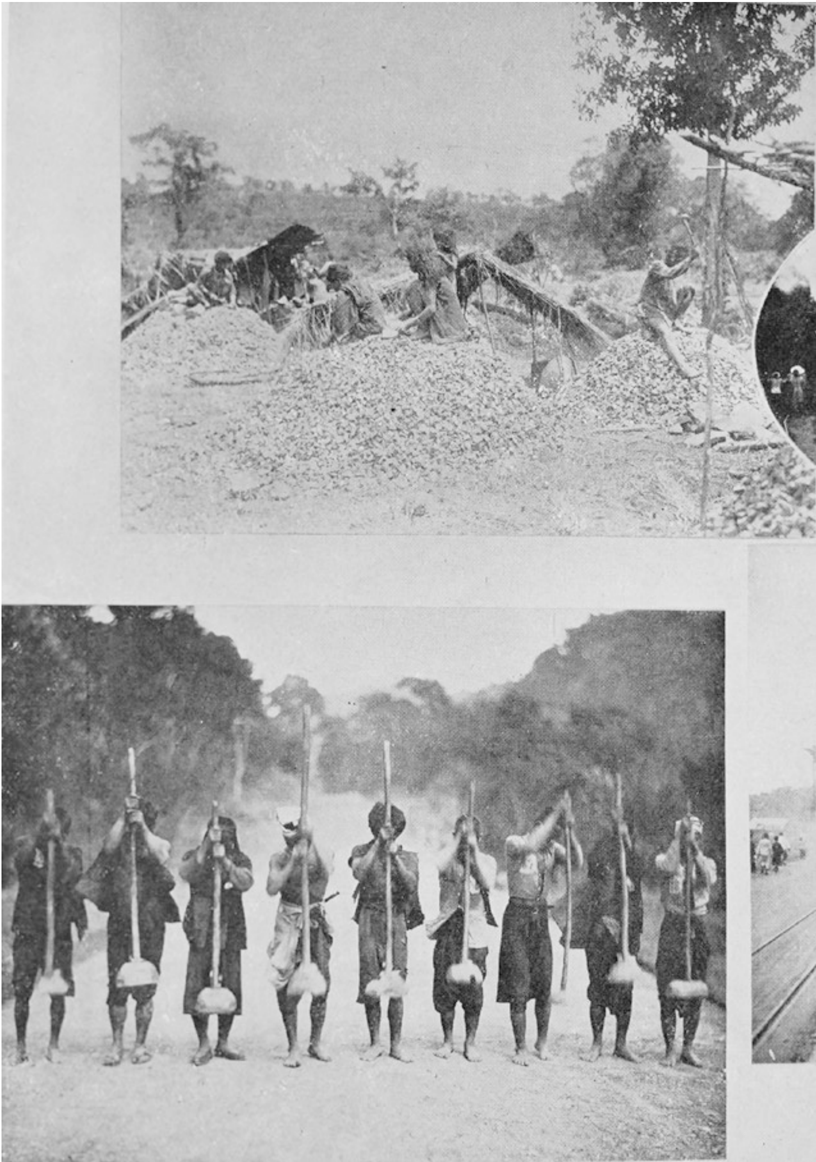

Fig. 2.3 Human labor and road-building (Eugène Teston and Maurice Percheron, *L'Indochine Moderne: Encyclopédie Administrative, Touristique, Artistique et Économique* [Paris: Librairie de France, 1932], 991. Courtesy of Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer. FR ANOM BIB AOM/12674/1932)

To some extent, Zinoman demonstrates that prisons, like schools, were incubators, nurturing bonds that supported the development of what Benedict Anderson has described as “imagined communities.” This is especially evident in what happened after their experiences in the prison system and in building the road network:

> After release, escape, graduation, or expulsion, many ex-students and ex-prisoners (especially political prisoners) attempted to promote the sensations of connectedness that they had experienced during their journeys as the ideology of modern nationalism.[59]

Unlike schools, the prison system was not elitist. Thus, the creation of a road network, through the use of penal labor, also facilitated the meeting and coming together of people from diverse social backgrounds in that political prisoners worked alongside petty criminals. In addition, the prison system and the road network extended over the five parts of French Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin) and could send convicts originating from one area to work in another, thus enlarging their national consciousness through their involuntary journey on the roads to be built or maintained all over Indochina. A new sense of community was born from the shared experience of imprisonment and roadwork. So while French colonial administration sought to valorize (*mise en valeur*) and order (*mise en ordre*) Indochina through the creation of a road network and the organization of the penal system, they also set off an underground network of circulation because of—and in spite of—their quest for control over indigenous mobility. In opposition to this hidden circulation, the staging of the colony also took place on roads.

2.3 Building Colonial Roads with the French: The Staging (*mise en scène*) and Development (*mise en valeur*) of Indochina

This first road network was simply a skeleton, the base structure of an empire, whose concrete and asphalt veins and arteries would link colonial capitals. Official French discourse around the construction of roads in Indochina revealed remarkably similar ambitions to the road network that sought to encompass the entirety of metropolitan France under the Third Republic. However, in the case of Indochina, the reference point for civilization extended beyond France’s history and its double legacy as

Roman Gaul to integrate native history as reconstructed by and for the French, in their approach to local practices of *corvée* labor and in their interpretation of local myths. When Colonial Road 1, the backbone of the colonial road network, was nicknamed the "Mandarin Road" after the pre-colonial route that mandarins took between Hanoi and Saigon, a simple mention of the name evoked romantic notions of the wealth and past splendors of the East. The symbolic value of roads built in the French style was also understood in political terms. Beyond an organization that sought to be more direct and efficient, Western machines became "key agents in their campaigns to revive 'decadent' civilizations in Asia."[60] By claiming to restore the "Mandarin Road" and by opening it to new vehicles such as the automobile, the French could also pretend to revive a decadent Vietnamese civilization and to legitimize their presence in Indochina in the eyes of all.

The pursuit of development (*mise en valeur*) therefore came to rely heavily on the staging (*mise en scène*) of colonial progress on the roads, and the link between colonial politics and French literature became more explicit with the development of roads. Writing to his Residents from his mission in France during the summer of 1914, Governor General Albert Sarraut congratulated himself on the concomitant development of roads and colonial propaganda. *Mise en valeur* and *mise en scène* were becoming one. Scientists, writers, and artists, as well as tourists, were more and more interested in Indochina, and it was the duty of the Governor General and the local administrations to support this interest. Previously, these efforts had been at best sporadic, depending on the capricious goodwill of individual administrators. However, with Sarraut's intervention, colonial authorities would deliberately facilitate the mobility of artists, especially writers, in the colony:

> The Administration did all that was in their power to make their stay pleasant, facilitate their means of transportation, and help them in the research and studies they wanted to do on site.
>
> This way of proceeding, left until now to the initiative of each of the representatives of the Administration, must in my opinion become the rule, the implementation of which would usefully be the object of precise, anticipated, and ordered measures in each of the countries of the Indochinese Union.[61]

Thus, colonial propaganda took to the roads and rails. Sarraut ordered the systematic allocation of credits in local budgets to grant free transportation on the non-conceded networks of the Indochina Railway Company

to representatives of the *métropole* and holders of fellowship. Budgeting for road transportation for these special visitors became the responsibility of each of the local Residents. These measures responded to the renewed interest in representations of Greater France and to a thirst for new landscapes and emotions, revived by the 1907 "retrocession" by Siam of the territories where Angkor Wat was located. Painters who received the Prize of the Society of French Colonial Artists, created by the General Government of Indochina, and the fellowship recipients of philanthropist Albert Kahn's World Tour organization had the opportunity and the duty to "travel the universe and to note the fecund manifestations of French genius and the beauty of its colonial domain."[62] In addition, Sarraut planned to create a "Room of the artist and fellow"[63] at Angkor Wat to serve as free housing, a plan that underscored the didactic function of the Khmer ruins.[64] In September 1914, interim Governor General Van Vollenhoven sent out a memorandum to all local chief administrators insisting on the selection criteria for the recipients of such largesse. They had to be sent from the *métropole*, and they had to be artists, not tourists; in fact, the word "tourist" is shown crossed-out on the page of the memorandum.

After the Sarraut General Government, colonial literature in Indochina became a political matter. For the Governor General, through the construction of roads, the development of communications, and the material and financial support of the Administration, *mise en valeur* would facilitate *mise en scène* and, reciprocally, *mise en scène* (staging) would help to publicize the accomplishments of development. It is in this manner that colonialist French author Eugène Pujarniscle conceived the function of colonial literature as a tool of propaganda that would uniquely transform and shape French opinion:

> Of all propagandas, the most efficient is propaganda by the arts and, more specifically, by literature. […] To create what we call an opinion movement, documentation must dress itself with images […]. The image arouses in us feelings and it is feelings that lead the world. […] The economist, the geographer, the archeologist look down a little on the frivolous flute player that is the novelist or the poet. Let them be wary: there is in his song, as thin as it is, more persuasive strength than in the loud volumes that they compose.[65]

Pujarniscle thus articulated the role of the writer in clearly political terms. The mobility of the writer in France's overseas possessions would help colonization.

In recent decades, the social sciences and humanities have focused on the issue of mobility and the complex questions related to the textualization of such mobility. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have reconsidered the status of travel as literary or theoretical metaphor,[66] the status of travel literature as a discursive practice,[67] and the status of the travel narrative as a source for historical data and documentation of cultural diversity or intercultural contact.[68] For contemporary authors and readers of the construction of "Indochina," the goal of travel narratives was clearly identified as colonial propaganda. Despite its heterogeneity, travel literature in Indochina at the turn of the century reinforced the cultural hierarchy on which French colonialism was based. In a variety of eroticizing travel narratives, *reportages*, and fictions, the colonial Other appeared as essentially different and inferior to the colonizer. For Nicola Cooper, such a literature reflects the historical specificity and inequality inherent in French colonial discourse as it adapts to political and cultural developments.[69] The portrayals and descriptions, the formation of narrative identities and the study of characters: All seem to favor a binary tension between colonizer and colonized. As travel was redirected to ground transportation, one emerging material condition nuanced such judgment: the introduction of the automobile. The new technology came hurtling into Indochina shortly after its beginnings in France. Noteworthy for its role in the acceleration of the individual mobility of French writers and travelers, as well as for creating new roles for passengers and drivers, the automobile upset both the perceptions and the material conditions of colonial life. In particular, car travel narratives reflect the effects of colonialism at the most individualistic level, since cars were intended to facilitate individual access to the territory opened by newly constructed or renovated roads. Initially, for the French, car travel could be depreciated, for the automobile was conceived of as a utilitarian vehicle that would not leave room for pleasure.

In the Indochinese context, the ambiguous signification of building modernity—transforming the land and its ancient configurations—was compensated for by the use of the image of roads in French novels, though without promoting a progressive image of a French colonial presence. French fictions about roads[70] seem to resist a realistic mode of narration and thus convey a complex image of colonization. How can one impose linear models of construction on an unleveled geography under unstable climatic conditions? How can one write a narrative text, which is by nature linear, about an environment that is culturally

resistant to linearity? Can a linear narrative convey the complexities of the colonial experience? The limits of the mimetic capacity of text are revealed in the ambiguities that seem to result from the imposition of linear models of construction and narration.

Such tensions are tangible in George Groslier's 1925 novel *La Route du plus fort* (The Road of the Strongest). The relationship between the two main characters, Ternier and Hélène, embodies the opposition between immobility and movement, straight lines and curves. Representations of transportation technologies and means of communication abound in this novel. Traveling, visiting, touring, constructing, horseback-riding, elephant-riding, but also waiting, breaking down, lying down, and sleeping are the characters' recurring actions. Ternier, a colonial administrator in charge of the *Résidence du Cambodge*, embodies a linear civilizing mission and aspires toward a colonial *mise en valeur*. The *Résident* is responsible for opening Cambodia by constructing a road, which will subsequently lead to technological modernization through the installation of telegraph and phone lines. Protagonist and hero, this senior official appears to embody the *mise en valeur* doctrine. In her doctoral dissertation,[71] Susan Dixon offers a thorough analysis of his interventions in the advancement of the plot and of his movements as a civil servant and representative of the French government. In particular, she draws our attention to his conversations around the topic of the road, as a spokesperson for France's interests. Ternier displays all the qualities of the colonial man: He is rational and well-educated, and also a little idealistic. The incipit and origin scene of all subsequent movements, immediately introduces him as thoroughly competent, but careless, slowly coming to the help of the Gassin couple, whose car had broken down on an Auvergne road:

> Behind an Annamese chauffeur who was driving with extreme slowness, a man with a thick drooping moustache, a short pipe under this moustache, settled himself comfortably and casually, taken with the landscape and the well-being of the time.[72]

Ternier is nothing like a rugged explorer. Gone are the bare feet or long beard of an Auguste Pavie. As Resident of Cambodia, he has undertaken a great road-building project. To some extent, his character is the quintessential road-builder who succeeds the explorer. He is an administrator who seeks to develop Indochina. Later, serving as guide for Mme.

Hélène Gassin in Cambodia, he explicitly refuses to be associated with a romantic image of Indochina:

> He directly attacked above all this persistent and absurd colonial legend in which so many misinformed people revel. And his word was that much more powerful in the spirit of Madame Gassin that, until then, so-called "colonial" or exotic novels had left on her only dubious impressions and artificial tableaus. If the revelations and sober touches of the Resident still threw her off balance [*déroutaient*], they invited her to move forward through all of this unknown in logical steps [*démarches logiques*], on well-established roads, enlightened with a tranquil good sense and above all brought along by the conviction of the trailblazer that he was.[73]

Romanesque illusions are gone and Hélène's attention is rerouted toward a clear, straight line, full of good sense, thanks to the words of the well-grounded man. Later, she will describe him as "in action like a powerful machine."[74]

Hélène, the French tourist, can be read as the embodiment of the female colonizer in general and as an incarnation of the nonlinear values of Cambodia, since only she slowly begins to understand the country. As Nicola Cooper, Jennifer Yee, and Marie-Paule Ha[75] have each noted, French colonial discourse regularly feminized Indochina. However, the identification of a French woman with the indigenous space of the Cambodian landscape results in a problematic spatial discourse, all the more complicated by the ironical reading of the novel's title, as the "weaker" sex appears to be the "strongest" in the end. When their journey on the road comes to a stop because of Hélène's attack of appendicitis and resulting death, Ternier's frantic horse-ride on the road he is building—or, rather, having built—to get medications for her is futile. The narrator ironically addresses the Resident: "Run, conqueror, on your road."[76] Hélène's death implies that *mise en valeur* could destroy its own object as Ternier is running against the natural rhythms of his environment: "All is logical that submits itself to the rhythm of the land and of the light, and you only aspire to impede this rhythm."[77]

Written by George Groslier, a French archaeologist born in Cambodia who was in charge of the Cambodian pavilions at the Decorative Arts Exhibit of 1925 and at the Colonial Exhibit of 1931 in Paris, *La Route du plus fort* stages colonists' growing anxieties and doubts about the efficiency and legitimacy of the work of *mise en valeur*. From a narrative point of view, the text does not end with the death of Hélène. Ternier

receives a letter from her sister, who attaches the last letter that she had received from Hélène herself. The circulation of the correspondence foils linearity, both spatially and chronologically. The narrative turns specular and speculative as Hélène is quoted again from her letter: "I must stop myself. My health is good, but I feel immensely tired. All that I see is admirable. How will this all end?"[78] In fact, for a long time, nothing was decided on the roads of Indochina. For colonists as well as for local populations, roads remained to be exploited, or *mises en valeur*, once their construction was achieved.

Building roads required the military, exploratory, ideological, and symbolical work that combined *mise en valeur*, *mise en ordre* and *mise en scène* of the land. Exploiting road with automobiles would present the occasion to reinvent almost everything: vehicles, roads and practices, and even the identities and roles of both colonizers and colonized. Despite years of automobility in France, nothing would immediately translate in Indochina. The knowledge gained on French national roads would not be directly applicable to colonial roads. Industrialists and their customers, colonial administrators, Europeans, and Natives: all had their opinions on these questions. Thus opened an era of negotiations over roads and many pages of travel narratives.

Notes

1. All translations from the French are mine, unless otherwise noted. Jean Thévenet-Le Boul, *Les travaux publics et les voies de communication en Cochinchine* (Saigon: Imprimerie Nationale, 1880), I.
2. To put his role in perspective, one must note that he played a key role in the race for Tonkin, even before Jules Ferry had formed his second government in the beginning of spring 1883. Although Ferry has been memorialized in French popular history as the instigator of French expansion in Tonkin, he was more of its heir than its principal author. The conquest of Tonkin was presented as a necessary step in the affirmation of French power overseas and the prelude to economic and political domination. Even more so than the French agents on the ground, the voice of Jauréguiberry was the strongest in advocating military intervention in Tonkin. See Kim Munholland, "Admiral Jauréguiberry and the French Scramble for Tonkin: 1879–83," *French Historical Studies* 11, no. 1 (1979): 81–107, 82.
3. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (New York: Vintage, 1989).

4. Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
5. The term was introduced to French political lexicon in 1895 by Gustave de Molinary, himself a fierce opponent to colonial expansion.
6. Virginia McLean Thompson, *French Indo-China* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, Ltd. and New York: Macmillan, 1937), 212.
7. Pierre Cordemoy, "Le réseau routier indochinois," *Bulletin de l'agence économique de l'Indo-Chine* (September 1934): 333–38.
8. Environmental historian David Biggs's work on the Mekong Delta shows how the colonial conquest and economy were shaped by the delta's waterways and he also addresses the presence of preexisting pre-colonial infrastructures that the French not so much erased but expanded upon. Far from a static and enclosed space, the Mekong Delta, in particular, had seen the settlements of Khmer, Cham, Chinese and Vietnamese farmers, fishermen, and traders before the arrival of the French. See in particular Chapter 2, "Water Grid" in David Biggs, *Quagmire: Nation-Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).
9. This is my approximate translation for "*chefs d'arrondissement*" in the original text.
10. Charles Le Myre de Vilers, preface to *Choses de l'Indochine contemporaine*, by Maurice Rondet-Saint (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1916), XXIII.
11. Archives Nationales du Vietnam 1 (ANV1), Résidence Supérieure du Tonkin (RST) 7510, "Au sujet de la construction du réseau routier du Tonkin 1885–1891." In a letter to the Residents, in charge of each colonial territory, dated July 11, 1888, the Governor General wrote: "Unfortunately, the limited resources of the budget only allow me to have at my disposal insufficient credit to undertake this work and accomplish it. There is more: the roads that we have found already built are left in a state of deplorable abandon, for lack of sufficient resources. I had to concern myself with providing the means to fix, insofar as possible, the lack of funding."
12. ANV1, RST 7510, "Au sujet de la construction du réseau routier du Tonkin 1885–1891," Letter 214 D from General Warnet, Interim Commander of the Tonkin Corps to the Director of Civil and Political Affairs in Hanoi, March 3, 1886.
13. See Truong Buu Lâm, *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900–1931* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 94.
14. ANV1, RST 7510, "Au sujet de la construction du réseau routier du Tonkin 1885–1891," Letter from Governor General to Residents, July 11, 1888.

15. Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890–1914* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 107.
16. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890–1914*, 123.
17. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 209.
18. See, for example, Camille Jullian, *Inscriptions romaines de Bordeaux* (Bordeaux: Imprimerie G. Gounouilhou, 1887); Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges and Camille Jullian, *Histoire des institutions politiques de l'ancienne France*: *La Gaule romaine* (Paris: Hachette et Cie, 1888); Camille Jullian, *Histoire de la Gaule* (Paris: Hachette et Cie, 1908); and Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *La cité antique, étude sur le culte, le droit, les institutions de la Grèce et de Rome* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1864).
19. Jean El Gammal, "Les références politiques à la Gaule de 1870 à 1918," in *Camille Jullian, l'histoire de la Gaule et le nationalisme français: actes du colloque organisé à Lyon le 6 décembre 1988* (Lyon: Société des Amis de Jacob Spon, 1991), 31.
20. Société de géographie commerciale de Bordeaux, Groupe géographique et ethnographique du Sud-Ouest and Association française pour l'avancement des sciences, *Bulletin* (Bordeaux, 1876): 355.
21. Coulanges and Jullian, *Histoire des institutions politiques de l'ancienne France*: *La Gaule romaine*, 137.
22. Coulanges and Jullian, *Histoire des institutions politiques de l'ancienne France*: *La Gaule romaine*, 137.
23. Peter Frederic Baugher, "The Contradictions of Colonialism: the French Experience in Indochina, 1860–1940" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980).
24. Louis Roubaud, *Viet-Nam. La Tragédie indochinoise* (Paris: L. Valois, 1931), 277–78.
25. Back in France, when former Governor General (1891–1894) Jean-Louis de Lanessan also known as Jean-Marie de Lanessan published his views on colonization, he compared Indochina's colonization by the French with Roman colonization. See Jean-Louis de Lanessan, *Principes de colonisation* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1897). When explorer and former colonial administrator Jules Harmand published his views on Indochina, he also considered Indochina's colonization as a continuation of Roman colonization, albeit with a major difference, as he stressed the lack of potential for assimilation with the peoples of Indochina and argued for the policy of association. See Jules Harmand, *Domination et colonisation* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1910).
26. Decree 752 of the Governor General, May 13, 1896.
27. ANV1, RST 3508, "Institution de la commission supérieure des digues, routes et tramways de l'Annam et du Tonkin," 1896.

28. ANV1, RST 7529, "Classement des routes en territoire civil," 1896.
29. ANV1, RST 7510, "Arrêté de la RST sur les routes de première et deuxième urgences," January 12, 1886.
30. ANV1, RST 7510, "Au sujet de la construction du réseau routier du Tonkin 1885–1891." In a letter to the Residents, dated July 11, 1888, the Governor General wrote: "The Residents and Annamite civil servants will have to make every effort to make clear the reach and value of this measure dictated by the care of the French administration in the interest of the population."
31. Under French rule, the protectorates of Annam and Tonkin were organized with a double local administration at the provincial level. The French resident had jurisdiction over Europeans and other non-Vietnamese citizens and he supervised the Vietnamese mandarins who were in charge on managing the affairs of the Vietnamese. The indigenous officials were appointed and compensated by the court in Hue. The *tong doc* is the highest-ranking official in the indigenous administration system. On the administrative organization of Indochina, see Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858–1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 88–90; Truong Buu Lâm, *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900–1931* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 19.
32. ANV1, RST 7510, letter dated January 24, 1886.
33. Raymond Betts, *Uncertain Dimensions: Western Overseas Empires in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 91.
34. For example, with the French occupation came the importation of a new system of measurements, the metric system, which managed to penetrate some local societies. In her doctoral dissertation, Noriko Kasuga Sekimoto studied local resistance and adaptation by considering the evolution of the system of weights and measurement in Vietnam under French rule. She points out the importance of practicability in everyday use and the rather flexible approach adopted by French administrators. See Noriko Kasuga Sekimoto, "Weights and Measures System in Vietnam During the Colonial Period: Its Regional Diversification and the Situation of French Rule" (PhD dissertation, University of Tokyo, 2014).
35. Hoang Cao Khai, *En Annam*, trans. Jules Roux (Hanoi: Imprimerie Express, 1910), 41–47.
36. Truong Buu Lâm, *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900–1931*, 73.
37. Truong Buu Lâm, *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900–1931*, 74.
38. Phan Boi Chau, *Hai ngoai huyet thu*, in Truong Buu Lâm, *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900–1931* (University of Michigan Press, 2000), 91.

39. Eugène Teston and Maurice Percheron, *L'Indochine moderne, encyclopédie administrative, touristique, artistique et économique* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1932), 843.
40. Charles Régismanset, preface to *L'Indochine moderne, encyclopédie administrative, touristique, artistique et économique*, by Eugène Teston and Maurice Percheron (Paris: Librairie de France, 1932).
41. "Transport et Tourisme: Pénétration Touristique dans le Haut Tonkin," *Tourisme Tonkin* (January 8, 1938), 8.
42. Jean-Louis de Lanessan, *La colonisation française en Indo-Chine* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1895), 324.
43. See Libbie Jo Freed, "Conduits of Culture and Control: Roads in Colonial French Central Africa, 1890–1960" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006).
44. Charles Le Myre de Vilers, preface to *Choses de l'Indochine contemporaine*, by Maurice Rondet-Saint (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1916), XXIII.
45. Stanley J. Tambiah, "The Galactic Polity: The Structure of Traditional Kingdoms in Southeast Asia," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 293, no. 1 *Anthropology* (July 1977): 69–97.
46. Jean Thévenet-Le Boul, *Les travaux publics et les voies de communication en Cochinchine* (Saigon: Imprimerie Nationale, 1880), 23. This observation contrasts with the French approach to constructing roads in other colonies, such as those in Africa studied by Libbie Freed. See Libbie Jo Freed, "Conduits of Culture and Control: Roads, States, and Users in French Central Africa, 1890–1960" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006).
47. L. Kreitmann, *Le Service du Génie au Tonkin sous l'Administration de la Marine* (Paris: Librairie Militaire Berger-Levraut & Cie, 1889), 9, 14.
48. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 2.
49. ANV1, RST 78989, "Construction, classement et déclassement des routes locales du Tonkin," 1900–1930.
50. Eugène Guillemet, *Sur les sentiers laotiens* (Hanoi: Impr. D'Extrême-Orient, 1921).
51. Jean-Louis de Lanessan, *La colonisation française en Indo-Chine* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1895), 92–93.
52. Martin J. Murray, *The Development of Capitalism in Colonial Indochina, 1870–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 315–74.
53. Charles Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indo-China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), 101.
54. Charles Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indo-China*, 103. The French built prisons in Kon Tum and Buon Ma Thuot as well

as labor camps in Dark Lak and Dark Mil. In the 1930s, their prisoners built Colonial Road 14 from Buon Ma Thuot to Quang Nam and Colonial Roads 5, 24, 27, and 33 creating a network that linked Kon Tum, Plei Ku, Ban Me Thuot, Qui Nhon, Ninh Hoa, and Nha Trang.

55. See David Del Testa, “Paint the Trains Red: Labor, Nationalism, and the Railroads in French colonial Indochina, 1898–1945” (PhD dissertation, University of California Davis, 2001).
56. Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). See especially Chapter 3, “The Regime.”
57. Prisoners were moved to alleviate overpopulation, counter plots, and epidemics.
58. Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille*, 66.
59. Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille*, 66.
60. Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 224.
61. ANV1, RST 8321, “Mesures prises pour faciliter les moyens de transport aux touristes envoyés par la France en Indochine,” 1914, letter from Paris dated July 18, 1914. Ironically, the archive file is mistitled, as the French administrators insisted that these measures be applied only to artists and not to tourists.
62. ANV1, RST 8321, “Mesures prises pour faciliter les moyens de transport aux touristes envoyés par la France en Indochine,” 1914, letter from Paris dated July 18, 1914.
63. ANV1, RST 8321, Circulaire n°80-S-A, Interim Governor General to chiefs of local administration, September 7, 1914. For an in-depth study of colonial tourism in Angkor, see Aline Demay, *Tourism and Colonization in Indochina 1898–1939* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).
64. Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860–1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007). See in particular, Chapter 2, “Urban Legend, Capitalizing on Angkor.”
65. Eugène Pujarniscle, *Philoxène ou De la littérature coloniale* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie., 1931), 5–7.
66. Georges Van den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).
67. David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).
68. James S. Duncan and Derek Gregory, *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

69. Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).
70. Christopher Robinson offers a study of French colonial fiction set in Indochina that extends to roads and railways. Comparing the two modes of transportation and their respective narrative models through three texts: Eugène Guillemet's *Sur les sentiers laotiens* (1921), Georges Groslier's *La route du plus fort* (1925) and Roland Daguerches's *Le Kilomètre 83* (1913), Robinson highlights that roads and railways serve a different set of functions from their equivalent in metropolitan texts, as they represent "alien spaces which impinge on but are not fully part of the world which they ostensibly delineate." See Christopher Robinson, "Lines of communication: Thematics of Direction and Strategies of Narration in Colonial Indochina," in *France and Indochina France and Indochina: Cultural Representations*, ed. Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 49–62, 60.
71. Susan Dixon, "De l'invention de la société: l'agent de l'État comme personnage et auteur de romans français d'Indochine" (PhD dissertation, Rutgers University and Paris 8 University, 2006).
72. George Groslier, *La route du plus fort* (Paris: éditions Émile-Paul Frères, 1925), 8.
73. George Groslier, *La route du plus fort*, 15.
74. George Groslier, *La route du plus fort*, 235.
75. Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Jennifer Yee, *Clichés de la femme exotique: un regard sur la littérature coloniale française entre 1871 et 1914* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000); and Marie-Paule Ha, *Figuring the East: Segalen, Malraux, Duras, and Barthes* (Albany: SUNY, 2000).
76. George Groslier, *La route du plus fort*, 226.
77. George Groslier, *La route du plus fort*, 201.
78. George Groslier, *La route du plus fort*, 235.

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CHAPTER 3

Unfolding the Road: Automobile Pioneers

When the first car rolled out in Indochina, almost everything about it had to be reinvented: the shape of the vehicles, their place on the road, the road itself, road signage, the drivers' etiquette, and even legal penalties and reparations. Despite years of prior use in France, the automobile and its effects did not immediately or easily translate in Indochina. Manufacturers and customers, colonial Administrators and Residents,[1] Europeans,[2] and Natives: everyone had a view on these issues. In the pages of local newspapers, motoring magazines, or metropolitan newspapers, journalists, columnists, and members of automobile clubs circulated their opinions, biases, and desires. Extensive negotiations began and helped to shape the technical system of the automobile in Indochina. Through this movement, both spatial and critical—closely connected to technical change, travel practices, and aesthetic or moral values–emerged a specific colonial car culture.

First, what should a vehicle specifically designed to travel on Indochinese roads look like? Should it be heavy, robust, and aimed at the greatest number, or would it be light and easily maneuverable, designed to facilitate the movement of a cultural elite? Should it be a racing machine capable of great bursts of speed, or should it be a modest motorized cart that would transport passengers in peaceful comfort? Should it even be a motorcar? Would a vehicle specific to these new ground conditions be better suited? Answers came in the shape

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of groundbreaking technical experiments and moral choices. As they worked to create a colonial road and motor vehicle, automotive pioneers also sketched a portrait of the automobile traveler in Indochina.

3.1 Where the Rubber Meets the Road: Technical Hesitations

In France, and even more so in Indochina, in its early days the automobile[3] involved very few people. At the turn of the last century, the car was a luxury good, and French manufacturers—unlike their American counterparts—did very little to democratize its use through their commercial strategies. There were three hundred automobiles in France in 1895 (the first year for which figures are available), almost three thousand in 1900, and over one hundred thousand in 1914.[4] The year 1902 marked the arrival of the first automobiles in Saigon, a fleet of 68 vehicles imported from the West.[5]

Did Motoring Have a Future in Indochina?

In May 1903, a survey conducted by the Chief of Staff of the Governor General[6] showed that the roads of Tonkin, Annam, and Cambodia proved impracticable, except around large cities like Hanoi, Haiphong, Tourane, and Phnom Penh. It was only in Cochinchina, because of the primacy of its economic development, that most of the roads were accessible and usable in all seasons. Peugeot was at the time the only brand represented in Indochina, by two French automobile dealerships: Mignot in Saigon and Boillot in Hanoi. In Saigon, indigenous engineers had been "trained" to operate motor vehicles. The Chief of Staff also noted in his survey that "the natives, having great dispositions for mechanical arts in general, easily assimilate the techniques of all machines." Supplies of oil and gas were only available in Saigon, Hanoi, Haiphong and perhaps also in Phnom Penh, urban centers situated at large distances from one another, thus limiting travel and automobile accessibility. At the time, according to information provided by the Chamber of Commerce in Hanoi, several large establishments in Hanoi were nevertheless willing to purchase trucks for the transportation of goods, if their prices were lowered in Indochina. Distinguishing between native mechanics trained to drive, on the one

hand, and touring motorists, identified as “drivers” (*chauffeurs*), on the other, the Chief of Staff asserted that all “drivers” in Indochina were Europeans, with the exception of the son of Le Phat Dat,[7] a wealthy Annamite from Saigon. Indeed, for the representatives of the colonial authority, the question remained: what did the colony need most, the leisurely car ride or the commercial delivery service? Apart from a small fleet of trucks operating a circumscribed car service for people and goods between Saigon and Tay Minh, the only automobiles found on Indochinese roads at the time were private passenger vehicles, and these were very few in number. Given the conditions of an undeveloped infrastructure and a limited market for automobiles, the Chief of Staff did not believe that motoring would expand significantly in Indochina, except perhaps in Cochinchina, where the number of buyers remained very limited.

In Tonkin, the northern part of Indochina, the police tallied a dozen automobiles in Hanoi during a census led door to door in 1905.[8] They all belonged to Europeans, including Mrs. Charpantier, a trader; Mr. Haff, a forwarding agent; Mr. Kelly, a commercial painter; Mr. Trombert, the director of the power plant; Mr. Fontaine, an alcohol distiller; and Mr. Garnier, a contractor. These car owners held comparable occupations to those of metropolitan owners who used their vehicles on their business trips. However, these figures were unreliable. This inventory of “cars, horses, dogs, automobiles, motorcycles, bicycles of the city of Hanoi” was ordered by a note by the Mayor of Hanoi but was conducted without the publication of a decree. Therefore, the administrator Bonnemain, the lawyer Deloustal, and the owners of the Omnium garage refused to offer any information on the number and type of vehicles they owned, probably suspicious of the potential tax use of these statistics. The final picture painted by the police is therefore riddled with estimates. The reluctance of these notable individuals but also experts in the emerging automobility system points to the power of these elites and their desire to maintain control over their means of transport, a new object that had yet to be regulated in France and was an expensive privilege in the colony. This combination of legal, technical, and cultural considerations would exert a considerable influence on the development of a specific form of automobility in Indochina.

The Social Uses of the Automobile: The Tour d'Inspection

Why were car owners so distrustful of police incursions into their garages? For the few motorists in Indochina, the automobile performed several functions closely associated with the social habits and values of the ruling classes. It allowed one not only to move, but to move in comfort and—at least superficially—without having to depend on the local population. Moreover, it facilitated one's display of social status, especially in the city. The car enabled the visits and counter-visits required by bourgeois sociability, in effect supplanting the carriage or rickshaw that necessitated the direct intervention of a local. A typical example of colonial mobility for urban, European elites on an almost daily basis was the "*tour d'inspection*," conducted in the late afternoon, that allowed the colonists to take a breath of fresh air and to cool off in a rickshaw or a horse carriage.[9] One could show off one's carriage and clothing and see those of others, permitting these individuals to measure their own social status against that of their neighbors.[10] Women observed each other in silence. Men competed in elegance in a game of one-upmanship. All took advantage of the cooler hours. The arrival of the automobile quickly transformed this practice, as the car became the vehicle of choice for ostentatious outings and potential impropriety. On February 17, 1912, issue of the *Courrier d'Indochine Républicain*, a journalist accused a Resident Superior of misusing "the royal car" of the Emperor in Hue for his own exclusive rides. In 1916, Rondet-Saint,[11] Director of the *Ligue Maritime et Coloniale*, reflected on the change in practices that accompanied the introduction of the automobile:

> For a long time, one of the most celebrated attractions of Saigon, often called the Pearl of the Orient, was the *Tour de l'Inspection*, a pleasant circular walk around the immediate vicinity of the Indochinese capital. The car effectively extirpated the *Tour de l'Inspection*, now too small for the new mode of locomotion and only frequented by a small number of unfortunate individuals condemned to the horse-drawn carriage. By car, the "*Tour*" is actually done in the blink of an eye. Today, one goes farther.[12]

One can go farther, longer and more comfortably in the car. Better yet, the car—thanks to its speed—allowed for more cooling and relief from the weather, thus giving passengers more liberty in their dress:

> And one of the less successful automotive applications is not to serve as "refreshment" for the wealthy. One dresses a lot in Saigon, and one does not host less; in the evening, after dinner, or leaving the theater, one will, in most cases, men in tuxedos, women in low-cut *décolletage*, a simple cloak over the shoulders, do an hour or two in a car through the countryside, under radiant and starry skies, in the sweet sweaty nights of the Far East. It's lovely.[13]

Finally, the car disrupted sensibilities, establishing a new and delectable pleasure. The automobile in this new century held the promise of a new freedom for colonists and rich Western visitors in Indochina: freedom of movement, freedom from time and finally freedom of expression, for a population trying to overcome its geographical limitations. The car integrates colonial life in a process that is both symbolic and technical.

The introduction of the automobile in Indochina at the turn of the last century was very far from being a linear process by which vehicles straight out of the manufacturers' workshops would roll down the roads of France and effortlessly flood a colonial market predisposed to welcome them. As a technical object still entirely new and a means of transportation with new requirements, the car would fit into the heart of a transportation system adapted to the environment at the cost of many experiments, hesitations, and negotiations.

Depending on the demands of the terrain, it became necessary to develop and adjust the technological object itself, a complex system consisting of an engine, a frame adapted to the power of the engine, steering, braking, lighting mechanisms, etc. The technical possibilities seemed endless. The many companies emerging on the French national market to produce personal cars proliferated their proposals in the hopes that they would differentiate themselves from the others.[14] While the sales prospects of passenger vehicles for colonists in Indochina were negligible, the transportation of materials or people, especially public transportation of the native population, presented the opportunity to capitalize on a promising emerging market.

Indochina: A Testing-Ground for the Automobile

At the end of the nineteenth century, improvements in gas-engine and steam traction technology created new transit opportunities on roads.[15] In March 1896, inspired by the British use of road trains in Central Asia

and in South Africa[16] and by the promising results of their military operations in France, Gabriel Cécillon, Emile and Raoul Genin Vitrou, three traders from Lyon, requested the exclusive permission to operate the Scotte steam omnibus on the roads of Indochina, particularly in Tonkin, for the transportation of goods and native passengers.[17] Between 1892 and 1896, the mountainous region of Tonkin had been "pacified" by building a network of roads and paths, each "military territory" methodically "raked" by the slow progress of a line of temporary outposts, according to the tactics of the "oil stain" defined by Pennequin, a road construction company.[18] The roads thus seemed open to such an operation (Fig. 3.1).

Fig. 1. — Le train Scotte à son arrivée à Vendôme à la caserne de Rochambeau.

Fig. 3.1 Scotte road train arriving in Vendôme at the Rochambeau barracks (*La Nature: revue des sciences et de leurs applications aux arts et à l'industrie* [Paris: Masson, 1901] 52. Courtesy of the Cnum—Conservatoire numérique des Arts et Métiers—http://cnum.cnam.fr)

While the Director of the Public Works Department in Tonkin studied their proposals, in 1897 and 1898, regular Scotte train services were being tested on a large scale in several French *départements*: Seine, Seine-et-Marne, Seine-et-Oise, Calvados, Côte-d'Or, Drôme, and Meuse.[19] Interest for this type of material—despite its apparent incompatibility with the intended terrain—was not entirely unfounded for Tonkin, as the costs of its construction would be less expensive than those of building railway lines in this rugged region. However, only well-supported roadways such as the cobbled streets of Hanoi and Haiphong could sustain the weight of the nearly three-ton-per-axle loads of the Scotte road trains, which would be equally unable to cross rivers on the already extant ferries and bridges. In addition to these technical limitations, the expenses required for maintenance would far exceed any expected benefits, especially for the Natives. In his report, the Resident Superior rejects the proposal but remarks that "the prospect of automobile traffic on our roads seems attractive,"[20] if it could facilitate European mobility. The solutions for transportation in Indochina could not therefore be a simple matter of transposing French motoring experiences to the colonies.

Eventually, Indochina would present an extremely lucrative and mutually beneficial opportunity to both technical developers of the automobile and colonial administrators. Colonial journalists and adventurers joined French journalists to disseminate the images of the automobile dream in France. Their styles of writing, not atypical of the *Belle Époque*, reflected their styles of driving, both of which influenced the establishment of new social codes and forms. Driven by a complex process of innovation, between 1895 and 1914, the automobile diversified its forms of exposure and its trading venues. On the one hand, through a worldly and local use, this object of ostentation served as much to transport as to display luxury and social ease in the colony. On the other hand, individual adventurers competed with each other in performing innovative feats of glory. The press reported, celebrated, and commemorated each performance, and the staging of these successes (or failures) continued with the metropolitan publication of these stories that would help support new colonial endeavors.

3.2 Technical and Symbolic Transportation: From Saigon to Angkor, the Duke of Montpensier's 1908 Expedition

The history of car-pioneering in Indochina starts with a real-life fairy tale: Once upon a time there was a French Prince. Forbidden to take up arms to defend France, he rode a "thoroughbred car" from the capital of French colonial Indochina to the ruins of the seat of the Khmer kingdom. This is the story of Ferdinand d'Orléans, Duke of Montpensier, who drove from Saigon to Angkor and back from February 28 to May 1, 1908. Excluded from the army by an 1886 Republican law,[21] yet allowed to reside in French territories, his Highness and "*Prince français*" received the Gold Medal of Bordeaux's Geographical Society[22] in 1912 and the Legion of Honor[23] in 1923 for his expeditions in the French empire, and particularly in Indochina. While his father, the Count of Paris and a pretender to the throne, had seriously threatened the stability of the Republic with a potential return of the monarchy,[24] Ferdinand d'Orléans was rewarded for his efforts to popularize "Greater France." Based on his 1908 journey, he authored a travelogue[25] whose title evoked both politics and fantasy: *La Ville au Bois Dormant, de Saigon à Ang-Kor en automobile* (1910). Indeed, the Duke of Montpensier's title is a play on *La Belle au Bois Dormant*, the French title of Charles Perrault's seventeenth-century fairy tale "Sleeping Beauty." This section focuses on Ferdinand d'Orléans's charting of the land, its people, its flora and its fauna with the new technology of the automobile, and it relies on the narrative tools that shaped and disseminated the fairy tale: two of the Duke of Montpensier's travelogues, *La Ville au Bois Dormant* (1910) and *En Indo-Chine*, *Mes chasses–mes voyages*[26] (1912), and a selection of press accounts.

Driving and Writing to Bridge Territories

Like all good fairy tales, Ferdinand d'Orléans's story sets out in a faraway land, where the hero—aided by loyal companions—is equipped with a magical horse. One can trace in *La Ville au Bois Dormant* the authorship of an Indochinese landscape through the accounts of a first-person narrator and trailblazer. The Duke's discursive and driving practices dovetailed with the transformation of French colonial sensibilities in Southeast Asia (Fig. 3.2).

Fig. 3.2 Trailblazing illustration by artist Sahib showing the automobile and its French crew driving through plains set on fire by Cambodian peasants to clear the way (Ferdinand François Philippe Marie d'Orléans, Duke of Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant: de Saïgon à Ang-Kor en automobile* [Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1910], 147. *Source* Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

Ferdinand d'Orléans is a wealthy amateur motorist, endowed with a "stubborn will and indomitable energy at the service of a robust health and a golden belt"[27] and accompanied by the Count of Bernis. Such consumer-innovators participated in the development and stabilization of the technical system of the automobile. Putting his French fortune in the service of the colony, Ferdinand d'Orléans became a role model for an international economic elite,[28] and his achievement and narrative brought a degree of visibility to a colony still ignored by most of the French. In metropolitan France, heroic accounts of trips abroad published by the *Automobile Club de France* and the Touring Club's cheerful chronicles of long trips to the countryside tailored to bourgeois tastes promoted the recreational use of the automobile. As a member of these clubs, Ferdinand d'Orléans borrowed from their familiar forms of writing, values, and models.

The test of the road to Angkor was above all a technical one. In the years immediately following the introduction of the automobile in Indochina, drivers made significant contributions to the vehicle's development. In Ferdinand d'Orléans's narrative, the technical object is highlighted in parallel with the rediscovery of Angkor. From the beginning and even before arriving in Saigon, Ferdinand d'Orléans's concerns are primarily technical. On the boat to Saigon, "the motorist in [him] replaces the lover of exotic nature; at each turn of the propeller, [his] anguish grows and exacerbates […] What about the car!?!?…"[29] The car is presented as the primary object and the key to the progression of the narrative, far more than the landscape itself. Indeed, the first illustration shows us the vehicle out of context (Fig. 3.3).

Absolutely essential to the adventure, the great surprise and the charm of this trip, the car becomes the hero of the story. Indeed, the journey from Saigon to Angkor is not the source of the novelty, as Ferdinand d'Orléans is not the first Frenchman to go there. What then is the purpose of the expedition? For him, the automotive adventure in Indochina is not a mere leisure activity but a colonial adventure defined by a narrator who does not dream of performing feats that would rank him among "the hardy pioneers of civilization,"[30] on par "with Livingstone and Stanley, Francis Garnier, or Savorgnan de Brazza,"[31] (all colonial forerunners).

Indeed, routes between Saigon and Angkor already existed: many travelers went by waterways, local means of transport, and on foot. The interest of the automotive adventure of Ferdinand d'Orléans

Fig. 3.3 Chapter one: Arrival in Saïgon (Ferdinand François Philippe Marie d'Orléans, Duke of Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant: de Saïgon à Ang-Kor en automobile* [Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1910], 1. *Source* Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

lies therefore in its contrast with other technological feats, such as the 1908 Car Race around the World launched by the *New York Times* and *Le Matin* with its "bold riders, who only drink the obstacle and devour space."[32] Rather, the Duke of Montpensier's was a journey during which one would eat and drink in a distinctly bourgeois French manner, and a modest competition, if not a pleasure trip, not devoid of national character. The Frenchman wanted "just to see what one can do with a good mechanic and a good machine on their own, on roads deemed impracticable," thereby reminiscent of the Touring Club's educational goals,[33] translated for the tropics.

His motorized adventure was about the familiar and the domestic as much as it was about the different and the foreign; it was about "domesticating the empire,"[34] as Ferdinand d'Orléans engaged in the task of rearranging and reordering the exotic through analogies and similarities, claiming, for example, that the automobile was "climbing up the stairs"[35] of Angkor Wat (185), through a mountaineering metaphor.

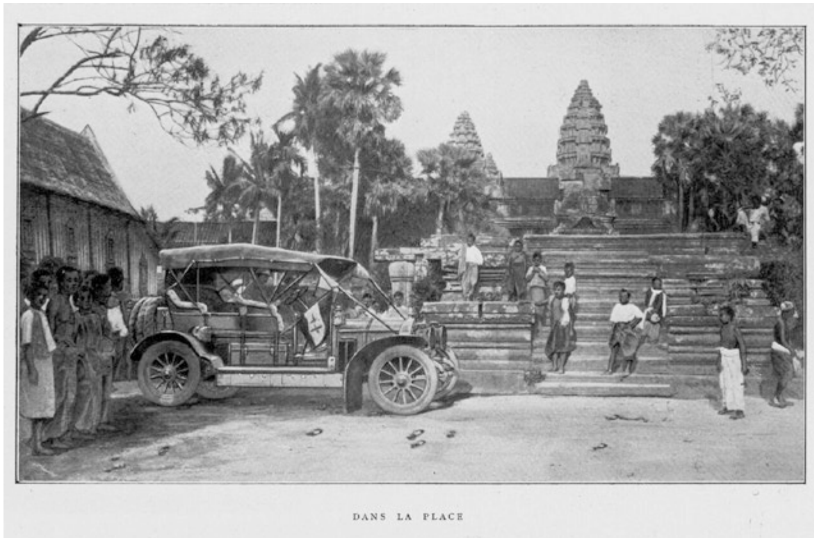
Driving and Writing to Bridge Histories

Moreover, the road Ferdinand d'Orléans chooses to travel is not deserted. Through accidents and engine failures, the automotive pioneer and his crew learn to rely on and collaborate with local populations, as well as temper their own frustrations. To the reader, his travel narrative becomes a lesson in race relations: "Luckily, a great number of natives escort us and seem to sympathize with our suffering. I parleyed with these good people: their dedication became ours by simply paying their asking price!"[36]

Bridging this cultural gap implies a narrative and authorial process that, on the one hand, renders the unfamiliar Cambodian landscape and people familiar to the French reader, and, on the other hand, reduces the strangeness of the new technology to the indigenous populations. In the narrative, transcriptions of negotiations with Natives abound. The Duke of Montpensier and his team of adventurers engage with colonial and local administrators, as well as with indigenous peasants and even prisoners, whose initial incredulity is quickly replaced by a benevolent admiration for the Western machine. A good French motorist in the colony has to be both a skilled driver and mechanic and an astute cultural agent.

Echoing the words spoken by the Frenchman, the book's photographs convey the end result to the reader. This other new technology used by travelers brought a performative dimension to the travel narrative. Here, captions are both narration and enactment: "*Ca y est!*" (Here we are!) or "*Dans la place*" (In the place). The picture proves it (Fig. 3.4).

Photography moreover completes the penetration of the monument by the machine. The silhouette standing in the gate of Angkor Wat—or rather, the gap of Angkor Wat—marks how the French led the first car to Angkor, taking the virginity of the place where "no one else will ever enter farther," (187) as Ferdinand d'Orléans claims (Fig. 3.5).



DANS LA PLACE

Fig. 3.4 In the place (Ferdinand François Philippe Marie d'Orléans, Duke of Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant: de Saïgon à Ang-Kor en automobile* [Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1910], 189. *Source* Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

The penetration of Angkor Wat marks the culmination of the journey and the climax of the narrative. The desire for conquest is sexualized and renewed through technology. Indeed, this penetration of the "ancient" place by the machine and the modern West is notably reproduced on the book cover (Fig. 3.6).

Photography and reproduction maintain the tension between a conquest of Eden and its preservation, a gap never to be fully filled. Combining writing and technological change, the expedition literally materialized the connection to the Western territories of Cambodia just months after their official "handover" in 1907, as a result of a Franco-Siamese agreement. Through automotive pioneering, Ferdinand d'Orléans, Duke of Montpensier, son of the Count of Paris, reclaimed what French journalists called "Cambodia's Alsace-Lorraine,"[37] and his narrative offered a Republican and nationalist reading of the colonial enterprise. The "sleeping beauty" of the title has found her Republican, colonial, motorist Prince Charming.

AUX RUINES D'ANG-KOR 187

Et que leur importe tout cela... qui n'est pas éternel?
Nous traversons l'enceinte. Pour arriver au pied du

LA PORTE D'ANG-KOR-VAT

grand temple il faut encore que la voiture gravisse, par ses propres moyens, un escalier de cinq marches et cela ne va pas sans m'inquiéter un peu. Pauvre auto! si

Fig. 3.5 The gate of Angkor Wat (Ferdinand François Philippe Marie d'Orléans, Duke of Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant: de Saïgon à Ang-Kor en automobile* [Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1910], 187. *Source* Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

Fig. 3.6 Book cover (Ferdinand François Philippe Marie d'Orléans, Duke of Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant: de Saïgon à Ang-Kor en automobile* [Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1910]. *Source* Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

Later, the vice-president of the Geographical Society of Bordeaux would praise Ferdinand d'Orléans's choice of Indochina as a "breeding ground, where all Frenchmen, thank God, can meet, unite and commune together, regardless of their origins, their social status, their ideas, their aspirations and their tendencies. On this ground on which all Frenchmen can march under the folds of the same flag, all can rally around the same spirit."[38] Indeed, as he closes his own narrative, Ferdinand d'Orléans honors the car manufacturer Lorraine-Dietrich, based in Lunéville, which had remained within France after its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the partial cession of Lorraine in the 1871 Treaty of Frankfurt. Moreover, this later, published account of Ferdinand d'Orléans automobile journey, "The Prowess of the Automobile," is sealed with the Cross of Lorraine, reminding the reader of this territorial loss—a gaping wound. Charged with nationalism and sexual desire, colonial automobility thus compensates for prior losses which undermined and defined French identity at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Driving and Writing to Bridge Ecologies

Ferdinand d'Orléans's car expedition charted a web of significations that spanned not only over histories and geographies but over ecologies as well. The journey back from Angkor to Saigon relies on an animal-machine hybrid that Ferdinand d'Orléans nicknames the "auto-buffalo."[39] Given the start of the rainy season, the roads become impassable and soon enough the adventurers, often running out of gas for lack of supply points, seek out water buffaloes. For most of the leg back, Ferdinand d'Orléans has to negotiate them out of their traditional function of plowing rice fields.

Such rational restraint expected of the motoring pioneers is reinforced in the hunting activities that complement each stop. On this trip and others, the gentlemanly motorist and hunter[40] kills rabbits and deer,[41] to feed his crew of Frenchmen and indigenous villagers, and he also collects a variety of exotic animals, from tigers to elephants,[42] shot for sportsmanship and slayed to protect villages. Designated by both their local titles (e.g., the Vietnamese *ong cop*: Sir Tiger) and their scientific names, Ferdinand d'Orléans sends them to the Rowland Ward taxidermy firm in Piccadilly to be stuffed and preserved in specially ordered dioramas of colonial landscapes featuring the ferocious beasts.

Detailing his driving techniques, the steps of the hunt, the skinning process and taxidermy preparation, Ferdinand d'Orléans frames motoring and hunting as sports at the junction of science and nature. Later, by displaying the heads and hides of unfamiliar animals from distant locales in the heart of his Randan castle and touring with them in France from Paris to Bordeaux and Marseille, he demonstrated the domesticating impulse of empire. Ferdinand d'Orléans also did this by making maps, driving across local territories, narrating careful descriptions and inventories of natural history, and using picturesque and fairy tale tropes to describe landscapes, people, and animals, thus aligning the features of a faraway world with established notions of both effort and pleasure and bringing the remote in concordance with the familiar.

For the French, colonial transportation and activities were designed to facilitate mobility and penetration while keeping disagreeable things and people away. Driving, hunting, and writing did just that. They allowed for freedom and individuality, and they contracted the space in Indochina, making it wholly accessible to the senses, while distancing the unpleasant, leaving a gap between them and the indigenous environment never to be fully closed.

Epilogue

In later years, the Duke of Montpensier became a rubber planter. Back in metropolitan France in 1912, he would travel on a ship he named *Le Mékong* to disseminate images of his Southeast Asian road trips. His publications, lectures, photographs, and collections cultivated the French imagination about faraway places that had only recently been made accessible by car, allowing for another, imaginary French invasion of the *Mékong*.[43] The automobile helped to bridge distant geographies, histories, and ecologies as the motorist and hunter "French Prince" was lauded for reclaiming "Cambodia's Alsace-Lorraine," spreading the "sacred love of the fatherland,"[44] and becoming a colonist himself.

In these ways, automotive pioneers populated imperial space with the stuff of fairy tales: people and animals that were strange, yet welcoming; valuable, yet in distress; awaiting the French and their technology to rescue and preserve them. Driving in Indochina meant moving bodies—human, animal, and mechanic—from one point to another, setting histories, geographies, and ecologies in motion back and forth between Empire and Metropolis. Today, the exotic beasts that Ferdinand

d'Orléans shot and collected in Indochina are displayed in his Castle of Randan, resurrected for a new audience through guided tours that recount the fairy tale of Angkor's Prince Charming, French motorist, and hunter to French heritage tourists.

Self-aware and self-promoting motoring started as early as 1908 in Indochina, when Ferdinand d'Orléans drove from Saigon to Angkor. His journey and his accounts of it became not only a technological action of movement through space, but also a public performance and political event that provided material to the local press and gave visibility to the products of the emerging automotive industry. Ferdinand d'Orléans not only tested the practicability of routes but he also offered models of technical, social, and colonial behavior. In all these areas, he signaled the direction to take.

3.3 Physical and Moral Transport: Pioneering Passengers

The development of automobility in Indochina was fueled not only by the love of technology and the taste for adventure exhibited by pioneering drivers such as the Duke of Montpensier. Being transported, or the experience of the pioneering passenger, also pointed to new opportunities for automobility. As technical choices stabilized, prices fell, and cars simply became more commonplace, safer, and more available in Indochina, another use for them began to emerge: the sightseeing tour.

Bicycles and Automobiles: Native and European Means of Transport

Just as the bicycle did in France, the automobile appealed to the colonial population, as it permitted individuals to choose their routes and stop at will without relying on railway timetables. But, of course, the automobile required less physical effort than the bicycle and, above all, it seemed safer and cleaner, allowing people to move inside it and keep their distance from an unfamiliar or even hostile environment. Meanwhile, cycling became the modern individual means of transportation for the Native in the 1920s, according to colonial administrators and experts from Western automakers in Indochina.[45] This mode of personal mobility remained much favored by the native population living in major

urban centers throughout the 1930s.[46] The bicycle was also the official vehicle of indigenous employees of the colonial administration. The sign painter, for example, who charted the official routes of cars and trains, traveled by bicycle. In the metropolitan imagination as well, advertisements encouraged the spread of this idea, employed in this case for the benefit of the bicycle market in France (Fig. 3.7).

In the early days of adventurous journeys on foot or by local means of locomotion, individual pioneers would return again and again covered with dust, broken by fatigue and filled with pride. The automobile, on the other hand, corresponded to an entirely different mindset. It offered the opportunity to travel in a group, carrying in one's luggage the clothing and accessories that would help maintain a bourgeois appearance and the Gallic victuals that would sustain and invigorate French bodies and minds throughout the colony. When car use spread among Europeans in the 1920s, it was in part for a peculiar colonial practice: the picnic. The automobile[47] isolated European passengers from their tropical environment and transported them to a Western bourgeois retreat.

The number of automobiles in Indochina at the beginning of the century remained low, however. For example, there were about 300 cars in Saigon in 1914, but in proportion to the number of European residents, there was greater access to automobiles than in metropolitan France. Yet this was no guarantee of greater mobility in the colony. Along with the first automobile facilities in Indochina, pioneer journalists developed a new colonial and daily use of the automobile, in its technical and legal dimensions, until the late 1910s. In so doing, they offered a specific social model capable of framing technical choices, practices of the body, social values, and cultural representations of the mobility of a French population in the tropics.

Excursions or cruises[48] provided an opportunity to highlight the elements that made the car the vehicle best suited to the conditions of colonial travel. Through new advertising channels, local garage owners teamed up with journalists and loaned them vehicles in exchange for their published travel stories. Although not abundant, these travel narratives were read avidly by French colonists. It was less the destination or journey than the simple fact of being in sync with the writing of French Indochina's fate that made these stories interesting to their readers. These trips were as much about tourism as they were about event planning. By reading the stories, one could cover immense geographical distances and overcome social isolation, while also being able to take part in

Fig. 3.7 Advertisement for bicycles sold in France (*La Dépêche coloniale illustrée*, March–April 1920. Courtesy of Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer. FR ANOM BIB AOM/31028/1920)

the political debates on the means and ends of colonization. These trips and accounts also continued the narrative tradition used to report and chronicle the events of colonial life, such as the official visits of Colonial Governors.

The Automobile: A Vehicle for Government, Journalism, and Business

One of the most symbolic events in the establishment of the colony was the *Conseil du Gouvernement* of 1913, organized around the *Têt* celebration[49] in Hue. Six cars had to make the trip from Hanoi to Hue, three of which belonged to the official convoy, while the other three came from Peugeot. The event thus took on a political as well as a cultural dimension, linking the colony to the Vietnamese calendar and imperial capital. In addition, Governor General Albert Sarraut seized the opportunity to make a speech that would bind road development and tourism in Indochina for the first time in an official manner. He recalled the prior efforts of the Touring Club of France that had been relayed by an office of colonial tourism and affirmed his intention to introduce "large-scale international tourism" to Indochina.[50] Indeed, holding the *Conseil du Gouvernement* in Hue was a performative act in substance and form, promoting and defending the legitimacy of tourism and motoring.

The journey itself became a communication tool when *Courrier de Haiphong*'s reporter Jean-Baptiste Saumont made it the focus of a motor travelogue in 1913 (Fig. 3.8).

In this defense and illustration of automobile tourism in Indochina, Saumont uses a Peugeot loaned by the dealer Boillot in Hanoi so that he can follow "on the roads of Annam from Hanoi to Hue in an automobile, the Tet celebrations and the Council of Government in the Annamese capital."[51] As an epigraph, Saumont places his portrait next to that of Boillot, in a chauffeur's cap, above a photograph of the eponymous establishment. The journalist thus frames the narrative. The social and political event becomes a celebration of the automobile excursion. As early as the foreword of his landmark book, Saumont pays tribute to his sponsor for both the car loan and his pioneering action on the road, calling him a "sportsman," using the English term in the original text:

> It's our friend Boillot, Director in Hanoi of the great Maison Peugeot frères who, the first, two years ago, opened this road from Hanoi to Hue to motoring, then very primitive and almost impracticable, today in

Fig. 3.8 Cover from Jean-Baptiste Saumont's *Sur les routes d'Annam* (Jean-Baptiste Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam. De Hanoi à Hué en automobile. Les fêtes du Têt et du Conseil de Gouvernement dans la Capitale annamite* [Hanoi: Imprimerie Tonkinoise Bach Thái Buoi & Cie, 1913]. *Source* Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

> sufficiently good state, in good weather, to tempt the Governor General, Mrs. Sarraut, and numerous Members of the Council of Government. And to the helpfulness of the same ardent sportsman, I myself owe the ability to make in turn a very pleasant journey in one of his elegant cars.[52]

The sporting craze in France at the turn of the century extends to the colonies. On the one hand, sport—in particular outdoor recreation—was valued as a patriotic response to the perceived physical shortcomings of young Frenchmen after the defeat of 1870–1871.[53] On the other hand, sport would expand the range of pleasures and leisurely activities available to the new bourgeois classes with expensive pastimes associated with the pleasures of high society, following an aristocratic model. The repetition of the English term "sportsman" highlights the exchange of favors between the businessman and the journalist, an exchange that itself demonstrates the rules of fair play. This gesture recognizes the company of sportsmen and in turn extends it to the reader who can join this illustrious group.

Relating his one-man journey down to the minutest detail, Saumont offers models of acceptable behavior to the reader, drawing and defining the limits of a new mass leisure in Indochina and surpassing the technical and heroic narrative outlined by the Duke of Montpensier. Saumont explains what he has experienced and what he recommends doing. He not only describes the trips, ferry boats, and bridges used, reasonable routes and connections with trains—all relevant information for the tourist on a newly accessible journey—but he also uses the opportunity to focus on descriptions of the landscape rather than on the mechanics of the car or the opening of the road. In short, Saumont provides the reader with an aesthetic reading grid while pursuing a dialectics of experience and representation. Neither entirely a technical expedition nor a personal memory, the story becomes an automotive chronicle or *reportage*, as the author is well aware of his participation in developing the conventions of a new genre. The journalist thus specifies the style of his narrative in a foreword. This will not be an extraordinary story because, to complete this journey, Saumont simply "took advantage of the long holiday of Têt."[54] He is on holiday and thus can rid himself of the expectation of professional writing, taking a break from work. His intention is to present his recollection and his "personal impressions … noted daily"[55] in such a way as to be valuable and useful to all motor tourists. He does not claim competence in any discipline, nor does he want

to offend the geographer, archaeologist, historian, engineer or geologist. Better yet, he will not even "deprive of novel satisfactions the simply curious who pass by noting the customs and manners of the natives."[56] Indeed, his goal is to stimulate the interest of "those who will follow him in his outing,"[57] to awaken and nurture their desire. He shuns literary artifice, the "boring genre," following the advice of author Jean Ajalbert and also rejects the arid monograph, the "study."[58] Simplicity must preside over the narrative, which must describe the experience as faithfully as possible, as its value is derived less from the style of its recounting than from its bare and simple reality as a lived experience.

The car trip allows him not only to go on the road but also to share in the lives of colonial policymakers. Indeed, "during these eight days" Saumont can follow "our great local men in their evolution." The practice of the automotive trip thus abolishes social distance, bringing the motoring passenger closer to the colonial residents and advisers, if only for a limited time. The ease with which the car operates must be reflected in the retelling of the story, such that one should "read without too much fatigue, as it is written, and that one should take a liking to such picturesque scenes, to such amusing details seized on the fly."[59] The text is meant to be funny and lively, and to express a certain *joie de vivre* and even a mocking spirit on seeing the "sumptuous Republicans lords" dragged down to this "existence in the bush that they usually understand so little for having looked at it from too high or too far."[60] Indeed, on the road and in the car, colonial decision makers and car passengers are on equal footing as far as accidents and breakdowns are concerned. Thus, the first moral value illustrated and defended by the motorist is sincerity:

> Sincerity in the reporting of external objects, as in the account of small road incidents; sincerity of accurately translated impressions, of information obtained in haste from Europeans or Natives; sincerity, in a word, of the substance and of the form, the latter borrowing from the wonderful ways of our beautiful language only the strictly necessary to differentiate us from a Joanne guide or a circular of the Touring Club.[61]

The heroic times of Ferdinand d'Orléans are gone; those who travel by car are not fantastical adventurers but ordinary people with their own unique strengths and weaknesses. Saumont's road trip is initially delayed, not because of mechanical problems, as was the case for the Duke, but

simply because the "weakness" of Saumont "is never to rush, to push everything back to the last minute and, consequently, to botch the preparations when the time has come."[62] Behaving like a vacationer and savoring his leisure time a little too much, the writer misses his friend Boillot's departure. A proponent of more ordinary travel, he does part of the journey by train. He invites himself and the reader into the official event to share in *l'imaginaire* of the elite—the images, representations, and myths of the wealthy and powerful—as well as the actual functioning of the colony, thus ensuring in his audience a certain unity of perspective. Taking the train from Hanoi to Vinh is presented as a reasonable decision, giving Saumont the opportunity to illustrate the intermodality linking train and automobile, on the one hand, and, on the other, to compare the two means of transport between Tonkin and Annam.

Riding and Writing to Become an Automobile Passenger

To travel by train is "to remain captive until the evening in [a] mobile prison."[63] The train passenger, trapped in a space and a time that do not belong to him, does not choose his stops or schedules. Train travel also implies that one will remain in the company of one's peers, in cars that one has to book in advance. Thus, on his outbound and return trips, Saumont chats with an old colonist, an assistant engineer from Tonkin, and a retired Annam Resident, who "instruct" him on the construction of roads and the country's history. Finally, the train is also the mode of transport that comes to the rescue of motorists when the rain makes it impossible to drive on roads, as is the case with Secretary General Van Vollenhoven, Resident Superior Destenay, Chief of Staff of the Director of Finance Détieux and the young government attachés Monier and Przyluski, all of whom board at Than-Hoa station. Therefore, while the train reinforces the isolation of Europeans from each other in the colonies, underscoring their usual separation, it also serves as a site of social exchange within the community, and the journalist can report the latest gossip from this circle. Unfortunately, the rain that causes the motorists to board the train also changes the view of the landscape:

> The skyline, narrowed under the flattened lid of a cloudy sky, spreads its dull gloom on scenes of a new genre: finite, the incommensurable sequences of small rectangles lined with slopes, in varying shades from black earth to silver liquid sheets, and all the greens of budding rice whose

> shadows show the age and thickness of the plants; in the plain, our eyes were so used to the uniform vision of the vast checkerboard, constantly renewed and yet always familiar, that the appearance of the hills seems to me something very new, almost Western.[64]

Seen from the train, the scenery becomes Westernized. One no longer sees the specificity of the Vietnamese countryside. What's more, rail travel modifies the relation to the body because "members become stiff in these compartments when one remains there for a whole day."[65] The body is stationary and falls asleep, as does the vision of the passenger.

In contrast, the automobile introduces a novel relation between the traveler and his body and between body and landscape. In a car, traveling on an open road in a straight line under a gray sky during the cold season of Têt:

> It feels good to snuggle up at the back of the car, a scarf on the neck, a big coat on my lap; because the cold bites, all the more acutely as speed increases; I begin to congratulate myself for having finally chosen, under the open hood, the position that allows me to cheat the damp bitterness of the weather.[66]

Here the passenger can renew the pleasure of dressing, thereby controlling his physical well-being, mastering the thermostat of his discovery. Moreover, one learns to look at the scenery from the car, or rather, to feel it with the road in a new awakening of the senses. One distinguishes the flat from the unleveled road and, even if there is no more physical effort required, one learns how to manage the ascent and descent of steep inclines. The author teaches us to read the bumps and shocks of the road in relation to the environment. In the car, one feels the three dimensions of the territory that are distance, time, and terrain, thus culminating with the approach to Annam:

> I count the kilometers, just to see the change from the twenty-fourth; it is sudden, not in regards to the landscape–it is always the flat and monotonous Annamese countryside–but regarding the road, I would not have believed–had I not had with me people in the trade–that an automobile could venture on dikes such as this old Mandarin road; and again here in the province of Ha-Tinh, we find, if not macadam, leveled roads roughly maintained; the challenges will grow significantly when, around kilometer 70, before the gate of Annam, we enter the province of Donghoi.[67]

The road renders the boundaries between provinces perceptible to the body. In a similar manner, with the climb and descent through the gate of Annam, the silhouette of a colonist's European home lends a new color to that familiar place, liberated now from the monotony imposed by memory and habit. The passenger of the automobile appreciates all the more the road and its changes as they remind him of the French shore: "pleasantly surprised to see at his feet, the waters of the ocean… which in this rainy weather, do not have exactly the azure color of the waters of the Mediterranean; otherwise, one would almost think of the Esterel overlooking the Gulf of Napoule."[68]

One learns to pay attention to one's body and automotive capabilities but also to the other bodies in the car. In the repetition of zigzags, climbs, and descents characteristic of the road, and despite the attractiveness of the shore, Saumont also outlines the risk and fear of the voyage, and he dialectically emphasizes the talent of "people in the trade":

> It takes a rare presence of mind to hold the steering wheel; and I do justice to my driver that he not too shabbily accomplished his task, and he even moderated, by the confidence of his steering, the instinctive fear, the emotion one feels skirting the abyss, plunging in these chasms.[69]

On this journey, the reporter is the passenger of a series of unnamed Vietnamese drivers. Meanwhile, Boillot is not his own driver either. He uses the trip to train and test drivers whom he will deliver with the cars that he sells. Thus, when his fleet sets out on the road from Vinh to Hue, the Peugeot dealer remains in the second car "to monitor the native driver because he does not know him well enough, having only recently hired him, and the journey will be long enough and painful enough for him to monitor, from the beginning, his professional skills."[70] Most drivers were actually trained on the job, even after vocational schools of mechanics were established in Hanoi and Saigon.

The Peugeot cars arrive safely at their destination, while the three official government cars end up being driven into a river, as the drivers fail to see the bank in time at the crossing of the first ferry. The accident is due to the road layout and the effect of speed:

> We notice that the road curves sharply to the right, just about thirty meters from the river, so that one cannot see anything. Arriving thus at the obstacle at a speed of 50 [kilometers] per hour, one is inevitably caused to

> tumble. Another observation: if, unfortunately, the ferry had been in place, instead of going down on the bank on a gentle slope, cars at this pace would have overturned against the bump and would have crashed against each other in the stream, crushing and drowning their passengers.[71]

Traveling by car in the less heroic capacity of a passenger does not exempt one from heeding practical wisdom. Anecdotes like these, which provide useful insights into the state of the road, are typical of the stories published by the Touring Club in the *métropole*. Here, in the context of an official visit in the colony, they constitute a commentary on the way a transportation network is designed and maintained and thus on colonial policy and development. Reflecting on the voyage itself, Saumont laments the state of the roads and the frequency of ferries, which point as much to weather conditions as to local political decisions. Passengering and writing become ways to question public expenditures. Reporting these shortcomings effectively calls into question the managerial practices of colonial authorities, on the one hand, and highlights and valorizes the interests of road users on the other.

It is ultimately Boillot's Peugeot cars that will save the convoy and transport the officials to Hue. Chief of Staff Délieux begs Saumont not to write about the incident—especially as newspapers do not come out during the Têt holiday—but the reporter delights in the exclusive scoop, indulging in the pleasure of retelling the official's request in direct discourse. Having shared his car with the survivors of the accident, the journalist can take advantage of the resulting intimacy he now shares with these colonial policymakers and produce more interesting and exclusive stories. The officials of the convoy are often ridiculed, not only for their incompetence, related to an excess of zeal, but simply because they "do not know how to travel."[72] Indeed, they rush: They do not listen to their hunger or to their bodies in general, and they let themselves be taken over by the speed of the car. They are carried away by the excesses of the machine instead of enjoying the freedom it creates. For Saumont, one must be careful not to let the pace of the automobile outweigh the biological rhythm of the traveler, driven by hunger:

> His car set out again, exhilarated, a little too chirpy, or at least obeying too docilely the haste of the travelers, because they will make me wait until three or four o'clock before stopping to eat. This fresh air really gives you an appetite! One has no idea of such a fantasy![73]

The outdoors will whet one's appetite, according to the Touring Club. The automobile gives one a breath of fresh air—a blessing in the tropics—but also makes one hungry. Moreover, with the traffic conditions in Indochina, the road also wears out car drivers, and one has to take this fatigue into account:

> [The government officials] forced their driver into overwork, sitting him in front of the steering wheel since four in the morning and who, parenthetically, has shown great endurance; but he would have perhaps lasted longer like mine if one had taken in advance the elementary precaution of letting him rest and recover normally.[74]

Automotive tourism in Indochina is not only a matter of technique, but it also requires managing the fatigue of one's driver, knowing when to let him rest and recover to ensure better performance. Yet some will inevitably use the technology to cut corners. After the accident, the car that carried the "stubborn" Secretary General Van Vollenhoven completed the rest of the trip in one day. Returning from Hue, Saumont takes his time, not putting any pride in the fight for speed:

> Triumphant entrance in Vinh; arrival at Hotel Roulet, where Mr. Boillot pleasantly mocks our speed as being comparable to that of turtles. It is about four o'clock; why would we hurry, since, moreover, we had all the time in the world before us?[75]

An account of fashionable events of colonial life, Saumont's story teaches us that what is most important in the excursion is not necessarily the environment—human or geographical—of the tourist, but rather the tourist himself, the pleasures of the road, of writing, and of social life. The colonial automotive tourist has wisdom and responsibilities. The journey is for him a cultural and social experience, together with an experience of the body, of learning to live in a colonial situation, as well as a confrontation with speed and risk. Thus, thanks to (greater) tourism, one Frenchman may become part of high society in "Greater France."

During the years of technical experimentation and hesitation about the shape of the vehicle, the motorist in Indochina learns that to drive (*conduire*) is also to conduct oneself (*se conduire*) and to behave (*bien se conduire*). In the car, he feels the three dimensions of the region that are distance, time, and terrain. The automobile becomes an extension of

the French body, a prosthesis that, unlike the train, allows him to feel the gaps that shape the earth. Ideally, colonial transportation should facilitate mobility and keep away the unpleasant things, animals, and people. For many French, the automobile did exactly that. It allowed for freedom and individuality. It shrank the space in Indochina, making it accessible to the senses while keeping away the disagreeable, leaving a gap with the native land and people never to be completely filled. But how does one learn to drive a car? In 1909, the Superior Resident of Tonkin explained to the Mayor of Hanoi that "the alleys of the Botanical Garden serve as training and maneuvering fields for automobile drivers. These poorly- or too quickly-driven vehicles are safety hazards for strollers, not to mention the extensive damage they are doing to the roads already well worn by a most intense traffic."[76] The problems of the student-driver do not come from mechanics as much as from the state of the road and the automobile's coexistence with other road users. Thus the aisles of the Botanical Garden will finally be opened to the automobile only from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m.[77] In Indochina, the French motorist, driver or passenger, who has learned to deal with nature, the elements, and his own body, must also learn to conduct himself in relation to other road users, including other tourists, the Vietnamese driver, and the native pedestrian.

Notes

1. In the colonial administration, Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, Cambodia, and Laos were each governed by a *Résident Supérieur*. A *Résident de France* was at the head of each province. A mayor would be heading each city. This colonial system was superimposed on an indigenous system run by mandarins at the province, city, or town level. For a detailed description of the administrative organization of the *Union Indochinoise*, see Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858–1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
2. "European" (*Européen*) and "Native" (*Indigène*) were official terms used by the colonial administration to refer, respectively, to Frenchmen and Westerners and to Southeast Asians (Chinese nationals belonged to another category: *Asiatique*).
3. This current chapter deals mostly with the social and cultural impacts of the introduction of the motor vehicle in Indochina, although the subtitle I chose also refers to the rubber industry. For more on the relationship between rubber plantations, which were an integral part of

the automobility system in Southeast Asia, and everyday technologies in Indochina, see Mitch Aso's work, in particular, "Profits or People? Rubber Plantations and Everyday Technology in Rural Indochina," *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2012): 19–45 and "The Scientist, the Governor, and the Planter: The Political Economy of Agricultural Knowledge in Indochina During the Creation of a 'Science of Rubber,' 1900–1940," *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* 3, no. 2 (2009): 231–56.

4. Patrick Fridenson, *Histoire des usines Renault* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 19–20.
5. Agence économique de l'Indochine, *Communiqué de la presse indochinoise*, May 1931.
6. Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer (ANOM), Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine (GGI) 7915, Letter from Chief of Cabinet of the Governor General to Chiefs of Local Administrations, May 6, 1903.
7. Diacritics will be used in accordance with the spelling found in the texts consulted.
8. Archives Nationales du Vietnam 1 (ANV1), Mairie de Hanoi (MDH) 4473, "Recensement des voitures, chevaux, chiens, automobiles, motocyclettes, bicyclettes de la ville de Hanoi en vue d'établir des statistiques," 1905.
9. The "*tour d'inspection*" was the colonial equivalent of the aristocratic practice of the "*promenade au bois*" in the parks of Paris. In the sixth issue of its official publication, the Automobile Club of Cochinchina and Cambodia published five itineraries in and around Saigon for a *tour d'inspection* by car and three more that could be done either by carriage or by car. See "Guides de l'Indochine. Saigon. Les tours d'inspection," *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois*, no. 6 (June 8, 1923): 9–10.
10. See in particular the scenes of the *tour d'inspection* in *Les Civilisés* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1905), a novel by Claude Farrère. It received the Goncourt Prize in 1905.
11. Maurice Rondet-Saint, *Choses de l'Indochine contemporaine* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1916).
12. Maurice Rondet-Saint, *Choses de l'Indochine contemporaine*, 258.
13. Maurice Rondet-Saint, *Choses de l'Indochine contemporaine*, 259.
14. It was only in the 1920s that major French car constructors started to develop marketing for specifically colonial vehicles. One could read in the pages of *Les Annales Coloniales* that "For the Colonies, Renault created the colonial 10 HP. Raised on a special chassis with a bodywork of colonial type, it has the same qualities as the production car, but it is especially built to cope with all the difficulties of the colonial road." See *Les Annales Coloniales, Numéro mensuel illustré*, June 6, 1923.

15. Indochina was also a place for testing roads and their surfacing. The heat and humidity proved particularly challenging for asphalting techniques. See, for example, Victor Forbin, "Comment la route a vaincu la jungle," *La Nature*, no. 2797 (November 15, 1928): 433–37; Albert Armand Pouyanne, *Les Travaux publics de l'Indochine* (Hanoi: Impr. d'Extrême-Orient, 1926).
16. The British used the first road trains, consisting of steam trucks, during the Crimea War in 1854. The British companies were Aveling, Porter, and John Folwer and Co. See *Transport sur Routes de gros chargements, Communication présentée par M. G. de Hevesy, Ingénieur, Délégué de l'Automobile-Club de Hongrie* (Paris: Imprimerie Générale Lahure, 1908).
17. ANV1, Résidence Supérieure du Tonkin (RST) 22848, "Demande de concession Cécillon pour l'introduction au Tonkin des automobiles Scotte," Letter, March 25, 1896.
18. Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858–1954*, trans. Ly-Lan Dill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 63.
19. *Transports sur routes de gros chargements. Communication présentée par M. G. de Hevesy, Ingénieur, Délégué de l'Automobile-Club de Hongrie* (Paris: Imprimerie Générale Lahure, 1908), 12.
20. ANV1, RST 22848, "Demande de concession Cécillon pour l'introduction au Tonkin des automobiles Scotte," Report by the Resident Superior to the Governor General, January 20, 1898.
21. The Act of June 22, 1886 concerned the members of families who reigned in France. It was a law of exile passed during the Third Republic to prevent monarchist contenders from taking over Republican institutions. It also prohibited members of these families from serving in the French Army or Navy.
22. "Lauréats de l'année 1912. Prix de la Société. Médaille d'Or: Mgr. Le Duc de Montpensier," *Revue de géographie commerciale*, Société de Géographie Commerciale de Bordeaux (February 1913), 85.
23. "Nécrologie," *Bulletin de la Société de géographie et d'études coloniales de Marseille* (Marseille: Société de géographie, 1925), 109.
24. Ferdinand d'Orléans, duke of Montpensier, was the youngest son of Prince Philippe d'Orléans, Count of Paris (Louis Philippe Albert; August 24, 1838–September 8, 1894), who himself was the grandson of Louis Philippe I, King of the French. He was Count of Paris and a claimant to the French throne from 1848 until his death in exile in England.
25. Ferdinand François Philippe Marie d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant: de Saïgon à Ang-Kor en automobile* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1910).
26. Ferdinand François Philippe Marie d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *En Indo-Chine: mes chasses - mes voyage* (Paris: Pierre Lafitte et Cie, 1912).

27. Pierre Jeantet, *Les Prouesses de l'automobile. Au Cambodge, de Saïgon aux ruines d'Angkor: par Mgr le duc de Montpensier* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Société Lorraine-Diétrich, 1908), 5.
28. See, for example, the article titled "A remarkable trip by car in Cochin China" published in the British *Automotor Journal* on October 31, 1908, 1416: "[…] not only did the journey involve cleaving a way through primeval forest, over rice fields, and across unbridged watercourses, but the rural inhabitants of the districts travelled through knew little of modern civilisation, and their attitude towards the "fire-car" was ever an unknown quantity."
29. Ferdinand François Philippe Marie d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant: de Saïgon à Ang-Kor en automobile* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1910), 2.
30. Ferdinand d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant*, 24.
31. Ferdinand d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant*, 24.
32. Ferdinand d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant*, 24.
33. See Catherine Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue et le stylo. Comment nous sommes devenus touristes* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1999).
34. See Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998).
35. Ferdinand d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant*, 185.
36. Ferdinand d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant*, 66.
37. Pierre Jeantet, *Les Prouesses de l'automobile*, 5.
38. Société de géographie commerciale de Bordeaux, Groupe géographique et ethnographique du Sud-Ouest, *Revue de géographie commerciale* (January 1913), 19.
39. Ferdinand d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant*, 71.
40. Ferdinand d'Orléans also used the English term "sportsman."
41. Ferdinand d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant*, 63 and 67.
42. Ferdinand François Philippe Marie d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *En Indo-Chine: mes chasses - mes voyages* (Paris: Pierre Lafitte et Cie, 1912).
43. See Ferdinand d'Orléans, Speech to Bordeaux's Geographical Society, November 26, 1912.
44. Pierre Jeantet, *Les Prouesses de l'automobile*, 6.
45. ANV1, RST 040958, "Demande de renseignements de la Fédération des Chambres syndicales des Agents d'Automobiles de France et des Colonies sur le marché des cycles au Tonkin." In a "letter of the President of the Chamber of Commerce in Hanoi in response to the request for information by the Federation of the *Chambres syndicales* of Automobile Agents in France and in the Colonies on the bicycle market in Tonkin,"

dated May 21, 1926, a colonial administrator wrote: "This item is in great fashion among the native population. We count approximately 6,000 bicycles in Hanoi, a city of 110,000 inhabitants. Yearly sales can be estimated in this location at around 1,000 units. One could double these figures to get an idea of the import potential for the entire province, Haiphong included. Apart from rare exceptions, French brands represent all the sales of this item."

46. ANOM, Agence de la France d'Outre-Mer (AGEFOM) 229,275, "Information pour la Fédération des chambres syndicales des automobilistes en France et dans les colonies," March 7, 1932.
47. As illustrated in a popular advertisement for the 15HP Delahaye published in the magazine *Extrême-Asie*. The "Beautiful Sundays with a 15HP Delahaye" of the advertisement are indistinguishable from beautiful Sundays in the French countryside.
48. Although typically reserved for boating trips, the term "cruise" was applied equally to automobile outings, organized or not, in the historical context presently under discussion.
49. *Têt* is the Vietnamese New Year celebration.
50. See ANOM, AGEFOM 547, 1927, Maurice Rondet-Saint's report on the organization of the tourism industry in Indochina. For a thorough study of the history of tourism in Indochina, see Aline Demay, *Tourism and Colonization in Indochina 1898–1939* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).
51. Jean-Baptiste Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam. De Hanoi à Hué en automobile. Les fêtes du Têt et du Conseil de Gouvernement dans la Capitale annamite* (Hanoi: Imprimerie Tonkinoise Bach Thái Bu̇oi & Cie, 1913).
52. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 7.
53. Alain Corbin and Julia Csergo, *L'Avènement des loisirs* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001).
54. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 7.
55. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 7.
56. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 7–8.
57. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 8.
58. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 8.
59. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 8.
60. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 8.
61. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 8.
62. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 9.
63. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 8, 10.
64. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 12–13.
65. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 13.
66. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 17.

67. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 26.
68. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 27.
69. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 27.
70. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 17.
71. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 20.
72. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 25.
73. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 25.
74. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 25.
75. J. B. Saumont, *Sur les routes d'Annam*, 122.
76. ANV1, RST 4770, letter dated October 15, 1909.
77. Decree 1711 by the Resident Superior, November 18, 1909.

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CHAPTER 4

Sharing the Road: Road Users

In the early twentieth century, motoring in Indochina involved European colonials and tourists who traveled on political assignments, for pleasure, or to promote road construction. These trips were tests of technological engineering, personal resourcefulness, and luck. Motoring quickly extended to all parts of the population, including colonial subjects, and it helped to define new roles and identities in relation to one's place on the road and in the automobile. From the viewpoint of colonists, motoring in Indochina took three distinct forms: technical feats by amateurs and professionals all over the territory, utilitarian and everyday trips (professional, military, and commercial transport), and leisurely travel (such as the "*tour d'inspection*" and sightseeing excursions). French colonial discourse on motoring oscillated between these three poles, depending on the motorists' objectives. Moreover, two factors contributed to the development of motoring among the European population: One, attractive, was the trip to hill stations, such as Dalat,[1] and to seaside towns reputed for their health benefits[2]; the other, repulsive, was the increasing use of trains and mass transportation by indigenous populations. For the settler community, automobility was an indispensable tool for tourism and greater access to the territory, as well as a key element of the process of their acculturation into colonial life. It also integrated the indigenous population, in particular through the curriculum of new, educational institutions that were established to educate

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S. Ponsavady, *Cultural and Literary Representations of the Automobile in French Indochina*,
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the Natives in pedestrian etiquette. The system of automobility started to reach them as well. For most Natives, it was a collective experience, but, for a few members of the economic elite, motoring was a privilege for which they paid the full price. Moreover, the car was immediately placed in native hands when local men were hired as chauffeurs and then as operators or even owners of transport companies, often after having trained[3] in trade schools created by the Administration (such as the Saigon School for Asian Mechanics) or on-the-job, like Boillot's drivers in Hanoi.

This diversity both in the car and on the road induces a necessary redefinition of social rules. The Vietnamese chauffeur is simultaneously the servant of the car owner and the master of the vehicle. Besides driving, he has other functions: he is a mechanic; he is in charge of fueling the automobile; he is a guide to his passengers; and he accompanies the European driver, even if he is not driving himself. Transport companies not only convey local populations from urban centers to the countryside, but they also carry mail on roads that are shared with private cars. In the city and in urban areas, the car must get along with rickshaws and tramways. In the country, it runs alongside buffaloes and wild animals and must adapt to the rhythm of seasons, especially the rainy season.

This simple list demonstrates the diversity of automobility in Indochina and the complexity of the motivations or justifications that accompany it. European movement in Indochina is always associated with moral values such as self-determination, a taste for effort, and a sense of class solidarity, but each category of users—and, within each category, each way of taking to the road—is subject to particular representations; moral and social justifications of road use are equally variegated. Moreover, a political project, in the larger sense of the word, is often associated with these movements. In this process of development, guidebooks, periodicals, and travelogues first pave the way for European motorists.

4.1 Automobile Guidebooks: Mirrors and Vehicles of Greater Tourism

Much like maps, guidebooks represent, shape, and distort the reality of the colonial road. They participate in the construction of an imaginary space—new horizons offered for tourists' consumption. They are mirrors and vehicles of the values of the travelers that write and read them.

Assemblages of information, images, and texts, guidebooks were often dismissed as mere databases for researchers or—worse, as in the case of the *Guides Bleus*—accused of "reducing geography to the description of an uninhabited world of monuments," according to Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*.[4] Yet in his article on the *Guides-Joanne* in *Les lieux de mémoire* (1986), Daniel Nordman takes guidebooks seriously, retracing their origin and relating them to visions of national territory; in short, using them as critical sources. In this perspective, guidebooks circulating in early twentieth-century Indochina map and create an imaginary space that was organized around the road and accessible by car.[5] The three most popular French-language guidebooks in the first half of the twentieth century are the Madrolle, Norès, and Taupin guides. Claudius Madrolle[6] is the first to write guidebooks on Indochina, although his were only region-by-region. When he writes about Indochina as a whole, he associates it with other territories: the Suez Canal, Djibouti, Harare, India, Ceylon, Siam, and Southern China in 1902. Thus, Colonial Indochina appears in relation to a vast, global geography. This Eastbound journey is made explicit in his 1926 title, *Marseille to Saigon, The Stops of the Crossing from France to Indochina: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ceylon, Malaysia* (*Marseille à Saigon, les escales de la traversée de France en Indochine, Djibouti, Éthiopie, Ceylan, Malaisie*). Writing only about Indochina, Madrolle publishes a standalone guidebook for South Tonkin in 1906 and then zooms out to write about North Indochina and South Indochina. This evidently helps to sell more books; the inquiring tourist will have to buy at least two books to get the whole picture. Besides, these territorial divisions do not reflect geographic reality or administrative boundaries. They map out points of interest delimited only by the touristic journey. It is accessibility, not an a priori political reality, which defines Indochina as practicable in the experience of the tourist. The primacy of lived experience overrepresentation is emphasized by the plethora of information collected and presented in the guidebook's pages on history, geography, geology, climatology, hunting, etc.

Madrolle does not rely only on his own experience to write these guidebooks. On the occasion of the Hanoi Exhibit, he publishes the first *Traveler's Guide* (*Guide du Voyageur*) with the encouragement of the Government General of Indochina and under the auspices of the Committee of French Asia (*Comité de l'Asie Française*), a colonial lobbying group. In addition to the support of his networks within the French

School of the Far East (*Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient*), the school for Eastern Languages (*Ecoles spéciales des Langues Orientales*), and in the colonial government,[7] he solicits the help of his readers as early as the preface to his 1902 guide[8]:

> The author is counting on the benevolence of residents and tourists and asks them to be willing to help him in the continuation of this work, if necessary in more ways than one, by bringing to his attention errors or omissions and by completing the number of itineraries: all great works, whether created by nature or by Man, deserve a visit and a study and must be highlighted. Subsequent editions will show how much this precious collaboration will be taken into account, and they will carefully record all the corrections and new indications that you will kindly send to the author.[9]

Indeed, in his 1912 Hanoi guide[10] and his 1913 Saigon and Angkor guide,[11] Madrolle includes two suggestion forms for the reader to send back as "the experience of each must benefit all."[12] Practice and practicability of the road by all its users participate in defining and delineating colonial space itself. The values of solidarity and mutual help prevail among new, colonial road users. Writing, reading, and correspondence will become tools in the construction of Indochina, just like labor, roads, and the automobile. Movements and transportation of colonists and tourists literally defined the routes of automobile traffic and delimited the realm of possible journeys, and the writings of these participants informed guidebooks. In addition to the written contributions and lived experiences of his readers, Madrolle duly records the first appearance of the automobile, as early as his second guide on Southern Tonkin (1907),[13] by paying tribute to the work of Governor General Beau for having brought to existence

> a considerable influx of travelers that either came to go on an excursion or to study the riches of the earth or the subsoil of the beautiful French colony of Asia: secondly, the opening of numerous railways, the construction of roads and their use by motorists have determined in the residents a significant movement of tourists who were insistently asking for a detailed guide of the main attractions of Tonkin.[14]

Madrolle makes explicit the relationship between residents and tourists, on the one hand, and these "locally described and developed" itineraries on the other:

> We hope, by this new effort, to keep the favor of the audience from the Far East who, furthermore, do not hesitate to collaborate *proprio-motu* to these works of public interest by sending us all corrections, observations, and additions that they believe useful and of which we take the utmost account in our editions.[15]

The "audience from the Far East" cited in this foreword represents the European colonists as a whole, whose individual initiatives would be materialized in the guide. Positioning himself between the administrative authorities and the mere practitioner, Madrolle puts the automobile in the spotlight for the first time in his 1913 guide on Angkor[16] as the "beautiful road network of Eastern Cochinchina enables us to undertake, by motorcar, interesting excursions,"[17] and includes Angkor on a two-day drive and boat-ride in three possible itineraries, while highlighting pleasant car-rides. The guidebook—through the contributions of readers whose experiences inform its content, in all of the meanings of the term—becomes a properly political tool, a social and spatial instrument engaging the citizen in participating in the colony. The automobile becomes the ideal vehicle[18] of the colonial city. Madrolle indicates prices for car rentals in town, with metered auto-taxis for short rides, and daily rentals in European garages for excursions (25–50 piasters). This evolution demonstrates the appeal of the motorcar in the exploration of the territory, as well as in the discursive construction of a territorial identity through writing.

In 1930, Georges Norès publishes a three-volume guide on automobile itineraries in Indochina.[19] In his foreword, he notes that his guide has an exclusively practical goal. The pocketbook format favors convenience and portability, as one can unfold it while traveling from North to South. Contrary to Madrolle's guides, which favor diversity, Norès's guide offers information in a more condensed format. It gathers a series of schematic maps that note the location of ferries (*bacs*), railway crossings, waterways, mountain passes, towns, picturesque attractions, as well as a topographical profile of the road. This guide is supplemented by maps of the most important cities and by a text that offers general descriptions and observations about the most picturesque sites, in addition to practical information specific to motoring: gas stations, mechanics, phone and telegraph offices, hospitals, and lodging. Overall, the information delivered to tourists is more condensed, more practical, and more quickly put-to-use, which is

reflected by the number of itineraries presented: eleven for the volume on Tonkin, ten for the one on Cochinchina and Cambodia, and ten for the third, focusing on Annam and Laos. An alphabetical index of the featured sites facilitates the guide's utilization. The territory is indexed and delivered, ready to be consumed by the wheels of the motorcar. The road user thus holds in his hands a work tailored to his specific needs.

The Taupin guide[20] of 1937 similarly speaks to the needs of the tourist who wants a single volume dealing with all of Indochina in a complete but not overly detailed manner, in a practical format, and for a reasonable price. The first part of the guide presents Indochina, the second lists towns and localities in alphabetical order, and the third suggests a number of excursions. Road maps of the five territories and maps of Saigon, Haiphong, and Hanoi complete the guide. With its condensed format, the Taupin guide is a sort of spatialized directory of Indochina, organized along colonial roads.

From the encyclopedic Madrolle to the alphabetical Taupin via the car-centric Norès, a wide selection of touristic information materializes that allows us to understand more clearly certain aspects of the evolution of motoring in Indochina. Guides become more practical as maps are introduced alongside observations on geography and history. Motoring therefore not only permits Western tourists to access a multitude of sites and to consume historical and cultural curiosities relating to them, but it also solicits and facilitates the participation of road users in the representation of Indochina's accessibility through their suggestions and contributions, which will eventually attract more tourists and motorists. Thus began the virtuous discursive circle that informed Indochina by the car and the pen. From the experience of the road, writing about it and the use of the guides' information emerge a dialogue among both French-speaking road users and a territory traversed and informed by them. This dialogical negotiation on sharing the road becomes institutionalized and organized on several fronts, first in the courts of law and then in the pages of the publications of the Indochinese Automobile Clubs, thus engaging new actors in the colony. New groups of road users appear, identified by their use of the means of transportation, their social and economic functions, and their ethnic origins. The use of the colonial road brings new freedoms, expands responsibilities, and creates unprecedented constraints for each category of road users.

4.2 What Makes a Good Driver in Indochina?

When the automobile is introduced in Indochina, so too is the issue of good driving and conduct. What makes a good driver? What makes a good chauffeur? These issues became hotly debated as soon as motoring starts in Indochina. In the pioneering era, the answer mainly concerned Europeans, motoring pioneers, and little-by-little Natives (Vietnamese, in particular) and Asians (Chinese and Indians). To drive in Indochina was to measure oneself against the road, against Otherness on the road and against Otherness in the car. For Europeans (and the French in particular), the answer was not only technical (one needed a good machine equipped by French carmakers, a good sense of mastery behind the steering wheel, and mechanical skills) but also human (a good relationship with Natives could save one from a breakdown). To sum up, from a French point of view:

> There are unfortunately here as elsewhere good and bad drivers; the good ones are those who not only respect the rights of the humblest pedestrian, but also show real respect toward him. The Motorist who drives at top speed through a town where children can come out of nowhere is a fool; he who aims his wheels at the dog or chicken that he is sure to run over without risking any injury to himself is a coward; he who intentionally drives into a puddle or makes no effort to avoid splashing a native on the side of the road is a boor. The true motorist reckons that he owes others the respect he expects for himself; he acknowledges the rights of the pedestrian, of all those who travel on our roads.[21]

The moral and technical perfection of the European driver continues in the pages of local periodicals with plenty of technical advice on driving and automobile maintenance. Their columns bear eloquent titles that emphasize the power of the driving experience by appropriating the vocabulary of culinary and military arts, such as “Our Useful Recipes”[22] (against condensation, radiator leaks, oncoming bright lights, etc.) and “Advice from an Old Soldier.”[23] They offer technical advice on motoring as well as moral judgments on driving in Indochina. In the *Bulletin de l’Union Automobile et Touristique du Tonkin et du Nord Annam* (Bulletin of the Automobile and Tourist Union of Tonkin and North Annam), a “Useful Recipe Against Dust in the Engine”[24] grows from a paragraph-long tip to a four-page plea on the urgency of paving all roads and an appeal to the Department of Public Works. The columns

of the motoring press become a public forum for debating the colony's public works, where texts meet and ideas spread. Thus, in spring 1923, Ernest Outrey, Deputy of Cochinchina and Cambodia's Delegate to the Superior Council of the Colonies in France, tells the story of his journey on the "Pathways into Laos" (*Les Voies de pénétration du Laos*). His text is reproduced in both widely read newspapers such as *L'Echo Annamite* and the specialized presses of the Automobile Club of Cochinchina and Cambodia and the *Union Automobile et Touristique du Tonkin et du Nord Annam* (Automobile and Tourist Union of Tonkin and Northern Annam) or UATTNA. Using this trip from Annam to Laos as an example, Outrey argues that priority should be given to the route from Vinh to Thakhek rather than to the one from Dông Hà to Savannakhet.[25] "A settler from Vinh"—whose title and anonymity are all the more legitimate given that Outrey's agenda is political rather than benevolent—corrects him for the first time in *France-Indochine*. This reply is reproduced in the issue published immediately after Outrey's narrative or in the same issue in some cases,[26] contrasting the politician's dogmatic approach with the expertise of experienced local motorists, all "settlers from" Indochina and colonial road users.

In contrast, Vietnamese-language publications focused more on denouncing the carelessness of drivers. Since its introduction, the automobile created tensions within colonized populations, first by the construction of roads and then by the human, economic, and geographic movements and disruptions that it necessitated. However, once built, the road facilitated villagers' travel to the fields, markets, and other workplaces. Soon this modern means of communication became congested with cattle, men, women, and children. Local populations traveled at their own risk, since, in Indochina as in France, roads had been built without always anticipating the obstacles that foot and non-motorized traffic would present. Rather, they were originally conceived to facilitate and to accelerate the movement of motorized vehicles. During the first decades of the twentieth century, only the wealthy and the powerful—primarily Europeans, government officials, or rich businessmen—were able to afford the purchase and maintenance of an automobile. Popular sayings in Vietnamese articulated these social and racial differences between modes of mobility:

> Automobiles belong to the French and the mandarins
> While bullock carts are for the Vietnamese.[27]

These two types of road users often ended up clashing in countryside traffic accidents that would maim or kill peasants, their family, or their cattle. According to historian Truong Buu Lam, the Vietnamese-language press reported and circulated such news from the most remote areas. In these accounts, peasants were held responsible for the wandering of their animals on colonial roads. They would be physically punished or brought to justice immediately and then fined. In his *Colonialism Experienced* (2000), Lâm included news items that reported how drivers who hit a pedestrian would simply flee the scene; when they stopped, it was out of curiosity or only to check on their car, leaving their victims to their fate.[28] These accidents did not go unnoticed by the French-language press, but they were often represented as caused by the victims' carelessness and their lack of familiarity with the automobile. The nascent issue of road safety affected metropolitan France similarly, but in terms that articulated different divisions: between town and country, bourgeoisie and peasantry, individualism and communitarianism.[29] If news articles shifted the blame between natives and Europeans, the archives found in Hanoi today demonstrate the seriousness with which the colonial legal system treated these accidents. Traffic accidents were treated on a case-by-case basis and often reveal nuances that are omitted by accounts in the press. Investigations were conducted with rigor and demonstrated the degree to which automobility was integrated into colonial society.[30]

On March 10, 1915, at the Intersection of the Militia in Haiphong,[31] an elderly native female, a Buddhist nun, is kneeling in the middle of the street at the end of the wall fencing of indigenous guard barracks. A large hematoma covers her entire right temple and eye. She has just been run over by a car. She reports to policeman André Bigenwald that she is in great pain. He has her transported to the indigenous hospital where Dr. Forest certifies that her wounds are not serious and do not pose a threat to her life.

On the right side of the street, near the sidewalk of the Militia, stands a small automobile from Le Milou and Company, which carried the mail to Do Son. The driver, trying to steer away from a herd of cattle, had deviated to the left and hit the Buddhist nun who was moving forward at the same time. In the police report (*Procès verbal*) n°185 of March 10, 1915, the voice of road users takes on a legal value and the hand-drawn sketch represents a colonial urban space traversed by "the trail left by the passing of the car." All of these signs take on a highly legal meaning of capital importance (Fig. 4.1).

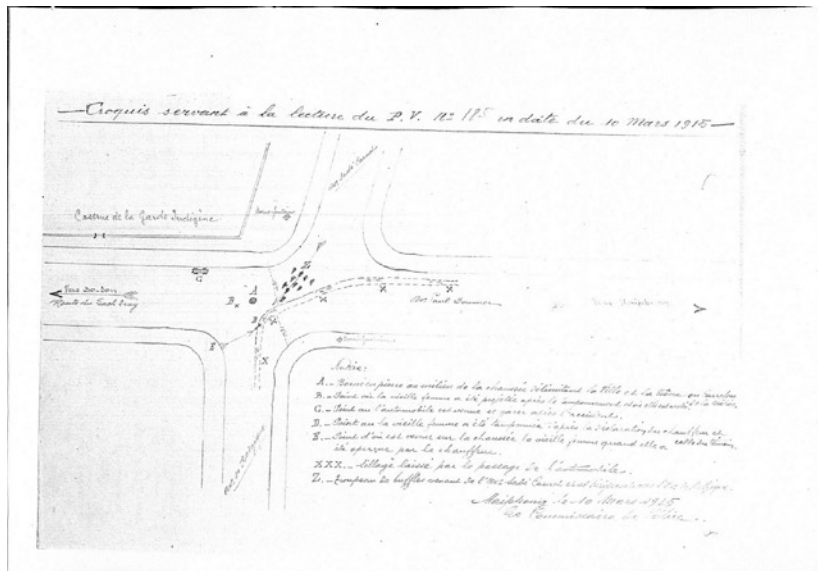

Fig. 4.1 Sketch for report n°185 dated March 10, 1915 (Archives Nationales du Vietnam 1, Tribunal de Première Instance de Haiphong 842)

The case directly involves three Natives: Vu Si Lu, age 37, native guard and witness of the accident, who states he did not hear the car honk; Tran Thi Bong, age 72, Buddhist nun, who was run over on her way to the market; Bui Van Le, age 21, mechanic working for the company Le Milou et Cie, who was in charge of transporting mail to Do Son. Their testimonies are not verbatim and were most certainly translated. However, these written traces parallel the "trail left by the passing of the car." Wherever the car goes, there goes the written word. As the automobile goes almost everywhere, including among the native population, their voices take on a legal existence, here entering the Haiphong Police Tribunal (*Tribunal de Première Instance de Haiphong en Police Correctionnelle*). Furthermore, this case reminds us that most traffic accidents (minor, major, or deadly) staged Natives as defendants and victims. Most of the time, Frenchmen do not drive public transport vehicles; Natives do. Frenchmen do not walk on the roadside; Natives do. Finally, quite literally in a more pedestrian way, the case reveals to us, as to the tribunal, that the young mechanic did not use his horn, nor did he have a

driver's license (*brevet de chauffeur*), though he states that he will take the exam shortly. Here begins the legal responsibility of the European actor.

Behind the company, Milou stands the Society of Indochinese Automobile Transport (*Société des Transports Automobiles Indochinois*, STAI), owned and directed by Mr. Pierre Duclaux. Based on the indigenous guard's testimony at the hearing on Monday, March 22, 1915, Mr. Duclaux is declared responsible in the case against the public prosecutor according to civil law. He is sentenced to pay a five-franc fine because his employee was driving without a license and a fine of 100 francs for injuries resulting from gross negligence. His mechanic—the driver—receives a one-month prison sentence for injuries resulting from gross negligence.[32] The archival files relating to the case reveal no evidence that damages were paid to the victim, but it is possible that the victim sued Duclaux and his employee in a civil court, as similar cases followed this legal course.[33] The testimony of the road user on modern traffic and mobility in Indochina gains considerable weight in the judicial system. The road brings individuals with different languages and different cultures face-to-face in common situations and in a commonplace. At first, it seems that the power of the machine decides who lives and dies, who has the right to the utmost freedom of movement in space and time, and who is condemned to stasis and the ultimate state of immobility, death. However, it turns out that what helps the law decide between them is the weight of the word and of narrative.

Duclaux explains why his driver does not have a license in a letter to the president of the tribunal. Not denying the lack of a license, he invokes an administrative delay as an extenuating circumstance: He had filed an application under the name of his driver on January 15, 1915, in Haiphong, but the examiners could spend up to three months in Hanoi before coming to Haiphong. For the French businessman, this is not a viable option:

> What must the candidate do in such a case? Wait for three months? We do not think that it is fair; a driver has like everyone the right to make a living, and by way of comparison, we take the liberty of saying that in France one takes the exam in the eight days following the application.[34]

Emphasizing the importance of fluidity in the mobility of people and goods, Duclaux questions the very functioning of the colonial system of exploitation. The French owner both invokes the right of the

Vietnamese to work and compares the situation to that in France. If colonization was to succeed fully, Indochina would have to be ruled like France, but administrative functioning and distances are far from similar:

> As for sending him to Hanoi to take the exam, it is actually impossible because the decree provides that the application must designate the machine on which the candidate will take the exam (art.7), which, unless one can find in Hanoi a car exactly identical, would force one to have one's vehicle shipped there; that is to say, disproportionate costs.

The situation in Indochina is thus quite complicated for car owners who want to hire drivers legally, whether for private or public transport. They are stuck between the obligation of insuring the transportation of people and mail shipments by contracts attributed by the Government General,[35] which represent the imperatives of colonial development (*mise en valeur)* and the legal status of their activity, which falls under the ordering (*mise en ordre)* of the colony. In fact, these automobile owners left a significant paper trail in the archives.[36] Claims often were not pursued by the administration. Therefore, these owners frequently preferred running the risk of fines in the case of an inspection and had their drivers work without a license—a lesser cost than investing in legally obtaining a license. In addition, they could count on the complacency of the agents in the Department of Public Works or in the European police.[37]

However, the introduction of automobility opened a flow for the travel of geographically and socially mobile Natives all over Indochina in the 1920s, especially Vietnamese. The evolution of the job market for indigenous drivers was evidence of a new relationship between Europeans and Vietnamese. French attempts at regulating this market demonstrated anxiety over the legal control of the mobility of European and indigenous bodies, as well as of the workforce. Should this movement be more fluid? At what cost? The answers varied according to the group of users and the audience, and they first came from the viewpoint of the European colonists. In the 1920s, organizing themselves into associations of road users, Europeans managed to influence debates on traffic and mobility in the colony in a significant way. In Tonkin, in particular, sharing the colonial road became part of discursive negotiations begun on the pages of the *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique du Tonkin et du Nord Annam* and centered around the issue of the driver's license (*brevet de chauffeur*), its validity, and thus the criteria used to

determine good driving and conduct of Natives—on the road and elsewhere—a recurring topic that encompassed all aspects of the presence and freedom of movement of Europeans in Indochina.

4.3 Automobile Associations in Indochina: Generating and Recording Good Driving and Good Conduct

New associations started to define road rules and social use of the road. These organizations structured public roads and public life, and their influence spread far beyond their apparent object of motoring. They enabled the diffusion of new technologies by lobbying the colonial administration for more favorable material and legal conditions. They organized the common space of the road according to racialized rules as a playground for the wealthy and offered technical models as well as moral justifications to their members.

A specific group of motorists in Tonkin held a large amount of power over the decisions of the colonial administration. Motorists' associations[38] such as the *Union Automobile et Touristique du Tonkin et du Nord Annam* (Automobile and Tourist Union of Tonkin and Northern Annam or UATTNA) created on February 2, 1922,[39] under the tutelage of the Resident Superior, immediately launched their own publications. In the inaugural issue of its *Bulletin*, the UATTNA claims to "be the organ of all the public's legitimate desires, or at least of the public that travels, occasionally interceding on its behalf with the various authorities on which depend the regulations of all kinds that rule traffic."[40] The political function and the intervention of the UATTNA in the local legal process are required because "as far as the automobile is concerned, these tendencies have given birth to a number of decrees more or less incompatible with the nature of things, and which, de facto, go, in most cases, unheeded."[41] For this, the UATTNA can count on the competencies of its members, in particular, its president, Dr. Forest; its vice presidents Mr. C. Vuillaume, director of the French Asian Company of Petroleum and executive administrator of the Society of Plantations of Thanh-Hoa, and Mr. Albert Aviat, leader in the transportation business in Tonkin and high member of the Chamber of Commerce of Hanoi; or in its board of directors, Mr. Sauvage, ship-owner and president of the Chamber of Commerce of Hanoi, Maître Persuis, notary in Haiphong,

Mr. Duchesne, director of the French-Annamite Schools, Mr. Chodzo, Water Inspector, and Mr. Duclaux, member of the Chamber of Commerce of Hanoi and executive administrator of the Society of Indochinese Automobile Transports, who went to trial in the case discussed earlier in this chapter. The UATTNA thus offers the "support of an ensemble of expertise to which one can resort for all the measures concerning traffic, and an Association, more than an individual, can in such matters consider things with the necessary detachment and impartiality."[42]

More explicitly than the Automobile Club of Cochinchina and Cambodia, the UATTNA presents itself as an organization involved in all aspects of the French presence in Indochina, making it more like the Automobile Club of France and the Touring Club of France. For its members:

> The automobile is not exclusively for the tourist. Our Association was first conceived as having to be an Automobile Club or something of the type. But rapidly, the idea broadened: We came to consider the automobile as one of the best means, but only of the means to make the country that surrounds known.[43]

The automobile is still a necessary condition, if not sufficient, for colonial discovery and conquest on an individual scale, for "it is motoring that prepares tourism."[44] The UATTNA considers the automobile to be the vehicle of choice for discovering the colony and the political passport for a greater engagement of each settler in the life and formation of Indochina. Each motorist has duties but can also claim rights in the colony, the first of which being the right to travel as a tourist and thus to expect a certain degree of comfort. The UATTNA follows the lessons[45] of the Touring Club of France and plays the same role in Indochina:

> To eat and to sleep are despicable yet pressing necessities, from which neither the lover of beautiful landscapes nor the person curious of the past's relics can escape. For both, the question of hotels is unfortunately of a certain interest, especially when ladies[46] take part in the tour; and, on this issue, let us all agree frankly that a lot remains to be done in order to give to foreigners above all the impression that the country is properly equipped to receive its guests.[47]

The UATTNA seeks support from hoteliers and the colonial administration. It uses the methods developed by the Touring Club and the

Automobile Clubs in France to build its own influence. Again, the colony offers the opportunity to create a political project that would be mutually beneficial for the promoters of the automobile, administrators, and tourism professionals.[48] The Union calls them to order in unequivocal terms:

> For all this, we call upon the support of all and more particularly upon this brotherhood which is at the highest point in the character of certain peoples or certain groups and that gives them such strength. May each person who is interested in travelling in this country, under its multiple forms, share with us his observations, his desires, his misfortunes or his findings; may all motorists send us their remarks, their trials of all types or the results of their expeditions; may the Public Works, the Residences, the administrations of all types be willing to share with us (we beg them urgently) their information on the state of roads, their viability, on new documents that to be published about traffic, under all its forms…[49]

The written word will be the weapon of the UATTNA. It awaits the narrative production and correspondence of "Friends" and "Comrades"—the terms chosen by the organization. It counts on its strength in numbers to multiply the efficacy of its narratives. The UATTNA encouraged its members to lobby for road construction and maintenance by writing up itineraries and travelogues.

Many picturesque trips appear in the tables of contents of the *Bulletin* of the UATTNA and of the *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois* of the Automobile Club of Cochinchina and Cambodia.[50] One of the first commented itineraries in the *Bulletin* is "From Hanoi to Saigon in automobile"[51] on the Mandarin Road, described in its length (with a table of distances and a list of ferries), height, and its relationship to the train[52]—in three dimensions, in short. The information provided concerns the estimated costs of traveling alone or in a group, on public transport or in a private car, by staying overnight at each stage or not, etc. Automobility and its cost are clearly displayed in issue 4 of the *Bulletin*: "One of our friends calculated the time and money spent in order to obtain the authorization to put on the road an automobile vehicle and its driver,"[53] with an estimation of 85 piasters and 14 cents. In addition to this legible and countable measure of motorized transport in the colony, the *Bulletin* regularly publishes distance tables, topographical surveys, the state of the road network in general and certain sections in particular, the timetable of ferries (*bacs*), and news on motoring from all over the world. "What the Tourist Must See" becomes a recurring column. A historiography of

the road in Indochina appears in articles, such as "Roads 40 Years Ago" in issue 11 of April–May 1923, at a time when funding for road-building and maintenance starts to slow down.

The *Bulletin* and the *Revue* also published commented itineraries that respond to the needs of motorists. Some information[54] is given in both French and English ("Useful Information"). The goal is to open Indochina to English-speaking tourism, especially American tourism.[55] To flip through these motoring periodicals in Indochina is to rediscover a realm of motorized possibilities, a delineated, measured and delimited motorized playground. These travel narratives and their translations multiply the effects of the pioneering narratives discussed in the previous chapter and spread the values of the good colonial motorist on a large scale. In addition to motoring and political news items, opinion pieces, and useful information, the various genres published by the Automobile Clubs include: a poem of eleven quatrains in Alexandrine verse and alternate rhymes on fire and light as metaphors for the past and future of Indochina,[56] a collection of Vietnamese aphorisms and proverbs,[57] an essay on the psychology of landscapes,[58] narratives full of local color such as the notes hastily taken between Vinh and Luang Prabang in 1922 with the Lao title "Coolies, *Pai Waiwai*!"[59] (Coolies, hurry up!), etc. Much like Claudius Madrolle in Indochina and the Automobile Club in France, the UATTNA calls for the contributions of its readers as early as in the inaugural issue of its *Bulletin*:

> Each of us, and even those who are not [members], but would have something interesting to tell us, should not be afraid to tell us about their travels of all sorts, and we will rapidly constitute and keep updated the repertory of all the indications that can be useful to know to whoever will want, in this country, to undertake any trip. We will communicate these indications to all who would like to ask for them, with the unique desire to be useful to all, to make the country where we live better known and in so doing to make it better liked.[60]

Membership in the UATTNA seems limited at first. Of the 36 inaugural members, most of them are professional transporters and only one is Vietnamese, a transporter named Nguyen-Huu Thu dit Sen. The reach of the *Bulletin* is nevertheless fairly large. It is distributed freely to its members; to the *Syndicats d'Initiative de l'Indochine* in Hanoi,

Haiphong, and Dalat; to the Colonial and metropolitan administrations; to the *Messageries Maritimes*; in train stations.[61]

"Those who are not members" could thus be occasional readers from these places but, in the local context, this particular Union situates itself more radically, as European automobile experts reacting to the solidarity of their native chauffeurs: "Finally, we have the intention to do for motoring a service of another order. It appears to many of us that the solidarity that Indigenous chauffeurs show among themselves, we would have all interest to demonstrate it between ourselves."[62] The UATTNA defines, positions, and builds itself against the unofficial union of indigenous drivers, basing its call to membership on the common European experience of the road or, more precisely, on an anxiety born out of the interdependent relationship of colonial automobility that leaves these automobile experts at the mercy of their chauffeur's expertise or lack thereof: "We entrust our chauffeurs not only with a tool of a respectable price but also with our lives, those of our families, our friends, and on top of it, even if indirectly, those of passersby! – That's a lot…"[63] The indigenous driver holds in his hand the wheel of the French car but also the lives of all road users. However, French motorists cannot remove him from the car, for lack of chauffeurs, for fear of social *déclassement* and for the sake of saving the civilizing mission. In these early 1920s, the policy of *association* informs, in a contradictory manner, Europeans' everyday ways of traveling. It becomes, then, all the more important to control the indigenous chauffeur. Since the chauffeur's responsibilities fall beyond the scope of the colonial administration's legislative power, the UATTNA, as a group of experts, suggests mobilizing its resources and competencies, multiplying its capacity to discern the "good" and expert native driver by knowing:

> where he trained, if he is a good mechanic, if he knows not only how to drive but also to maintain his car, if he knows the type of car he will be handed, and other similar information. This is what we hope to achieve, in the imminent future, by keeping up-to-date a repertory of chauffeurs according to the data given by those who have hired them; and we already have abundant resources from some of our founders in this regard.[64]

The repertories were available for consultation at the UATTNA's head office in Haiphong.[65] In the South, following requests and the desire of the Automobile Club of Cochinchina and Cambodia, the Governor

created a similar civil record (*casier civil*) of the antecedents of indigenous chauffeurs for hire in May 1923.[66] Similar registries were also created in Europe and the US, but in Indochina, they only existed for native chauffeurs. On the pages of the *Courrier Automobile*, a motoring publication created in July 1924, published in Hanoi every two weeks until the mid-1930s, Vietnamese chauffeurs advertised their services by stressing their technical skills, past experience, and good morals:

> NGUYÊN-HUY-YÊN, 9 Chanceaulme Street Hanoi, car driving license n°8889 issued on October 20, 1928, recently graduated from the Hanoi School of Applied Arts, knows mechanics very well.
>
> DINH-NGOC-TOAN, 60 Pourrin Street Hanoi, license n°8577 issued on May 19, 1928, former mechanic and driver of the STAI, chauffeur of Mr. René Pierre.
>
> HOANG-THUAN, 184 Gia-Long Boulevard, license n°8575 issued on May 19, 1928, former chauffeur of Mr. Dufau, Administrative service, Company of Yunnan, and of Dr. Ramijean (graduate of the School of Applied Arts).
>
> HAN-VAN-CHUC, 18 Cathedral Street, car and truck driving license n°9188 issued on March 18, 1929, in exchange of the license delivered by Military service – Commendable subject.[67]

The 1920s French-language press also starts to report numerous accidents and acts of theft caused by native chauffeurs. The *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois* reports a morbid nickname for the 6000 km of roadway in Cochinchina: “the smash-track” (*écrasodrome*).[68] In Tonkin, the members of the Union put the blame on the failings of the driver’s license exam (*brevet de capacité*) instated in Indochina in 1913,[69] which only tests the natives’ technical skills and not their morality.[70] Only the test of the road, the experience of traffic, and the testimonies of their passengers can stand as evidence:

> Undoubtedly the Union [UATTNA] cannot guarantee that the chauffeurs it will recommend will be a walk in the park, but it can very well, without compromising itself, quote the opinions given by the people who have hired them and, by knowing the services they rendered, it will make a selection among the significant number of candidates installed in this well-paid, coveted position, which bestows upon those who occupy it the respect of their peers. In any case, if the dexterity of the chauffeur

> cannot absolutely be guaranteed, his morality can be … more or less, and all thieves or slackers will be mercilessly turned away.[71]

In this manner, motorists' associations label individuals according to their driving and conduct and thus encapsulate the automotive experience. European motorists seek to maintain control over a growing mass of indigenous drivers, by questioning, measuring, and evaluating their automotive expertise according to technical and moral criteria. Furthermore, the first issues of the *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois* in Saigon publish a list of withdrawn driver's licenses. In later versions of the Highway Code (1922 in Cochinchina, 1924 in Tonkin, and 1931 for all of Indochina), local automobile clubs manage to include their members in the exam committees, and a certificate of good morals is made mandatory for all Natives taking the exam.[72]

What is the driver's license good for, if it is not reliable? Sharing the road is a matter of trust and interdependence, the nexus of the relationship between colonists and colonized. For the motorist members of the UATTNA, this license is useless, senseless, and even harmful. It is useless because the ability to drive can be proven by a simple road test:

> We would gain a lot by doing away with this useless certificate. We would win for the owner the right to choose his own chauffeur, not at the sight of a dubious piece of paper, but based on his abilities. There is no certificate for cooks; you judge the one you just hired according to the first meals he prepares for you; more easily would you even judge your chauffeur on the first hundred meters, as one would judge a sais in the old days; and the dirty card that he extends to you would not attest to the ability, prudence, composure, and even honesty of its bearer, which is really too much to ask from it.[73]

The passenger should be able to rely on his impressions, as journalist Saumont had demonstrated earlier in his journey from Hanoi to Hué. The comparison between chauffeurs and cooks (*bêp*) reveals that the former has become an indispensable member of the colonial household. For example, in Saigon in the early 1930s, a "placement office" located on *rue d'Espagne* offers the services of "good and honest servants (boys, cooks, chauffeurs), seamstresses, collaborators or managers, etc." with "serious references."[74]

In addition to its uselessness, the license is senseless, as a good part of the test consists of responding in French to the examiner:

> Contrary to common sense, the dictate that demands that the examiner quizzes the candidate. [*sic*] In addition that he steps out of his role by asking him to repair a breakdown (because it would be a threat to public safety), in which language will he question him? There can be Annamite, Indian, Chinese, Cambodian, Thai, and Hmong chauffeurs; and Japanese and English; are we going to forbid them to drive because they will not be able to answer in French a question recorded on an out-of-synch tape recorder?[75]

How to legislate and manage such a diverse population traveling on the same territory? The creation and implementation of the driver's license are not limited to technical issues, but they also confront linguistic and cultural impediments. Babel is on wheels. In theory, everyone can drive, take to the road, and use the modern means of colonial transportation, but no one can communicate: here is another paradox of motoring in Indochina. The constitution of rules of the road ironically demonstrates the impasses of French as a vehicular language.

Finally, the license is harmful because it introduces a prerogative recognized by colonial authorities that threatens social and symbolical hierarchies:

> [these exam formalities] create a privilege and bestow it with a lightness and indifference to consequences that make it doubly dangerous; dangerous immediately for safety, dangerous more distantly for public morality by the deplorable example that gives this unjustified privilege.[76]

One man leads the case against the official piece of paper, in particular in Tonkin: the author of these lines, Pierre Duclaux. From August to October 1922, he publishes no fewer than four articles to denounce the driver's license as instituted and regulated in all of Indochina by the decree of September 29, 1913.[77] Before this date, automobile traffic was left to the judgment of local colonial administrators, who were free to pass decrees. The issue of the driver's license, which Duclaux had already faced in the 1915 court case, in particular, the "dispositions relating to chauffeurs and their freedom of movement,"[78] clearly become his obsession.[79] This freedom is as much physical as it is economic and social and is thus all the more threatening to colonial society. It deserves to be tackled from several angles. Duclaux, the director of the STAI and founding member of the UATTNA, relies on the association's statutes[80] to align

his business interests with those of the colonial motorist: he as administrator of a company that hires indigenous drivers to transport goods and people and the private motorist who hires a personal chauffeur for the transportation of himself, his family, and his friends. His argumentation unravels the thread of the micro-powers of automobility in a colonial setting. His expression of contestation and discontent in the pages of the *Bulletin* is both illustration of and conduct for the circulation of this power.

The driver's license is perceived to be a constraint, a burden, and a lie imposed on the European owner by the colonial administration:

> By awarding the license, the Administration does not take any responsibility and does not guarantee anything; that the owner who has hired a chauffeur on the basis of the evidence provided by the license has an accident; that a victim run over by one of this patented drivers asks him to take responsibility; it ignores everything, it washes its hands of it, it does not want to know anything; the driver remains implicated alone, and so does the owner from the viewpoint of civil law. The owner was *forced* [Duclaux's emphasis] to be led by one of the members of the Administration; but he was not given anything in return for this obligation.[81]

For Duclaux, it is clear: The colonial administration forces his hand, and he ends up dominated by the automobile system, where the chauffeur is only a cog in the machine. The license becomes a dangerous privilege that the Native can use for his own benefit. Not only does it give him the freedom and right to drive, it also offers him freedom of employment, allowing him to go from one job to another. The driver's license thus facilitates the mobility of the workforce throughout the colony.

The issue of labor mobility and its relationship with the development of transportation infrastructure in Colonial Indochina brings to light a differential gap among the native population, that not only discriminated according to economic positions (between chauffeurs and transportation entrepreneurs, for example) but also according to ethnicity[82] or territorial origin. In an article focusing on a road trip that the Vietnamese intellectual Pham Qúynh took to Laos in 1931, historian Christopher Goscha remarks that the construction of roads, such Colonial Road 9 from Hanoi to Vientiane, not only opened Eastern Laos but also enabled the mobility of Annamese workers around Indochina, often as chauffeurs

of the cars that traveled between Laos and Annam or Tonkin.[83] In his book-length study of the "idea of Indochina" in Vietnam, Goscha points out how a generation of "Annamese ran with [the] new information" provided by new transport systems, such as roadmaps and guides, which were "particularly helpful for Annamese entrepreneurs who started forming car, bus, and trucking services in the 1920s to transport goods and people 'on all the roads' of Cambodia, Laos, and Annam." Goscha also notes that although this new Annamese mobility often followed more ancient trading routes running into Laos and Cambodia, it did so in unprecedented ways and at a much greater pace.[84] He locates a geographical awakening or *prise de conscience* by young Annamites, as opposed to Cambodians or Laotians, of an Indochinese space through mobility practices enabled by the introduction of modern transportation infrastructure. Goscha tackled the question of Annamese trucking and bus services not only through a study of the decrees passed by Résidents Supérieurs preserved in the archives[85] but also through an illuminating reading of Annamese travelogues and press. Based on the 1920s and 1930s travelogues by Nguyen Van Vinh, he sums up the Annamese entrepreneur's point of view: "Annamese labor combined with expanded roads and canals would eventually transform Indochina into a Franco-Annamese capitalist entity."[86] The prospects also expanded the economic horizons of other Annamites involved in the automobile system.

Automobility, coupled with the policy of, opens a new economic era to the benefit of a category of newly qualified native workers: Vietnamese chauffeurs. Once awarded, the license can only be withdrawn in case of gross misconduct, ruled by the courts:

> […] once owner of his title like the officer of his rank, the apprentice of the day before is let loose on the all roads of Indochina, with the right to run over one person per year, for it is only for the second one in the year that his license can be taken away after a commission's recommendation, an investigation, and a special decision by the Resident Superior. Discharging a civil servant does not require more.[87]

The chauffeur is thus free to find employment. A skilled worker, he can also claim a higher salary. In a 1931 survey of 13,000 workers in northern Indochina, chauffeurs in transport companies receive an average monthly compensation of 40 piasters and private chauffeurs an average of 32 piasters, while cooks earn an average of 19 piasters,

placing chauffeurs just behind the top-earning salespeople, at an average monthly salary of 42 piasters, and well above other manual workers and servants of Europeans (*boys* earning an average of 14 piasters and *congaïs* 13 piasters).[88] Besides, the introduction of the paper document also makes it possible to traffic licenses, playing on the perceived difficulty for Europeans to identify and differentiate between Natives.[89] Article 3 of the decree of January 31, 1924, also known as the Tonkin Highway Code, instates fingerprinting against this type of fraud, responding to requests from the UATTNA[90]; the law evolves by responding to these road users' reactions. The Automobile Club of Annam and Tonkin also protests against the faulty ticketing of its members Borzecki and Le Roy des Barres.[91] As a response, the Resident Superior asks police officers who witness such infractions to stop the vehicle in question by whistling or gesturing in order to establish the true identity of the chauffeur or car owner.[92]

Another way for colonial authorities to respond to European anxieties is to adjust the requirements for Natives to obtain their driver's license. In particular, the minimum legal age is revised in a series of decrees from 25 years old (1918) to 22 (1920 and 1924) to the decree of June 24, 1931, that creates a distinction between native or Asian drivers of private vehicles and those who work for public transport companies. The former have to be at least 20 years old and the latter 25 years old. Indigenous public transport companies are becoming more popular and common. Native businessmen and businesswomen[93] purchase used vehicles (notably trucks) that they repair, renovate, and put back in service.

Motorists' associations pursue their role under various incarnations. Founded in 1925, the Automobile Club de l'Annam-Tonkin (Automobile Club of Annam-Tonkin) or ACAT takes over from the UATTNA and then merges with the Moto Club of Tonkin in 1932 to become the *Club automobile et Motocycliste du Tonkin Annam Laos* (CAMTAL), the Automobile and Motorcyclist Club of Tonkin-Annam-Laos.[94] Among its accomplishments, between 1934 and 1936, the CAMTAL starts a campaign to monitor headlights that results in a series of circulars written by the Resident Superior.[95] The CAMTAL also seeks to popularize and disseminate the Highway Code of 1931. Acting on the wishes of its members, it lobbies for a unified signage system[96] and a

better education of Natives by publishing over 10,000 leaflets, including 5000 in Vietnamese.[97]

In the 1930s, some Vietnamese drivers[98] organized themselves and no longer hesitated to voice their concerns. Thus, an association of Vietnamese chauffeurs in Saigon addressed directly the Governor General of Indochina a request for a uniform set of traffic laws all over the territory of the colony in September 1931. Their representative explained their motivations:

> Certainly, roads are for the use of all kinds of carriages and not only automobile cars, and yet it is we, the drivers of cars, who must take initiative to call for a highway code: it is because we want the responsibility of each to be exactly determined in the event of an accident.[99]

The highway code of Indochina was in fact already law since June 24 of that same year.[100] The Vietnamese chauffeurs of Saigon truly targeted other road users: pedestrians, animal-drawn carts, etc. The first thing they wanted protect against was the threat posed to their mobility in case of an accident. They showed very little concern with their physical immobility or morbidity, or road safety, but they demonstrated anxiety over legal and thus economic immobilization:

> Up until now, each time an accident happens, and that there is a fatality or a casualty, the driver, whether he is at fault or not, is always immediately put under arrest. And it is always the driver and the owner of the car who are condemned to pay for the damages but never has the pedestrian or the cart-driver who caused the accident been sentenced to compensate the driver.[101]

The Vietnamese drivers base their argument on their use of the road, from which they derive rights. They re-appropriate and repurpose the rhetoric used by French motorists in their narratives. They even adopted the European point of view:

> Although there are fewer cars in circulation here than in Europe, all things equal, accidents are more frequent [here]. Here the Annamites, from car owners and chauffeurs to the simple pedestrians as well as the cyclists and cart-pullers are not familiar enough with traffic laws.

With this alarmist posture, Vietnamese chauffeurs joined in the chorus of European motorists, driving on the same side of road and writing on the same side of the law. Their representative insisted on the groups' inherent solidarity facing the indigenous pedestrians:

> When the accident happens through the fault of the driver, the owner of the car is civilly liable while the criminal responsibility, if it exists, falls on the driver. But when the accident is due to the fault of the pedestrian or the carter, an investigation should be opened and meanwhile the driver should remain free, even if he has to appear before the court every time he is summoned. As for civil reparations, it will be the business of the owner of the car or the insurance company: the driver who is not at fault, cannot be held responsible.

The association demands that pedestrians everywhere keep to the right and that the government institute regulations for their circulation. The Vietnamese chauffeurs seized on the way motoring had been conceived by the colonists. Thus, they offered ways to facilitate the acculturation of their contemporaries:

> Additionally, we ask:
>
> 1 – that theses rules, once established, be the object of a very large publication, in French and in quôc ngu in the phu, huyên, cantons, and villages;
> 2 – that it be ordered to the village notables to bring it to the attention of all the inhabitants;
> 3 – that the same propagandaPropaganda be done in the educational establishments, by the care of the teachers and the professors among their pupils, and, in the barracks, among the men of the army, by the care of the officers;
> 4 – that these regulations also be posted on all street corners, in all public institutions, common houses, pagodas and guard posts. In this way, the education of the population will not be long in regard to traffic.

Of course, the colonial Administration had already started raising road safety awareness in primary schools, vocational schools and through local notables, especially under the influence of the European automobile clubs. Here, the drivers took the initiative to claim specific and targeted

propaganda. Moreover, the Vietnamese chauffeurs also made material claims that were as much a result of the changing circumstances of the colonial economy and road network as they testified to their growing weight in the process of traffic legislation, as road users and professionals. Thus, while greater tourism was developing in Indochina and while the questions of the infrastructures of reception were raised, the indigenous drivers raised their voice demanding their own facilities:

> Traffic is constantly expanding through the construction of new roads, and as it grows, our work as car drivers becomes more and more difficult.
>
> In remote locations such as Phnom-Penh, Kep Bockor, Siem Reap, the Angkor Ruins, Battambang, Phanthiet, Nhatrang, Tuy-Hoa, Quinhon, Quangngai and Donghoi, [*sic*] the administration had bungalows built at its expense, but usually when we get there, we have traveled several hundred kilometers. Now, in these bungalows, if there are many garages to give the cars, which are made of iron, shelter from the weather, the drivers who are men, and who have been exposed all day to the sun, wind and rain, find no place to lie down.

The indigenous drivers thus claimed a literal place on the road. They asked the Governor General and the owners of cars to pay a minimum of one piaster per car to allow the construction of garages and housing in these garages for drivers in remote locations. For that, they drew a parallel between the wear of the car and that of their body, the driver then becoming part of the system of automobility. It is by associating with their machines that Vietnamese chauffeurs could base their claim to restore their body.[102] They further explained that they would place their project's finances under the monitoring of the president of the Automobile Club of Cochinchina and that they would collaborate with local Public Works departments to build and maintain their housing.

Their request was soundly argued and clear. Understanding the vision of motoring associated with the greater tourism dear to the Colonial Administration, they did not hesitate to align themselves with their machines, the needs of the Vietnamese, and the interests of the European. The response of local administrators varied. In Laos, for example, there were already separate dormitories common to the drivers passing through in the bungalows set up by the Colonial Administration.[103] In other cases, these special accommodations could be included in the construction plans and specifications of the hotels and bungalows, without obligation. With respect to the education

of indigenous populations, the Highway Code was translated, signs in native languages (Vietnamese, Lao, and Khmer) were made, pictorial posters were posted in schools and public places, but the official response was that specific regulations for pedestrians would be inoperative and that the observance of the principles of the Highway Code could only be achieved through progressive education and experience gained from the dangers of a route open to motorized traffic.

The new drivers that were the Vietnamese drivers, therefore espoused models already defined by the European organizations, with which they had in common to allow their contemporaries to travel across the territory and to expand its lived limits. Although they lacked the material means and tools of political domination, they did not hesitate to draw on the experience of European passengers, travelers, and tourists to demonstrate the value of an alliance that would transcend racial divisions, siding together in the system of automobility. In this process of elaboration, this group borrowed in writing the path opened by European automobile clubs in new and increasingly formal negotiations, that could threaten social, racial, and symbolic hierarchies.

Originally elitist and European, motorists' associations support a collective project that is bigger than their initial membership: Vietnamese and Chinese entrepreneurs soon join them, and native chauffeurs' organizations[104] appeal to them to represent and defend their interests to the colonial administration. The influence of local automobile clubs in colonial Indochina is significant, as they explicitly associate automobility and geographical, social, and moral knowledge of the colony. More profoundly, by aiming to foster harmonious relationships between a European elite and the mass of native road users, these associations offer a model for society where settlers and natives could theoretically coexist and circulate smoothly. These new motorists, Europeans and increasingly Natives, adopt models already defined by organizations and societies in metropolitan France, with whom they share the effort to teach their contemporaries to take advantage of the road, this time overseas. They thus offer a greater tourism for a greater France and enter into a dialogic relationship with the experience of metropolitan French writers and journalists, shaping both local politics and the colonial imaginary.

Notes

1. See Eric T. Jennings, *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
2. See Eric T. Jennings, *Curing the Colonizers: Hydrotherapy, Climatology, and French Colonial Spas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
3. How to teach native drivers to drive well and behave? In France, racing helped test and measure the power of the machine. In Indochina, racing had a pedagogical and moral mission. Endurance races and gymkhanas were favored to teach native drivers economy and dexterity. See *La Revue du Tourisme Indochinois.*
4. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 127.
5. For an approach to guidebooks as indicators of the touristic offer and the evolution of the practices of tourism, see Aline Demay, *Tourism and Colonization in Indochina 1898–1939* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014). My focus is on the delineation of the colonial space and the values that are conveyed and circulated by these guidebooks, insisting in particular on the collaborative aspect of their creation.
6. Claudius Madrolle (1870–1949) was a geographer who worked in Indochina from 1902 to 1937. Before that, he had been on exploration missions for the French government in the Casamance, in Guinea, and in Fouta Djallon (1892–1893).
7. Nicolas Lemaire, "Claudius Madrolle et l'introduction du tourisme colonial en Indochine Française, 1898–1914: entre propagande économique et légitimation politique" (Master's thesis, University of Québec in Montréal, 2010).
8. Claudius Madrolle, *De Marseille à Canton, guide du voyageur: Indo-Chine, canal de Suez, Djibouti et Harar, Indes, Ceylan, Siam, Chine méridionale* (Paris: Comité de l'Asie Française, 1902).
9. Claudius Madrolle, *De Marseille à Canton, guide du voyageur: Indo-Chine, canal de Suez, Djibouti et Harar, Indes, Ceylan, Siam, Chine méridionale* (Paris: Comité de l'Asie Française, 1902), II.
10. Claudius Madrolle, *Hanoi et ses environs* (Paris: Hachette, 1912).
11. Claudius Madrolle, *Vers Angkor. Saïgon. Phnom-Penh* (Paris: Hachette, 1913).
12. Claudius Madrolle, *Vers Angkor. Saïgon. Phnom-Penh.*
13. Claudius Madrolle, *Tonkin du Sud, Hanoi. Les Annamites, Hanoi, pays de So'n-tâi, pays de So'n-nam* (Paris: Publication du Comité de l'Asie Française, 1907). The guidebook is preceded by a Traveler's Memorandum: "MM. Tourists and Residents are urged to write down

the corrections and additions (opinion on hotels, excursions, navigation, various notes) of which the usefulness would have been demonstrated and to address their communication to Mr. Director of the MADROLLE GUIDES, at the Committee for French Asia, 21 RUE CASSETTE, Paris" (XI–XII).

14. Claudius Madrolle, *Tonkin du Sud, Hanoi. Les Annamites, Hanoi, pays de So'n-tâi, pays de So'n-nam*, V.
15. Claudius Madrolle, *Tonkin du Sud, Hanoi. Les Annamites, Hanoi, pays de So'n-tâi, pays de So'n-nam*, VI.
16. Claudius Madrolle, *Vers Angkor. Saïgon. Phnom-penh* (Paris: Hachette, 1913).
17. Claudius Madrolle, *Vers Angkor. Saïgon. Phnom-penh*, 12.
18. An ideal and highly desirable vehicle that was not always accessible to colonists. See the theme of the automobile in Marguerite Duras's works set in Indochina.
19. Georges Norès, *Itinéraires automobiles en Indochine: guide du touriste*, 3 vol. (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1930).
20. G. Taupin, *Guide touristique général de l'Indochine* (Hanoi: Edition Taupin, 1937).
21. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique du Tonkin et du Nord Annam*, n°4, August 1922, 1.
22. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique du Tonkin et du Nord Annam*, n°4, August 1922, 17–18
23. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique du Tonkin et du Nord Annam*, n°11, April–May 1923, and following issues.
24. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique du Tonkin et du Nord Annam*, n°5, September 1922, 3–7.
25. The opening of Laos, a landlocked country, was an ever-recurring issue in the policy of *mise en valeur* of Indochina. Road-construction projects are constantly discussed. The axis from Vinh to Thakhek would have created a conduct for transporting people and goods between Annam and Laos.
26. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique du Tonkin et du Nord Annam*, n°11, April–May 1923.
27. *Tiêng Dân*, October 15, 1927, translated by Truong Buu Lâm, *Colonialism Experienced. Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900–1931* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 46. *Tiêng Dân* (the voice of the People) was the first independent newspaper published in Annam, the center region of today's Vietnam, and ran from 1927 to 1943.
28. *Tiêng Dân*, September 3, 1927, December 21, 1927 and February 15, 1928, translated by Truong Buu Lâm, *Colonialism Experienced:*

Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900–1931 (University of Michigan Press, 2000), 47.
29. Patrick Fridenson, “La Société Française et Les Accidents de La Route (1890–1914),” *Ethnologie Française* 21, no. 3 (1991): 306–13.
30. See, for example, in Archives Nationales du Vietnam 1 (ANV1), Tribunal de Première Instance de Haiphong (TPIH) 34057, the case (or non-case) of doctor Le Roy des Barres, local director of the Health Department in Tonkin, who ran over and killed an indigenous woman between km 31 and 32 of the road between Vinh Yên and Hanoi in June 1926. The police investigation finds that the accident was caused by the victim, whose son nevertheless received 60 piasters from Le Roy des Barres.
31. ANV1, TPIH 842, “Contravention aux règlements de circulation des automobiles commis par Bui Van Le, originaire du village de Yen Tri du huyen de Yen Hung, Quang Yen en 1915.”
32. Offenses punished by articles 16, 25, and 26 of the September 29, 1913 decree, 471§15, 320 of the penal code, 1384§3 of the civil code.
33. ANV1, Résidence Supérieure du Tonkin (RST) 034057, “Au sujet des accidents de la route.” Phùng Thi Trinh presented a petition, dated July 4, 1930, asking the transport company My-Lam for damages on the death of her husband, Vu-Ngoc Truoc, caused by a car accident.
34. ANV1, TPIH 842, “Contravention aux règlements de circulation des automobiles commis par Bui Van Le, originaire du village de Yen Tri du huyen de Yen Hung, Quang Yen en 1915,” letter from Duclaux, Society of Indochinese Automobile Transport, Haiphong Branch, to the President of the Tribunal of First Instance in Haiphong, March 21, 1915.
35. See ANV1, RST 4241, for examples of bills of specifications for postal service and mail shipping in Indochina. The procedure of adjudication or call for bids is instated by a decree of the Governor General on December 31, 1899. A few Vietnamese female names appear among the owners of the companies selected.
36. See ANV1, RST J8.
37. ANV1, RST 41872, “Sanction aux infractions commises par les entrepreneurs de Services publics de transport en commun aux prescriptions du Code de la route,” Report n°3644 by Normandin, Chief-Engineer of the Department of Public Works in Tonkin, January 1, 1925.
38. In Saigon, the Automobile Club of Cochinchina and Cambodia is founded in 1922, and it starts to publish the weekly *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois* (*RTI*) on Friday, May 4, 1923. The publication becomes *Revue des Etudes Indochinoises, de l'Automobilisme et du Tourisme* (*R.E.I.A.T.*), starting with issue 41, published on February 8, 1924.

39. Bibliothèque Nationale du Vietnam in Hanoi (BNVH), M2722, Statutes of the *Union Automobile et Touristique du Tonkin Annam*. In 1925, it is renamed *Automobile Club of Annam Tonkin* (ACAT) and later merged into the *Club automobile et Motocycliste du Tonkin Annam Laos* (CAMTAL) in 1932.
40. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°1, May 1922, 4.
41. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°1, May 1922, 5.
42. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°1, May 1922, 5.
43. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°1, May 1922, 4.
44. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°1, May 1922, 5.
45. See *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°2, June 1922, 2–10. The UATTNA's reading of the Touring Club's strategies is similar to that of Catherine Bertho-Lavenir in *La Roue et le Stylo. Comment nous sommes devenus touristes* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1999).
46. The colonial female passenger embodies the necessity of a degree of comfort in car travel in Indochina. The Automobile Club of Cochinchina and Cambodia's official journal published a travelogue by a Parisian female and the impressions of an unnamed American female tourist as evidence of the ease of touring Indochina. See Bobby, "De Saigon à Dalat. Journal d'une Parisienne," *La Revue du Tourisme Indochinois*, n°10, July 6, 1923, 7, and an American female tourist, "Impressions d'une touriste sur l'Indochine – A bord du Battambang," *Tourisme, Revue d'études indochinoises, de l'Automobilisme et du Tourisme R.E.I.A.T.* n°85, December 12, 1925, 8.
47. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°1, May 1922, 5.
48. On the creation of hotels in Indochina, see Aline Demay, *Tourism and Colonization in Indochina 1898–1939* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).
49. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°1, May 1922, 5.
50. Pierre Billotey's travelogue, *L'Indochine en zigzags* (Paris, 1929) is an example of that celebration of the freedom of movement created by the automobile.
51. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°3, July 1922, 12–19.

52. On the complementary relationship between rail and road, train and car, see also David Del Testa's "Paint the Trains Red: Labor, Nationalism, and Railroads in French Colonial Indochina, 1898–1945" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2001).
53. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°4, August 1922, 7–9.
54. Starting with issue 6 of the *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois* published on Friday, June 8, 1923, the column "*Renseignements utiles*" is also translated into English as "Useful Information."
55. On advertising to American tourists, see Aline Demay, *Tourism and Colonization in Indochina 1898–1939* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014). In particular, Chapter 4, "Comings and Goings in Indochina, Tourist Accessibility and Mobility," which deals with the integration of Indochinese ports within the international tourism network and the development of international tourism in Indochina. See also, in BNVH, M5 6798, the speech by Mr. Lécorché, president of the *Club automobile et Motocycliste du Tonkin Annam Laos* (CAMTAL) on the evening of January 9, 1932. Lécorché uses the example of Billy, an imaginary English-speaking tourist traveling by car during his Grand Tour to arouse his audience's interest. Finally, see the literary example of Pierre Benoit's *Le Roi Lépreux* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1927) for the symbolism of the car ride. The novel unfolds as the narrator awaits the return of an automobile that carries a female American tourist through the night. I must thank Jean-François Klein for bringing this novel to my attention.
56. Henri Blaquière, "De l'Indochine-torche à l'Indochine-phare," *Tourisme, Revue d'études indochinoises, de l'Automobilisme et du Tourisme R.E.I.A.T*, n°150, April 23, 1926, 11–12.
57. Pierre Galinier, "Aphorismes, proverbes et dictons annamites," *Tourisme, Revue d'études indochinoises, de l'Automobilisme et du Tourisme R.E.I.A.T*, n°147, April 2, 1926, 18.
58. Rolly, "La psychologie du paysage," *Tourisme, Revue d'études indochinoises, de l'Automobilisme et du Tourisme R.E.I.A.T*, n°104, May 29, 1925, 2.
59. Antonin Baudéane, "Coolies, Pai Waiwai. Notes hâtives entre Vinh et Luang-Prabang (Décembre 1920–Janvier 1921)," *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois*, n°15, August 10, 1923, 20–21.
60. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°1, May 1922, 5.
61. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°5, September 10, 1922. It is also mentioned that the Director of the Economic Agency of Indochina in Paris (*Agence Economique de*

l'Indochine) has received its first issue fresh off the press and that the *Bulletin* is available in New York.

62. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°1, May 1922, 5.
63. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°1, May 1922, 5.
64. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°1, May 1922, 6.
65. See *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°4, August 1922, "Meeting of the Board of Directors of August 23, 1922. Decision n°7: The Board decides of the immediate opening of a registry of chauffeurs, in which will be reported their names, their license's number, date of delivery, and the opinions of their employers. This registry will be made available to the members of the Union that look for information on the skills of chauffeurs seeking employment."
66. *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois*, n°5, June 1, 1923, 15.
67. *Le Courrier Automobile*, May 1, 1929, 24.
68. "Un enfer évité," originally published in *L'Impartial* and reproduced in *La Revue du Tourisme Indochinois*, n°39, January 25, 1924, 20.
69. Decree n°2520 signed by Albert Sarraut Governor General, dated September 29, 1913, makes mandatory the possession of a driver's license for automobile drivers in Indochina, known as *certificat de capacité* or *brevet de chauffeur*. It sets the exam requirements according to the race and age of the candidate. The certificate is delivered by the Chief of the local administration of the Residence upon the favorable recommendation of the Department of Public Works. The certificate should mention the nature of the vehicles that its holder is authorized to drive. All applications should include a photograph on paper at a sufficient scale so as to allow the identification of the applicant's face. The candidate will be subjected to tests under the direction of an exam committee appointed by the Chief of the local administration, generally comprising an agent of the Public Works as well as a member of the local automobile club. The committee can delegate one or several of its members to examine and subject the candidate to practical tests. According to article 20 of the decree, the skills observed and assessed by the committee are "prudence, self-control, and presence of mind of the candidate, accuracy of the glance, reliability of the steering, dexterity in adjusting speed according to needs, promptness of braking, and the feeling that the candidate has of the requirements of traffic on public roads and his/her knowledge of the regulations applicable to driving his/her car."
70. For one member of the Automobile Club of Cochinchina and Cambodia, writing under the pseudonym of STOP, "we live in a country where 'car drivers,' by this I mean our indigenous drivers exclusively,

have the minds of children [*mentalités d'enfants*], and not the hatred of the pedestrian," in "Une mise au point," *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois*, n°14 (August 3, 1923): 7.

71. E. Moriceau, "Plan d'Organisation de l'UATTNA," *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°2 (June 1922): 5.
72. ANV1, Bibliothèque, J206, *Bulletin Administratif du Tonkin*, Decree n°837 (August 22): 1923, on opening the exams for obtaining the driver's license that gave rights to the title of patented mechanic and ANV1, RST 77769-02, "Création au Tonkin des centres d'examen pour le permis de conduire les véhicules automobiles," 1931–1934.
73. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°4 (August 1922), 5.
74. *Annuaire complet (européen et indigène) de toute l'Indochine, commerce, industrie, plantations, mines, adresses particulières: Indochine, adresses. 1ère année, 1933–1934* (Saigon: A. Portail, 1933), 335.
75. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°4 (August 1922): 4.
76. P. Duclaux, "Réglementation automobile, arrêté du 29 septembre 1913," *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°4 (August 1922): 4 and 1–7.
77. P. Duclaux, "Réglementation automobile, arrêté du 29 septembre 1913," *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°4 (August 1922): 1–7; "Au sujet du brevet de chauffeur," *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°5 (September 1922): 1–3; "Abus de réglementation," *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°6 (October 1922): 2–5; and "Supplique d'un habitant de Ha-Giang à M. Le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin. P.C.C.", *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°6 (October 1922): 6–7.
78. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°4 (August 1922): 4.
79. By way of comparison, at the same time, the Citroën half-track (*Autochenille Citroën*) is the obsession of Henri Blaquière, journalist and businessman in Saigon, also founding member and director of the *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois*, the publication of the Automobile Club of Cochinchina and Cambodia. In his view, the half-track would allow any motorist to make a road without having to rely on the Administration. This ultimate dream of autonomy and independence is a recurring theme in the Cochinchina, where the relief seems less hilly than the north. It also demonstrates the emphasis on individualism in the settler world. Of course, Blaquière's project does not succeed. Only in the early 1930s would Citroën's half-tracks make their way to Indochina, and it would only be as a feat of adventure, not as

the quotidian colonial vehicle dreamed of by Blaquière. See Blaquière, "Variétés: Le tour du monde d'une invention française," *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois*, n°9 (June 29): 1923, 11 and "De la chenille à … La colonisation par le tourisme," *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois*, n°10 (July 6, 1923): 13–14.

80. BNVH, M2722, *Statutes of the UATTNA*.
81. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°4 (August 1922): 5.
82. For lack of a better word. On the oversimplifications it implies, see Christopher E. Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina*, NIAS Classics Series, no. 3 (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), 11.
83. Christopher Goscha, "L'Indochine repensée par les «Indochinois»: Pham Qùynh et les deux débats de 1931 sur l'immigration, le fédéralisme et la réalité de l'Indochine." *Outre-Mers. Revue d'histoire* 82, no. 309 (1995): 421–53, 428.
84. Christopher E. Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina*, NIAS Classics Series, no. 3 (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), 43–45.
85. Christopher E. Goscha, *Going Indochinese*, note 58, 44.
86. Christopher E. Goscha, *Going Indochinese*, 45.
87. *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°4 (August 1922): 5.
88. Survey of 11,300 workers in Saigon and 13,000 workers in Northern Indochina published by the Government General of Indochina, Inspection générale des mines et de l'industrie, service de la Statistique générale de l'Indochine, in *Annuaire statistique de l'Indochine, 1930–1931*, vol. 3. (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1932), 236.
89. "Au sujet du brevet de conducteur," *Bulletin de l'Union Automobile et Touristique de l'Annam Tonkin*, n°5 (September 1922): 1–2.
90. A brief history of the Highway Code (*Code de la Route*) in Indochina: the colonial decree of 1913 legislated traffic all over Indochina while local administrations (provinces and towns, in particular) had already started to monitor motorized mobility in the 1900s. Following the Highway Code of 1921 in France, a Highway Code was created in 1922 in Cochinchina and in 1924 in Tonkin. A unified Highway Code was instated all over Indochina in 1931.
91. ANV1, RST 077769-07, "Dossier concernant l'infraction, la contravention, la sanction pour des propriétaires des voitures sur des routes au Tonkin," letter n°973, ACAT, Hanoi, November 20, 1928.
92. ANV1, RST 077769-07, "Dossier concernant l'infraction, la contravention, la sanction pour des propriétaires des voitures sur des routes au

Tonkin." Fines involve the issue of authority and legitimacy: who can judge of the speed of others? On the issue of eyesight, of the accuracy of assessment of speed and distances, the CAMTAL questioned the abilities of indigenous agents in 1935: "the issue of fining people on sight pose the extremely complex problem of the parallax, which seems beyond the normal understanding of the majority of local agents, even European ones. […] We feel the need to note that the calculation of the speed of an automobile measured by a single indigenous agent is necessarily beyond the limit of its competence," in letter n°2045, CAMTAL to Resident Superior, February 12, 1935.

93. ANV1, Mairie de Hanoi (MDH) 4234, "État nominatif des entrepreneurs de transport en commun à Hanoi en 1931."
94. BNVH, M762, Statutes of the CAMTAL. Its head office is located in the Gallery of the Land Bank (*Galerie du Crédit Foncier*) in Hanoi. Its founding members are Le Roy des Barres, Borzecki, Ducamp, Larrivé, Pelletier, Piton, and Schaeffer.
95. ANV1, RST 077771-01, "Réclamation du Club Automobile et Motocycliste du Tonkin – Annam – Laos relative à l'éclairage des véhicules automobiles," 1934–1936.
96. ANV1, RST 77769-04, "Vœux formulés par l'Automobile Club de l'Annam Tonkin au sujet de la circulation automobile en Indochine en 1932."
97. ANV1, RST 84285, "Établissement d'une signalisation routière sur toutes les voies publiques ouvertes à la circulation permanente des automobiles en Indochine Establishment," 1937–1939.
98. Another corporation born out of the introduction of the autmobile voiced its opinion in an organized manner: the mechanics (*ouvriers mécaniciens*). See ANV1, MDH 4805, "Réclamation des ouvriers du garage Griffe 31 Boulevard Dong Khanh (Hanoi) contre leur patron pour non-paiement de leurs salaires," May 18, 1933.
99. ANV1, RST 077759-01, "Vœux formulés par l'association des chauffeurs annamites de Saigon au sujet de l'obligation imposée aux piétons de se tenir sur le côté droit de la route et la construction de garages comportant des logements pour chauffeurs," letter from the Vietnamese chauffeurs' association dated September 12, 1931. Their representative presents himself as the former president of the Diên-xa-Tuong-Tê association and signs Dang Ngoc Phan.
100. Arrêté du Gouverneur Général du 24 juin 1931, dit Code de la Route en Indochine.
101. ANV1, RST 077759-01, "Vœux formulés par l'association des chauffeurs annamites de Saigon au sujet de l'obligation imposée aux piétons de se tenir sur le côté droit de la route et la construction de garages

comportant des logements pour chauffeurs," letter from the Vietnamese chauffeurs' association dated September 12, 1931.

102. To some extent, this contrasts with the deplorable work conditions of the rickshaw coolies (*cu li xe kéo*), also described in Vietnamese as "human horses" (*nguoi ngua*).
103. ANV1, RST 77759-01, "Vœux formulés par l'association des chauffeurs annamites de Saigon au sujet de l'obligation imposée aux piétons de se tenir sur le côté droit de la route et la construction de garages comportant des logements pour chauffeurs," letter from the Interim Résident Supérieur in Laos, dated December 12, 1931.
104. The Vietnamese drivers of Hanoi formed their own association (*Association amicale des conducteurs d'automobiles de Hanoi*) in 1938, after having asked for and obtained the authorization from the Resident Superior in 1937. They were closely watched by the Sûreté which would monitor their "morality" over the years. However, after 1940, they came up against the new restrictive laws of Vichy. In July 1941, the Governor General's instructions formally prohibited associations from donating, acquiring, or receiving grants other than those of the State and Indochinese budgets, thus removing the provisions for the benefactor and perpetual members of *Amicale*. The Governor General dissolved the association on September 25, 1942. See decree n°4459-A and "Note Postale de la RST à l'Administrateur Maire de Hanoi," July 9, 1941 in ANV1, MDH 2743, " Autorisation de fonctionner l'Association dénommée 'Association amicale des conducteurs d'automobiles de Hanoi'," 1937–1945.

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CHAPTER 5

Writing the Road: Journalistic and Literary Passages and Passengers

Since its early days in Indochina, car travel had placed European drivers and passengers in a privileged position of observer. With the introduction of the automobile in Indochina, the passenger was merely to be transported from point A to point B, with no risk of contamination from the exterior. Mathematically speaking, the passenger was to keep his/her own properties. This was especially true of the way in which female passengers were supposed to travel in the colony. However, combining the conflicting values of speed and depth, adventure and comfort, and danger and safety, automobility transformed the position of the passenger—European or Asian—with regard to his/her environment. Enabling physical and social mobility, the automobile opened a new space where being a passenger was neither passive nor static, but an active and sometimes transformative act, what today's mobility studies have identified as "passengering":

> Alongside the central activity of driving, once you add a passenger cars become places of talk and places where the expectation, unlike an elevator, is that we will talk. Another key component of car passengering might then be an obligation to make passenger talk.[1]

This obligation served one category of passengers in particular: French journalists.

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5.1 The Automobile: A Vehicle for Investigative Journalism

Although just a passenger through South Asia and Southeast Asia, in *Indochine SOS* French journalist Andrée Viollis offers an analysis of the situation that she observed on her road trip through India, which ends in Pondicherry:

> After six weeks of car travel in the South of British India; through a thousand wretched villages, populated by naked peasants, unbelievably thin, with big feverish eyes, I had the pleasant surprise of finding the natives of our tiny colony, well-dressed, well-fed, looking content; to see also children coming out of school, books under their arms. No one was thinking about rebellion. "Why march with Gandhi?" replied the locals to our boys. "We, French citizens, we vote, we happy…"[2]

From India, the journalist quotes the words of the Natives of the French territory of Pondicherry in broken French. The car allowed her to cross thousands of villages and to operate on a large scale but also to keep a degree of detail and local color, the sign of a gap never fully filled by the automobile and that the approximate form of the totalizing quote connotes. The car has functioned as a mobile capsule, facilitating the penetration of the territory but also keeping away local poverty. Even after reaching her destination in Pondicherry, the gap is never fully filled. The contrast between the content of the statement—the assertion of their French citizenship—and the way in which they express themselves demonstrates the ambivalence of the colonial situation that both grants civic rights and imposes immediate limitations, so that the French Indians do not side with Indian independence at the beginning of the 1930s economic depression.

> The economic crisis is hitting Pondicherry like anywhere else, says the governor, and local political passions are raging. But Indians remain attached to us, and even outside our establishments, they show us a true sympathy in the entire peninsula… Proof that our old colonial method of cooperation and equality was not so bad.[3]

It is quite difficult to appraise Andrée Viollis's anti-colonial involvement. According to Nicola Cooper,[4] the equality that Viollis points to is only equality between individuals of the same social class. Similarly, the way in

which Viollis describes Vietnamese individuals as degraded renders problematic her conviction that Frenchmen and Frenchwomen should be the moral tutors of uncivilized Natives. Recent postcolonial critiques of *Indochine SOS* hint at its colonial ideology and rhetoric while they note a kind of patriarchal feminism, despite the author's denunciation of colonial abuses and her sympathy toward Natives who are fighting colonial powers. A reading of her work through the lens of mobility and the historical context shows a more nuanced picture.

In his foreword to *Indochine SOS*, André Malraux recalls the experimental aspect of the narrative, localizing it within the tradition of the nineteenth-century novel's social realism:

> I believe there are very few novelists of our time who have not wandered around reports collected in volumes, who have not felt that, there, a new novel form was being prepared, and who have not so quickly abandoned hope. Reportage continues, however, in one of the strongest lines of the French novel, from Balzac to Zola: the intrusion of a character in a world that he discovers for us while discovering it himself.[5]

In the novel, as in reportage, the relationship to social reality, to truthfulness and true facts, points to the limits of representation and mimesis. Ultimately, the modern novelist would see in reportage the mirror of the industrial world and the constitution of a modern consciousness.

For Andrée Viollis, the trip to Indochina took the form of an unveiling of the situation and of her own position. Arriving in Saigon on October 7, 1931, she visits a prison whose abuses she records two days later. Then on October 12th, she receives a letter, signed by three Annamites who had studied in France[6] and read her *India Against the English* (1930), asking her for a meeting near her hotel:

> I go out. The terrace of the *Continental* where I live overflows on the sidewalks. Since the minister is arriving in three or four days, civil servants and settlers flock to Saigon. White costumes, light dresses, multicolored drinks, fans, jazz. A crowd in front of the stores of Catinat Street. I turn onto a pink road, almost empty, stifling, under an arch of blooming flamboyants. At the corner, three young men, standing in front of a Ford, wave to me.
>
> - Quickly, Madam, says one of them in a hushed voice.
>
> I get in, we start.[7]

The young Annamites choose the automobile to escape from the surveillance of the hotel staff and because "the boys are almost always spies."[8] If these young men were seen with her, they risked arrest. Again, the mobile and intimate capsule of the automobile allow an escape from surroundings that, this time, threaten the discipline of the colonial system. The Ford car opens a space of political unveiling, parallel to the bustle of the colony's administrative and social life, of the visit by Minister of the Colonies Paul Reynaud, that Viollis had precisely come to cover, and that of a modern leisure and consumer society. Here the journalist is taken on a whirlwind ride that changes the geography of the city and disorients her:

> Twists and turns[9] of the car, along streets that all look alike, surrounded by bushy gardens of a poison-green color, in which soak low houses with open galleries. We finally stop in front of a bungalow at the end of a garden. A European lunch awaits us. We are alone, no servants. My hosts resemble yesterday's prisoners: same straight gaze, same smile, and same very soft voices. Without interruption, they tell me how they became nationalists. In France, one has no idea of what is happening here, they tell me.[10]

The automobile where the French journalist finds herself a passenger moves in a way that mimics the manner in which these young men had acculturated themselves to the French way of life through their education at the Sorbonne or Parisian law schools: acceleration, curves, and detours. Much like the passenger in the capsule of the automobile, these former students had been invited into the exclusive circles of their colleagues and professors during their stay in France. There, they created social and political ties and "they believed themselves to be free, citizens like everyone else."[11] But, upon disembarking in Saigon, they face the sad disillusionment of returning to the colony and its social organization: Their left-leaning newspapers are confiscated, they are not allowed to practice the profession for which their studies had trained them, and they are sent to prison if they make their opinion public or travel without a passport. Everyday

> all three emphasize particularly the humiliations to which they are constantly subjected, the degradation of being called "tu," rude remarks; in France, they were treated as equals by eminent men; here, civil servants

> without education or knowledge make no difference between Annamites from a good family, educated, and the boys whom they treat God knows how. They get invited nowhere and do not socialize with any Europeans.[12]

The destination of the trip with the journalist is a location at odds with traditional Vietnamese society: a European lunch without servants, and thus no witnesses. From one intimate space to another, the meeting leads to a revelation of complete and accurate details on political arrests, the conditions of prisons, and the practice of torture, reported by Viollis in direct discourse.

Later, on October 14th, a second meeting with the three young men again begins by a road trip to see a nationalist writer in a village a few kilometers outside of Saigon. This writer, a "returned from France," (*retour de France*)[13] had spent two years in prison, and a Parisian friend had recommended the female journalist to him. The country, seen from the window of the car, is described in an unsurprising way:

> Villages of mud and bamboo huts, under willowy bouquets of coconut trees. Fruit and vegetable markets, so bright they look painted and varnished. Tobacco fields, flooded rice-fields, children squatting on buffaloes.[14]

There is nothing out-of-the-ordinary in this description, as everything looks quite exotic. In this setting, the nationalist writer opens up to Viollis, and his account is similar to those of the students, reinforcing the idea that it is the disciplinary colonial machine that creates revolutionaries. Again, the automobile functions like a mobile vestibule, and the road trip serves as a preamble to confidence. Mirroring the trajectory of the acculturated students in France, the French female journalist has gained access to the closed circles of nationalists and revolutionaries in Vietnam. Suddenly, their conversation is stopped:

> All of a sudden, from the entrance of the garden where we left the car, shouts, a host of awful curse words tossed by coarse voices, the muffled sound of blows…
>
> – Damn s…, confounded c…, get a move on!
>   My companions jump to their feet. I see them suddenly pale, out of breath.

> – It's the district police. They were informed. Our poor comrade, the chauffeur… He is going to lose his driver's license, he will be arrested… And we…
>
> I go out. A fat man in a white uniform, with a large golden stripe on his arm, holds the frail little chauffeur by the shoulders. This latter's hair is ruffled; his torn sleeve is dangling. Another agent is threatening him, holding up a baton. The car is searched; the seat cushions are thrown on the floor.
>
> I move forward, I hold out my card, I state my position of attaché to the mission of the minister. Why rough up my chauffeur?[15]

Quickly, the French journalist de-escalates the situation by producing evidence of her certified status and thus proves the legitimacy of her mobility. Here is a paradox of colonial automobility: it allows for speedy physical travel and a degree of autonomy in so far as colonial authorities sanction it. Thus, Viollis can travel in the shadow of the official visit's itinerary; where the cortège goes with great pomp, the journalist and her chauffeur can follow the trace of empire.

Empire and automobility both operate based on a spatial logic, through the conquest of a faraway territory and the thrill of speed that cancels distances. French automobile travel narratives from Roland Dorgelès to Andrée Viollis demonstrate that the colonial world portrayed from the *métropole* is an illusion, a simulacrum, an element of the nascent "Society of the Spectacle,"[16] in particular after the impact of the colonial exhibits in France.[17] They do so by shocking their readers, by confronting their aesthetic and moral sensibilities with unfamiliar elements, in the mode of the epiphany. What these narratives maintain and use toward political ends is this critical gap: The experience of modernity requires a contemplative approach while the experience of speed abolishes distance. Thus the French reader finds him/herself deep in an immediate and intimate representation of colonial reality. Yet this critical gap, which is simultaneously a social position vis-à-vis colonial order and a modern posture vis-à-vis colonial *mise-en-scène* or staging, is threatened by the effect of speed itself and the diffusion of new technologies.

The appropriation of modern technology by Natives, and in particular by the Vietnamese, led to the expression of an increasing anxiety from the French, as demonstrated in Chapter 3 by the analysis of publications by motorist's associations. This anxiety is also palpable in the accounts of French journalists. As early as 1925, Roland Dorgelès laments: "Roads, telegraph lines, automobiles have upset all the ancient traditions.

The colony has known a greater development in fifteen years than Europe in a century."[18] One particularly worrying effect of modernization is the threat of being overtaken, on the road and in history. As automobile usage spreads in the colony, choosing to use it becomes a political act for Europeans as well as Natives. In the 1920s, the latter seem to prefer the road for both economic and social reasons:

> In Indochina itself, transport companies develop every day at the expense of railways. In Cochinchina notably, the progress of the automobile is quite remarkable. Services providing public automobile transportation benefit from the favor of the indigenous population, whom the railway Administration–an administrative service–has alienated by the strict implementation of an irksome regulation and the rise of fare prices, an increase of which the travelers from the lowest class bear the cost above all, although they represent the most lucrative market, as they make up the vast majority [of passengers] and provide the biggest share of the yield.[19]

This is how journalist, writer, and politician Nguyen Phan Long describes changes in Vietnamese mobility in the 1920s. Founder of the newspaper *L'Echo Annamite*, he also voiced his opinion in articles written in French for other papers. In addition, he was a member of the Indochinese Constitutionalist Party, a group of elite Vietnamese politicians who worked on the frontlines of politics and economics, seeking to convince the French to open positions in public administration and the assemblies. Speaking to the French readers of the *Eveil économique de l'Indochine*, he provides economic and social reasons to explain indigenous behaviors and movements. For him, simply choosing a mode of transportation is a political act. On the rail line between Saigon and Mytho, the rise of third class fares leads hundreds of indigenous travelers to take to the automobile:

> It was thought possible to make the Native pay more for his seat on the railway, and with impunity because of his steady accumulation of wealth; but he, who surely has the right to spend his money as he sees fit, went for the automobile, a more convenient, faster, and less expensive means of transport.[20]

In summary, for Nguyen Phan Long, the Native expresses his critique of the train fare system by changing his way of moving, the way he decides to travel. The Native individual enjoys the potential for mobility brought

about by the colonial automobile system, in which he makes rational choices. In other words, he capitalizes on what social scientists Vincent Kaufmann, Manfred Max Bergman, and Dominique Joye describe as "motility":

> Motility can be defined as the capacity of entities (e.g. goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social and geographical space, or as the way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances.[21]

Earlier, Kaufmann had argued that motility has become an important new form of capital in contemporary societies that can be regarded as relatively autonomous from economic, social, and cultural capital.[22] As modern societies evolve, they create extensive temporal and spatial constraints. Therefore, a degree of motility capital becomes "an indispensable resource to enable people to get around the many spatial constraints that bind them. Quality of life often depends on the ingenuity of the solutions invented and applied."[23] In the case of these Vietnamese colonial passengers, their considerable degree of motility capital is due to what Nguyen Phan Long calls "accumulation of wealth": the economic gains of a certain class of Natives during the 1920s and the rise of a colonial system of automobility (notably through the building of roads, the introduction of vehicles, and the development of public transport companies). Compensating for their deprivation of social capital, they "get around" in automobiles, often on buses owned by Vietnamese or Chinese companies. Conversely, railways had been run by the French administration. Therefore, the way train fares were fixed could be conceived of less as a translation of their use-value and more as a type of tax, an unfair imposition on the Natives' standard of living. On the transportation market, Natives are free to choose the best offer, to "spend their money as they see fit," and to transform money earned from labor into motility capital. Train fares are then the symptom of an unjust system of redistribution:

> [The Native] is happy to have the railways at his disposal, but he does not agree with people's speculating[24] based on his accommodating temper and his willingness to pay what is asked from him. In addition, the train conductors are not usually known for being examples of politeness and helpfulness in their interactions with these d… native paying passengers. And the Annamite, who, like all humans, likes comforts, even when he is traveling, thinks: "Where there's inconvenience, there's no pleasure."[25]

While the French conceived the colonial system of transportation as a way of using the land and the people for the benefit of the *métropole*, Nguyen Phan Long views the economic exploitation of mobility as a political signifier—a signifying way of criticizing this very system by moving oneself, one's body, and one's goods with one's own piasters. Therefore, the best way to protest against their mistreatment onboard is to not take the train.[26] The Vietnamese journalist reminds us that Natives are not taxpayers who are using and benefiting from a public good in this system of exploitation: They are objects of speculation. However, they are also capable of acting as unhappy customers by redirecting their business elsewhere and "voting with their feet" by using car services. Passengering or choosing not to passenger become political acts. A claim for the transformative capacity of mobility choices is itself a sign of the local population's appropriation of the political implications of transport and speed, which are particularly perceptible in cultural productions.

Vietnamese journalists and writers took on these new political and social issues by writing their own reportages, a Western import that rose to prominence as documentary writing became increasingly popular throughout 1930s Vietnam. Due to the acceleration of urbanization, the numerical growth of French-educated youth returning to Vietnam, and the economic boom of the 1920s, serialized publications grew in number and variety during the interwar years.[27] First published in 1932, Tam Lang's *Toi kéo xe* (*I Pulled a Rickshaw*)[28] established the genre. Tam Lang is the pen name of Vũ Đình Chi (1900–1986), an influential journalist from Hanoi, who also wrote under other aliases (Chàng Ba, Ba Phai, Linh Phuong). Tam Lang attributes his start in the genre to when the editor of the *Hanoi Midday News* said to him:

> You have a talent for writing descriptive prose, and the era of investigative journalism is upon us. Others in your profession are going all over the world, investigating events and interviewing people: Albert Londres has gone to Shanghai, Maurice Dekobra is in America, Georges London has arrived at the Turkish-Russian frontier, Louis Charles Royer has gone to Leningrad in the Soviet Union.[29]

Displaying an awareness of the transnational circulation of reportage owing to journalists' increasing mobility, the editor then laments Tam Lang's slaving away in the office. The Vietnamese journalist first reacts with shame and sadness, thinking:

> My young cousin wants to go and work in Cambodia and still hasn't obtained the papers he requested some time ago: Shanghai and New York are further than Cambodia, so how will I be able to go to those places, and in order to do what?
>
> Interviewing and investigating, those two tasks require more than just a talent for descriptive writing. Not until we have put on our walking shoes and picked up a bag of knowledge and another one of money can we take up the staff of the wanderer and talk about such adventures.[30]

Mobility makes journalism investigative. What can one do in the colonial context where geographic mobility seems controlled by the French administration? Tam Lang's response is to move in and around his own society:

> If I can't do it far away, then I should do it close to home.
>
> Thus imitating Maryse Choisy, the French journalist who disguised herself as a maid so that she could work in a brothel and write a book about it, I borrowed a set of working clothes from a laborer, put them on, and adventurously went looking for work in the rickshaw trade.[31]

Tam Lang explicitly acknowledges his French inspiration and chooses a mobile investigative tool that first appeared in Hanoi around 1884, at the same time as the French conquest, with the importation of rickshaws from Japan and Hong Kong.[32] Disguising himself as a rickshaw puller, he chooses an entryway into Vietnamese society that allows him to question the extent of geographical and social mobility in this new era of modernity. He also chooses a genre that expresses a great deal of truth: reportage or *phóng su*. The Vietnamese term can be broken down as *phóng*, meaning "to write after a model" while also signifying "to enlarge," and *su*, which means "event." Reportage thus implies the freedom to aggrandize and to exaggerate the facts so as to make the story more interesting. Much like Malraux's introduction to Viollis's reportage, the phrase *phóng su* points to a form of realism that borrows from fiction. Tam Lang's work shows how people from the middle class could become impoverished, and even become "coolies,"[33] through the example of Tu, a fellow rickshaw puller. Tu recounts his experience of downward mobility: a Confucian scholar from the province of Thái Bình turned "horse-person"—a term commonly used at that time to refer to rickshaw pullers—opium addict, and pimp in Hanoi. Who is to blame for Tu's degradation?

> I dare say you would answer honestly as follows: 'Society is to blame.'
>
> According to its strict meaning, 'society' is all of the people who come from the same origins and who all live together under the same system, and that includes you and me.
>
> Yes, you and me, all of us are equally at fault.[34]

Tam Lang's work explicitly criticizes society and thus needs to define what society means in this new era; it marks the end of the Confucian order and hierarchy by unifying its readers and author in a group of equals that are equally at fault. The text displays a new awareness of the individual's place in this modern, mobile context. Even before this conclusion, the active first person in the title *Toi kéo xe* breaks with the traditional order, as Greg Lockhart points out:

> No coolie would have declared 'I pulled a rickshaw'. He would have simply said, 'I am a rickshaw puller'. And so the really surprising thing about Tam Lang's 'I' is that it is associating someone who is higher than a rickshaw puller with a rickshaw and, by implication, making a *democratic-social* declaration of an affiliation with low-class people who pull rickshaws.[35]

Tam Lang's title implies a new social order, new categories of self- and collective identity that encompass and include everyone as if they were of equal status. His use of the active first-person voice in *Toi kéo xe* is subversive, providing a perspective from the bottom up and suggesting the emergence of a new sense of society and national identity. Tam Lang attempts to provide a realistic portrayal of the life of the poor and to engage his readers with the contradictions of colonial society: "the stark contrasts between rich and poor, humanity and cruelty, and between the promises of modernity and the 'backwardness' of reality."[36]

Journalist and writer Vũ Trong Phung, who earned the nickname of *ông vua phông su* ("king of reportage")[37] took on these contradictions. He also claimed Maryse Choisy as the inspiration in his work on "Household Servants,"[38] published in March 1936:

> But what about a long work of reportage on household servants?
>
> Why not! Not long ago, Maryse Choisy donned the garb of a maid, and wrote a long reportage, *Carnet d'une femme de chambre*, 1933, which was not without value for social scientists.[39]

At the end of his investigative piece as domestic servant, Vũ Trong Phung thus articulates the value in the social realism of reportage:

> A rickshaw puller knows all the cruelty of human beings far better than a scholar. A room-boy knows more about the debauchery of humanity than a surgeon. A servant understands more clearly the behavior of human beings than a realist writer.[40]

To tell the truth of modern life, the writer of reportage has to become the rickshaw puller, the room-boy, or the servant. Yet, there is a contradiction between life and literature, as it had been known in Vietnam so far. Vũ Trong Phung explains that the things that he learned during his immersion are "all very bizarre, all so crude and senseless that no one will dare to believe them."[41] So outrageous and immoral are these events that they are not fit to print in traditional literature that he continues: "Novels tell us things that people say is fiction. In life, on the other hand, there are things that a novel wouldn't want to report." How then does one write truthfully for his readers? Ending his reportage with a reflective chapter entitled "I Am Me," Vũ Trong Phung sums up his position as a writer this way: "I can invent stories that you will believe, or I can tell you true stories that you will think I have made up."[42]

5.2 The Automobile in Vietnamese Colonial Literature: A Literary Vehicle for "Invented Stories That You Will Believe"

Vũ Trong Phung's novels told stories that, although exaggerated, captured the attention of a wide audience. *Sô đo*, or *Dumb Luck*, first published in Hanoi in 1936, is a bitter satire of the rage for modernization in Vietnam under French colonialism.[43] It tells the absurd and unexpected rise within colonial society of a street-smart vagabond named Red-haired Xuân. As it follows Xuân's odd social ascent, the novel provides a panoramic view of colonial urban social order, from the underside, from the filthy sidewalks of Hanoi's old commercial quarter to the gaudy mansions of the emergent Francophile upper classes. Its characters are obsessed with sex, fashion, and Western consumer goods, such as the automobile. Cars function as signals of wealth and narrative indicators, deictic elements of the here and now of wealth. They tellingly opening

several chapters of the novel, appearing as precursors of wealthy and powerful characters:

> Just then, a sleek automobile pulled up in front of the tennis stadium bringing Miss Civilization, her beanpole husband and his aunt Mrs. Deputy Customs Officer to play tennis. The back door opened, and out stepped a hefty woman in her mid-forties, made up like a fashionable young seductress. Her face was caked with powder and lipstick, and her newly permed jet-black hair fell in tiny ringlets from beneath an elegant and equally tiny scarf. […] After her came a young man dressed like a Western tourist. He was tall and very thin, with a pronounced Adam's apple, bulging bug eyes, and a mop of frizzy hair.[44]

Cars almost never miss a beat. Tumbling down, roaring in a cloud of dust, they mark the arrival of the modern, Westernized, and therefore laughable, Vietnamese bourgeois:

- "Out on the street a car pulled up in front of the station. Mrs. Deputy Customs Officer entered the front office …"[45]
- "The car honked like the grunt of a wild boar […] The car pulled up in front of a twelve-step cement stairway that led to the front door of the house. The driver got out of the car and opened the back door."[46]
- "The clock struck twelve. Mr. and Mrs. Civilization drove to a restaurant for lunch, accompanied by several modern-looking women and a handful of students recently returned from studies abroad."[47]
- "Frightened and flustered, Miss Snow followed Xuân to the Japanese gate. As they passed through it, the car of Mrs. Deputy Customs Officer pulled in front of the hotel. Mrs. Deputy Customs Officer jumped out of the car and called out the name of Miss Snow."[48]
- "She hopped back into her car and sped off, a fugitive from love. Red-haired Xuân bade farewell to the Fairyland Hotel and returned to the Europeanization Tailor Shop on foot."[49]
- "The sound of car horns outside the gate put an abrupt end to [Mrs. Deputy Customs Officer's] tantrum."[50]

At the end of the narrative, the car also announces the arrival of the most powerful agent of civilization in late-colonial society:

> The sound of a car parking and footsteps approaching the house roused [Grandpa Hông] from his sleep. Everybody looked out the window and saw a uniformed Frenchman enter the house. He had stripes on his sleeves and wore a sword hanging from a gold belt. A wave of fear passed through the house.[51]

All throughout the novel, traditional relations are upset. Here the French officer has come to congratulate Xuân, the former street vagrant, and offering him the Legion of Honor on behalf of the Governor General and informing him that the imperial courts in Huê and Bangkok each plan to award him honors. Traditional Vietnamese class relations and gender relations are disrupted by the growth of colonial capitalism, and the automobile functions both as material signifier of new wealth and as a narrative device that announces disruptions, accelerations, and upsets in the plot.

The car plays a preeminent role in *Lam di*, or *To Be a Whore*, also published in 1936 by Vũ Trong Phung. The novel follows the descent of Huyên, a young woman from a good family, into prostitution, based on a Freudian reading of the development of female sexuality and a sociocultural approach to the changing conditions of modernization. The protagonist recounts how her libidinous drive was frustrated time and time again through her repressive education and an unhappy marriage. In his study of Vũ Trong Phung's trajectory, Peter Zinoman gives a compelling reading of the Freudian elements of the text and also shows how *To Be a Whore* links the expansion of prostitution in Indochina to:

> broader cultural and socioeconomic changes associated with the onset of modernity. The most significant is the spread throughout Vietnamese society of *chu nghĩa vât chât*–literally "materialism" in the sense of an inflated yearning for modern consumer goods and a new Westernized lifestyle.[52]

Huyên's infatuation with consumer goods, fashionable clothes, Western food, phonographs, radios, and automobiles follows her trajectory through adulthood, incest, adultery, and prostitution. The protagonist is financially well-off throughout most of the narrative; thus her fall into prostitution cannot be read as an expression of labor relations through a Marxist lens. Zinoman argues that the novel suggests that "colonial capitalism fosters the generalized growth of an acquisitive mentality that fuses a desire for commodities with a wanton craving for sex."[53] Automobiles play a particularly important role in this conflation. Huyên

feels both attracted to them as modern consumer goods and morally compromised by the erotic sensations that they stimulate. The car becomes a meeting point for her adulterous affair with Tân. His shiny new automobile turns out to be an erotic heaven for her:

> The car was a truly magical instrument. It saved time and offered complete privacy. So many times we experienced the ecstasy of love, in a total and complete way, inside that car on the outskirts of the city … and no one on the outside had even the faintest idea what we were doing. Tân[54] would stop the car along the side of the road, turn on the green and red parking lights, and then… "Do you love me? Kiss me please! … We often finished before the engine had had time to cool. Tân would then start up the motor – thì-xình-xình-xình – and we would speed at one hundred kilometers per hour back to the city… I will never forget those happy days. I didn't feel bad about cheating on my husband since it all seemed so romantic, like in a film or in a novel.[55]

In *To Be a Whore*, the car, a Western import that came to benefit French colonists, becomes a mobile capsule that fosters intimacy and keeps away disagreeable things and people, a vehicle that not only shortens distances but also creates more leisure time for a new, modern, Vietnamese subject.[56]

The acceleration of transportation and the diffusion of the technologies of speed accompanied the birth of a Francophone Vietnamese literature. In 1921, two years before his article on "the struggle between railway and the automobile," the transport-minded journalist Nguyen Phan Long, also a writer, published the first Vietnamese novel in French: *The Novel of Miss Lys* (*Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*). Here, the automobile becomes simultaneously the key place for the diegetic unfolding of the text, acting as a mobile antechamber where the female Vietnamese protagonist and passenger can face her consciousness and where the developments of the plot are prepared, and also a new lens through which changes in the landscape and speed are perceived. In *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, Nguyen Phan Long presents an "essay on the evolution of contemporary Annamite mores"[57] by adopting the viewpoint of a young woman from the Vietnamese elite. The novel offers ethnographic presentations of local cultures and explicit references to a historical and cultural context unknown to its non-Vietnamese, French-speaking readers. In addition, it presents cultural conflict to a dual audience that is identified explicitly as Other, an audience of Vietnamese and French readers who both ostensibly understand French but inevitably fail to

grasp each other's subtle but meaningful inflections. As a consequence, a distant *métropole* could be identified as the target audience,[58] and the novelist appears as an informant in the liminal or "contact zones" shared by Europeans and Natives, such as their means of transportation.

Presented as a diary written by Hai, a young woman from Cochinchina who is returning to her hometown after eight years at a French school in Saigon, the text shows her French acculturation through her feeling of alienation from Vietnamese culture, with a particular disdain for the role of women in Confucian tradition. This alienation toward her Vietnamese environment is best expressed by the way she chooses to move around the traditional space of the village. The car becomes her ideal means of transport in order to go through the drudgery of the New Year's visits:

> Whatever pride we take in following the train, we are always from our own little village in some way.
>
> Our car goes at fast speed and drops us off in front of the cai-nhàs,[59] from which we exit almost immediately, having to complete a very full schedule. Each time, new greetings, resending of reciprocal wishes, stereotypes in the same fixed smile and in invariable clichés.[60]

The narrator insists on the inertia and weight of traditions ("always," "little village," "cai-nhàs," "resending," "stereotypes," "same," "fixed," "invariable clichés") that cannot be erased by the speed of the automobile. The contrast between traditional heaviness and modern speed is reflected in the train metaphor, simultaneously the pace of fashion, the spirit of the times, and a means of transport. Transportation will thus transport the young woman to a place of her past and express her Westernization. It can even become a defensive weapon. When she mistakenly tries to eat a decorative element nestled in the middle of the food at a wedding banquet, her faux pas is noticed by a group of young women at her table, who ruthlessly make fun of her. In this case, vengeance is a dish best served cold (and on wheels):

> These little fools followed me with their taunts right up to the door of our automobile. They do not even have one! They were all going home on foot. At least, that is one advantage I have on them. As we overtook them, I had the pleasure to see our car cover their beautiful clothes with dust. There is nothing quite like a little revenge![61]

Owning a car is in itself a sign of wealth, and the dust stirred up by the automobile to enshroud the village women who had teased Hai thus materializes and demonstrates the social power that she has gained as a Westernized agent by literally covering and overtaking the backward pedestrians. Thanks to her access to the technology brought by the French, Hai is able to get the final word and humiliate these women. There is power in ostentation, as it physically marks the traditionally clothed bodies of the pedestrians with the motorist's superiority over them. The new automobile leaves the past in the dust.

A cultural counterpoint to the celebration of the Vietnamese New Year, the episode of the Bastille Day parade in Cantho offers a new display of the ostentatious power of Western technology. Hai takes part in the patriotic parade, which counts among its folkloric elements an Alsatian woman and a Gallic rooster standing on top of a vanquished German eagle. The protagonist lines up and stands out:

> Ahead, a small car, driven by a cute Alsatian woman whose black winged headdress seemed to symbolize the grief of the mutilated Fatherland, then, going slowly in single file, automobiles among which ours was noticed a lot for its original character, horse-drawn carriages, tilburies whose rustic shapes were cleverly hidden under flowers and foliage, planes, tanks, and floats of the Chinese congregations.[62]

The image recalls the 1908 car expedition by Ferdinand d'Orléans between Saigon and Angkor: combining Western technology and an Asian landscape, a motorcade in Indochina seemingly enacts the reunification between France and Alsace, its territory lost to Germany. In the literary tableau, Hai is deemed worthy of being both displayed in juxtaposition to French symbols and celebrated for her contrast. This paradoxical relationship of Hai to France and its history is echoed inside the automobile during a conversation between Hai and Mlle. Mellin, her French piano teacher. Their relationship proves ambivalent, as the narrator describes herself in competition not only with other participants in the parade but also with her fellow passenger:

> It is imperative that I not pale too much in comparison to Mlle. Mellin, who must take part with me in the parade of floats in our automobile flanked by two flower and foliage dragons fighting over a great golden orb.

> What a striking contrast! A fantastic animal, birthed of the Asiatic imagination, straddling one of the most wonderful creations of Western science! And what a success in sight![63]

The dragon and the automobile, allegories for Asian imagination and Western science, also underscore the contrast between the two women. Marveling at the production of Western civilization and dreading an unflattering comparison, the narrator presents ambiguous feelings toward her collaboration with the French. The motorcade becomes a site and a symbol of the advantages and limits of the policy of *association* for the elite Vietnamese vis-à-vis the French authorities. While Hai's experience of covering her tormentors in dust remains a great triumph for her, it is only possible at the expense of her relationship with potential allies. The young woman fails to create and maintain a critical distance, a gap. Unknowingly, she achieves a pyrrhic social victory: "A triumph on all fronts! We scattered a lot of flowers, each and everyone had their share. Naturally, we talked about each other a little behind their backs here and there, just to gently badmouth good friends, without any mischief."[64]

The automobile also brings modernity into the home of the young Vietnamese woman in the form of the French piano teacher whom Hai sends for everyday: "Our car goes every morning to her house to pick her up and bring her here. But the fingering exercises are so fastidious and so tiresome that we gladly cut short our sessions with long conversations."[65] As Hai admits, Mlle. Mellin is not so much a piano teacher as she is the voice of French modernity. Her speech evokes the automobile as an agent of change and a site of disruption for its passengers. She is the first character in the novel to question the idea of progress and its effects on human relationships:

> Since [the time of Mme. de Sévigné], the courteous kiss of the hand has been replaced by the democratic hand-shake. We have invented the railway, the automobile, the airplane. Woman has lost the scepter of her fragile royalty; she has become the equal of man, even his competition. […] In public cars, male travelers are no longer willing to give their seats to women, as they used to in the old days. Is this an improvement with which we should pleased or a decadence that we should lament? I do not know. The fact remains. To be or not to be, here is the law of the contemporary world.[66]

This disillusionment with the West and the nostalgic anxiety over technology and progress are set in contrast with Hai's view of history, as seen through the trope of the automobile. Car travel allegorically represents Hai's embrace of what she regards as modern and French ways of doing things:

> As far as I am concerned, I have no history; my past as a spoiled child does not show to my memory any single accident, plain like the green tablecloth of rice-fields, alongside which our automobile runs without bumps, at an even speed, a wind so new that I cannot quite realize what I am feeling.[67]

Motion, speed, and distance in the landscape, all have an impact on the senses of the female passenger as she moves forward in history. The faraway objects seem to be immobile, while the trees and rice fields that are closer melt into a "green tablecloth," a level landscape, and create the feeling that Hai is running smoothly toward the future. In this manner, motion parallax affects the way the young, female passenger relates to progress on board the foreign vehicle of association with the French. As an automobile passenger, she views objects that are closer to her, such as her childhood, as moving faster than objects that are farther away, such as history, blurring the former into an indiscernible mass. This perspective, although full of confidence, is nothing but an optical illusion created by speed. Later in the novel, it is shattered by Hai's seduction and rejection by a self-serving Frenchman who is interested in her parents' wealth. Again, the automobile features as an agent and site of realization: a road trip with her father toward the ancient ruins of Angkor leads her to confront the past.[68] The vision of the landscape passing by and the stasis of the temple indirectly provoke her self-reflection and reconciliation.

In 1921, when the book is published, Nguyen Phan Long sees no interest in liberation from French domination, and his novel does not send a discordant message to its French readers. His edifying narrative of a Westernized Vietnamese woman's disillusionment can also be read by his French audience as a guarantee that, even if she is seeking association with French colonialism, the narrator can still relate to the conservative elements of tradition and keep to her place as an exotic passenger in the French motorcade that is carrying her toward progress. By

adopting automobile transport, the elite narrator risks making her social power excessively tangible to other Vietnamese, as motion parallax blurs her vision of history and leads her to the wrong track. Underscoring the multiple facets of this new technology, the car also allows her to claim a distant past, albeit a Khmer one, restored[69] or "*mis en valeur*" by the French as a touristic attraction and a symbol of past splendors. In Nguyen Phan Long's text, the allegorical car thus reassures its French readership, displaying its characters' anxieties over the acceleration of progress and ultimately resolving them, as the association between the French and their technology seems to arrive at a point of equilibrium, at least on paper.

In Pham Van Ky's 1947 novel *Blood Brothers*[70] (*Frères de Sang*), the literal juxtaposition of Western modernity against the exotic backdrop of Indochina is pushed to the extreme, resulting in a car crash, the paroxysm of the encounter between the Native and the "good import"[71] item. Although the accident takes place before the beginning of the story, it is fundamental in structuring the plot. Based on a similar premise as Nguyen Phan Long's novel, the narrator of *Frères de Sang* is a young man who returns to his hometown in northern Vietnam after years of study in France. The Westernized protagonist becomes reacquainted with his family and friends, including Lê Tâm, his "blood brother":

> One thing was certain: there was nothing in common between him and me. I refused to lay blame on one side in the conflict between the East and the West. It would have been childish, furthermore, to make Lê Tâm a victim of this conflict: an automobile had side-swept him while he was crossing the Mandarin Road for the first time in his life, accustomed as he was to the safety of local walking paths and other pedestrians. An automobile? What a diabolical invention! The only mechanics that he knew of were the fulfillment of man's fate and the course of the seasons. Of speed, he only knew that of the day which follows the night. The West had been for him but a continent on which the sun sets.[72]

Again, the automobile embodies a clash between cultures. In the narrator's perspective, the evil mechanisms of the West overtook the natural mechanisms of a pre-colonial world. The always-imminent disruption of the car replaces the safety and comfort of days chasing nights, what Paul Virilio described when he quoted 1930s philosopher Gaston Rageot: "with speed, man has invented new types of accidents. […] The fate of

the automobile pilot has become a question of pure luck."[73] The diagnostic drawn in France is even more severe in colonial Indochina. The irruption of the modern automobile in the rural region represented in the novel is an accident twice over. First, the appearance of an automobile in remote parts of the country was still a rare occurrence in the 1940s. Secondly, the chances of a traffic accident increased due to their rarity and rural pedestrians' lack of familiarity with these machines.

Written from France, where Pham Van Ky had been exiled since 1938, this novel represents a paradox: The accident might now be the only certainty on the Vietnamese road. The image of the traffic accident also underscores the failure of a teleological view of colonial history that tried to forge a discourse in which the relationship between France and Indochina was predestined and parallel to the development of transport technology. In which direction does the road run: toward accidents and the West? Who benefits from a road built by Natives for French colonists? Who benefits from a technology created by the French and imposed on Natives?

5.3 The Automobile in Marguerite Duras's *The Sea Wall*: A Literary Vehicle for Colonial Desire and Disappointment

Looking back on these issues from France, Marguerite Duras's first Indochinese book, *The Sea Wall* (*Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*),[74] is set in the colonial context. Although it was published in 1950, during the First Indochina War, the novel tells a story inspired by Duras's childhood in Cochinchina in the 1920s and 1930s. Marguerite Duras was born in Gia Định in 1914 to French parents who settled there as civil servants. Scholars have given deserved attention to the historical and social context evoked by *The Sea Wall* as well as to its critical reception. Jane Bradley Winston's chapter on cultural placing[75] and Panivong Norindr's work on the colonial city[76] have particularly focused on Duras's representation of colonial space. They both demonstrate how power relations frame space in the novel. The story of a French family composed of Suzanne, her mother, and brother as it struggles to build seawalls to protect their concession, *The Sea Wall* can also be read as a history of colonial mobilities. Colonial means of transportation and communication infrastructures frame the plot. Although never successfully undertaken

and achieved by the mother's private initiative, the eponymous seawall is by definition a structure to defend against flooding (*un ouvrage d'art* or *un ouvrage de retenue d'eau*) and aimed at regulating the ebb and flow of the sea, in short, to control mobilities. Duras's figurations of the road network in the novel also stand as structures of control and division specific to colonial domination, and road traffic demonstrates the asymmetrical power relations and the economic oppression of the colonial situation. In particular, the road to Kam runs across the narrow plain, separating the protagonist's French family on one side from the peasants from the hills on the other. "In principle, it had been constructed to drain off the future riches of the plain to Ram,"[77] but the plain has no riches. The road only serves as a playground for children or is used by hunters. Nobody else drives by. Suzanne can only fantasize about a chance encounter on the road:

> The day would come when a car would at last stop in front of the bungalow. Suzanne was sure of it. A man or a woman would get out to ask something, or to have her or Joseph give them assistance. Suzanne could not very well imagine what information they could ask for: in the whole plain, there was only one road, this one, which went from Ram to the city, by way of Kam.[78]

This dream encounter evokes the disruptive, upsetting, or accelerating qualities of the automobile in daily life. Suzanne longs for a vehicle to whisk her away from the plain where she is stuck in poverty with her abusive mother. Starting with the *incipit*, *The Sea Wall* immobilizes and invites us to reexamine mobility, automobility, and automobility in all of the facets that we have observed through previous analyses: knowledge and conquest of the land, self-determination and French identity, use of the road in relation to other road users, and critical distance.

> All three of them had thought it was a good idea to buy that horse, even if Joseph could earn with it no more than his cigarette money. To begin, it was an idea–which showed them they were still capable of having ideas. Then, owning a horse made them feel less lonely, for it linked them to the outside world. Thanks to the horse, they could still manage to get something out of that world: not much, in fact pitifully little, but all the same something that had not been theirs till then, and they could bring it to their isolated piece of the salt-soaked plain, to the three of them soaked in boredom and bitterness.[79]

The novel opens with an immobile and immobilizing image that seems to stop the plot in its tracks. The pluperfect, the past of the past, marks the return, the backward movement, embodied by the horse, an outmoded means of transport. It also signals the failure of a business that did not yield the expected results. Indeed, the horse, the original colonial mode of terrestrial transport, dies without being replaced by a better vehicle.[80] The failure of the principle of colonial exploitation is also patent: To colonize is to extract local riches and transport them in a single direction—away, with no turning back. In opposition to the economic extraction that mines the land stands another abstraction, the process of distancing ideas from objects and the circulation of these ideas. But the *incipit* warns us that "they," an abstraction corresponding to the mother and her two children, still have ideas. They are still able to be and to participate in the world, and the novel will relate their ideas and efforts.

To stay linked to the exterior world is in fact to fight against distance. However, colonial conquest was sustained by space, the availability of space and the unlimited potential of land to be discovered, as represented by the blanks left on maps. Space, during the long history of Western colonization, had seemed an unlimited resource. Until the very last days of imperial expansion at the turn of century, there had been a space that was considered unknown, unspoiled, and to be conquered. For sociologist and geographer Henri Lefebvre,[81] there is a link between the exhaustion of space in modernist art, novels, poems, and films, on the one hand, and, on the other, a realization that the limitations of space in the world will cause new anxieties for capitalist societies. Yet imperialism aims to eliminate all empty spaces. In Duras's novel, the resolution of this dialectic relationship is found in an incessant movement, the capacity for mobility or motility of individuals and goods that is materialized in transportation: "A great thing, the carrying trade! Even from a wasteland where nothing would grow, it was still possible to squeeze out something by ferrying across this wasteland people who lived elsewhere and were part of the living world."[82] For the narrator, what matters in daily, colonial life is less territory than mobility. The quality of the soil, even if in a desert, gains value only once it is traveled over. This is the lesson of *The Sea Wall*. The horse had been bought in order to commodify mobility and to make a profit from it, and it was Joseph, the son, who "had the idea of earning a little money this way."[83] Although penniless, the family is rich with abstractions, with ideas that can remove the sterile characteristics of space, in this case

distance, and that will remove the family from their own space too, or so they hope. At first, the transportation ideas formulated by the family function as an abstraction of distance, and eventually as an abstraction of the characters themselves by their desires, ideas, and wishful thinking. For Lefebvre, capitalism also functions by making space abstract, particularly through the process of colonization: it empties colonized space of its geographical, historical, and cultural particularities and homogenizes it. For Duras's characters, abstraction is the only way to participate in the necessary circulation of capitalism that is supported by the colonial system. To counter the capitalist extraction and their exclusion from its profits, they have ideas, a surplus of ideas. This family is rich with ideas and, as Joseph reminds us at the end of the first part of the novel: "If we want it we can be as rich as the next one. Hell, all we got to do is want it, and we're rich."[84] The best demonstration of this type of wealth in their world, where land is sterile and ungenerous, is the characters' desire for paroxysmal mobility:

> "Maybe so," said Ma, "if we really want to, we'll be rich."
>
> "Hell, yes," said Joseph. "And then we'll show the others! We'll run over them on the roads. No matter where we find them, we'll run them down, we'll flatten them out!"
>
> Joseph sometimes worked himself up like this. And when it happened – rarely, it is true–it was almost better than the movies.
>
> "Ho, as to that, yes," said Ma, "we'll run them down, we'll flatten them down, we'll tell them what we think, and we'll flatten them out…"
>
> "And we'll not give a damn if we flatten them out," said Suzanne. "And we'll show them what we have but we–we'll not give them one little thing, I'll say we won't!"[85]

The most violent and patent way of claiming one's place in colonial society is to take the place of another: literally, to crush them.

To read this novel according to lines of mobility involves following the tracks of Joseph, the automobile and automobile character of the family. Winston and Norindr highlighted the paths taken by young Suzanne. By following cars, their drivers and their passengers, we are pointed to another circuit for desires. The car has been part of the family since its arrival: "[Ma] had now been on the plain for six years. It was six years since Ma and Joseph and Suzanne had arrived there in that Citroen car, which they still had: 'the B-12,' as they called it."[86] The B-12 is the faithful companion to this déclassé trio, embedding the three characters

into the colonial automobile system. They have their place on the road and each one has a role to play. Joseph is the automobile character, the one who seems to be the most in control of his movements, as well as the chauffeur and mechanic of the family. All of his activities are dedicated to creating and accessing mobility:

> Ever since his horse had died, he busied himself interminably with the B-12, washing it when nothing was wrong with it which required repair. He never looked towards the bungalow. When he tired of the B-12, he went off in the countryside to look, he said, for another horse. When he was not looking for another horse, he went to Ram for no reason except the better to flee the bungalow.[87]

His motility, his mobility capital, is such that, according to Suzanne, he is able to drive all sorts of cars.[88] Although he sleeps with all of the women of the plain whom he drives in his chariot,[89] he has "eyes only for motorcars."[90] In fact, Suzanne is not the only one who longs for a motorist to whisk her away; Joseph is also waiting for a car, his own car and female driver:

> Joseph, too, was waiting for a car to stop in front of the bungalow. The car he was waiting for would be driven by a platinum blonde who smoked English cigarettes and wore lipstick and rouge. She, for instance, might begin by asking him to mend a flat tire.[91]

Both siblings are on the "lookout for motorcars;"[92] borrowing the vocabulary of hunters, they also hunt.

As predators, they know exactly what type of cars and what type of car owners they are dealing with. No details escape them when they see a vehicle worth noting:

> On their arrival at the Ram canteen, they saw, parked in the courtyard, a magnificent seven-seater black limousine. Sitting inside it, a liveried chauffeur was patiently waiting. None of them had ever seen the car before. It could not belong to any of the big-game hunters, for they usually rode in convertible cars.[93]

When Joseph approaches the black limousine of the wealthy M. Jo for the first time, he studies his prey:

> Joseph jumped out of the B-12 and slowly drew near, walking round the big car. Then, standing in front of the engine, he examined it for a long time, much to the astonishment of the chauffeur.
>
> "It's a Talbot or a Léon Bollée," said Joseph, not being able to make out the name.[94]

The verbs (to jump, to draw near, to walk round) and their lexical field demonstrate Joseph's animalistic response to the black limousine, an astonishing reaction, as demonstrated by the surprised chauffeur. Joseph's response is primarily physical; then, as he circles the car, he recalls potential brands and finally observes the engine. He must now meet the owner, so he abruptly greets Père Bart, the owner of the restaurant in Ram: "'You've got some swell customers today,' said Joseph. 'Cripes, that big limousine…'"[95] Joseph picks up on the ostentatious value of the automobile, which belongs to the son of a northern planter, newly returned from Paris. His ethnicity is unidentified. Duras later explained that she could not reveal the Asian identity of the person upon whom he was based for fear of shocking her mother.[96] In this scene, the owner of the car displays the "cultural goodwill"[97] of the petite bourgeoisie through his conversation as well as his physiognomy or *habitus*, to follow Bourdieu's terminology. As mannered as he is, with his beautiful and expensive clothes and ring, what remains apparent are the efforts that he puts into his outfit: "The planter from the North did not dance too badly. He danced slowly, carefully, academically, trying to impress Suzanne, perhaps, with his good manners and consideration."[98] The poor French family from the plain pick up on all of these social cues. Tellingly, in this first encounter, while Monsieur Jo, "the northern planter," tries to get to know her with questions about her background, Suzanne only asks him about one thing, the automobile, his status symbol: "Is that your car outside? […] Where did you get it? […] What kind of car is it? […] What horsepower is it? […] How much does a Maurice Léon Bollée cost?"[99] It is the whole automobile system—from its mechanical potential to its market and social value—that is uncovered by the young woman. When she brings him back to her family's table, her brother pursues the interrogation about the automobile:

> "What horsepower is a truck like yours?"
> "Twenty-four," said Monsieur Jo, carelessly.
> "Jesus! Twenty-four horsepower! Four speed gears, of course?"
> "Yes, four."

> "You can start off in second easy as not?"
> "Yes, if you like, but it's hard on the gears."
> "And she keeps to the road?"
> "At eighty kilometers an hour, she rides like an armchair. But I'm not very fond of this car. I have a two-seater roadster, and I can make a hundred in that car without any trouble."
> "How many liters per hundred?"
> "Fifteen on the road. Eighteen in town."[100]

Joseph questions the planter as a driver, as he himself is the chauffeur of the family and the pilot of their travels. The rapid succession of questions and answers demonstrates the advanced technology of the Léon Bollée. As its technical characteristics are listed, so is the distinction of its owner. However, the thread of discussion maintains both a link and a distance between the two men. When the planter returns the questions to Joseph about his own vehicle, the fast pace of the conversation is broken by silence, followed by Joseph's laughter, since it is "not worth talking about."[101] The ordinary car does not deserve to be detailed, its qualities verbalized, yet the literary text does just that. As their discussion shows, the car makes the man.

Yet the mother, always seeking solace from their misadventures and blind to the process of colonial domination that crushes her, reckons that they have "a good old Citroën that has been of great utility. For the road, it is good enough."[102] However, as Joseph immediately reminds her, it is neither the object nor the territory that matter, but mobility and thus the use of the car: "Easy to see that you don't often drive it." The mother mistakenly sees value in land, and that mistake is what led her to buy her concession from the colonial State and then to persist in trying to develop it. The son sees value in mobility, although he cannot control it fully. So he pursues the conversation, now comparing the other planter's other car with the family Citroën:

> "And the roadster?" asked Joseph.
> "What?"
> "What about its consumption of gasoline? How many liters per hundred kilometers does it make?"
> "More," said Monsieur Jo. "Eighteen on the road. It's a thirty horsepower."
> "Cripes!" said Joseph.
> "Citroens use less, I believe?"
> Joseph laughed loudly. He finished his glass of champagne and poured himself another. He looked ready, now, to burst with laughter.

> "Twenty-four," said he.
> "My goodness!" said Monsieur Jo.
> "But I can explain that," said Joseph.
> "It's a lot."
> "A lot more than twelve," said Joseph. "But wait till I tell you… The carburetor's a sieve."[103]

The family bursts out laughing, a reaction which destabilizes Monsieur Jo. The mother and Suzanne join in the farce and their exchanges deconstruct the "inexhaustible"[104] B-12 in spare parts, from the radiator to the tires filled with banana leaves. Their automobile thus becomes part-nature and also part-native, just as their Malaysian servant, the Corporal,[105] becomes one with the machine:

> "We, when we go for a ride," said Joseph, "we fasten the Corporal to the mudguard with a watering can beside him–" He hiccupped between the words.
> "And in the place of a headlight–he's the headlight, too–the Corporal is our radiator and our headlight," said Suzanne.[106]

The family's social downgrading is far advanced, and their automobile embodies their situation. Seamlessly, Joseph moves from the car to the sea walls: "But the car's not the only thing! Remember the sea walls… the seawalls…"[107] The Sea Wall is merely another abstraction of the impoverished French family, "an idea no one else could have had"[108] according to Suzanne. The car, too, is a source of abstractions. Eventually, this encounter with Monsieur Jo ends with them telling their story, "the story of all the land-holders on the plain. […] It was a huge joke and a huge misfortune. It was terrible and it was screamingly funny."[109]

After sharing the intimate space of a dance, M. Jo proposes to Suzanne that she share the even more intimate space of his car, but Suzanne neutralizes the sexual and racial implications of the car's interior by insisting that her mother accompany them. Joseph, however, does not hesitate to try the car by force:

> While Monsieur Jo's chauffeur got out and held open the door, Joseph climbed into the Léon Bollée, started the engine, and for five minutes tried the gears. Then, swearing, he got out and without saying goodbye to Monsieur Joseph he affixed his hunter's lamp to his head, started the B-12 by cranking it, and went off alone.[110]

Contrary to his mother and sister, who endlessly wait, Joseph embodies movement and decisiveness: "that's all we do: wait. But one things we can do is to decide we're not going to wait any longer."[111] Yet he lacks speed in his old Citroën; the Léon Bollée can make the trip to Ram in half an hour in contrast with the hour required by the B-12.[112] The planter rapidly outruns the young French colonist:

> Ma and Suzanne got into the back of the limousine and Monsieur Jo sat up beside the chauffeur. They caught up with Joseph very soon. Suzanne would have preferred not to pass him, but she said nothing to Monsieur Jo because, naturally, he would not understand. By the powerful headlights of the Léon Bollée, they could see Joseph as if in broad daylight. He had lowered what was left of the windshield and was speeding up the B-12 for all she was worth. He looked even more ill-humored than when he had started off, and did not cast one glance at the Léon Bollée when it shot past him.[113]

Suzanne acknowledges the importance of keeping one's distance on the road and in society. Indeed, the competition between the two men turns to a competition between their rides: "Joseph was always saying: 'Me and my B-12–we spit at you!' every time he passed close to the Léon Bollée, and then he would give it a good kick in the tires."[114] As Joseph fully identifies with his car, competition with Monsieur Jo becomes embodied in the automobile, and he performs a physical act of aggression by kicking the tires of the Léon Bollée. This personification of power through mobility escapes the mother, attached as she is to the land and territory through an outdated rapport with her environment.[115] She does not know how to feel passing sensations and learn the lessons of passengering in the automobile. Contrary to European motoring pioneers, she falls asleep in the black limousine:

> A little before reaching the bungalow, Ma fell asleep. During a whole part of the trip, completely indifferent to the way the big car sped along, she must have been thinking of what a good piece of luck Monsieur Jo was for them. But thinking of that good luck had not got the better of her weariness, and she had fallen asleep. She could sleep anywhere, even in the bus, even in the B-12, which had no top, no windshield, and no hood.[116]

This indifference to the automobile represents yet another form of abstraction, as the mother extracts herself from the physical conditions of

her transportation. In a way, she is oblivious to the critical distance that the automobile creates and maintains.

In contrast to the misfortune of the French family, Monsieur Jo's fortune originates in the exploitation and mobilization of the colony. After having made a profit by buying land adjacent to the largest city in Indochina, he decided to invest in new projects:

> Instead of speculating in more land, he developed what he had, constructing cheap houses called "native apartment buildings" [*compartiments*[117] *pour indigènes*], which had been the first of the kind in the Colony. The apartments were in reality rows of double houses opening out on one side upon small courts and on the other side upon the street. They cost little to build and they met the needs of a whole class of native shopkeepers. They became the rage, and at the end of ten years such buildings existed in great number. Very soon they proved to be particularly favorable to the propagation of plague and cholera. The fact had been exposed in a survey made by the Colonial government. But since only the proprietors were advised of this, there were always people waiting to rent the "apartment," and always in greater number.[118]

The type of housing on which Monsieur Jo's fortune was built is ironically named for its resemblance to train cars (*compartiment* in French), yet these compartments remain immobile and segmented, while enabling the harmful mobility of diseases.

The automobile becomes a vehicle for the desire that travels in the dialogues of the narrative. It becomes a form of desire itself as it creates new yearnings, and it promises independence and freedom. More so than the ring that Monsieur Jo ends up giving to Suzanne, the car represents the colonial "price for the bride," as the young woman asks for a car not only for herself but also for her family, were he to marry her:

> "What car would I have, if we married?"
>
> It was perhaps the thirtieth time that she had asked that question. But this kind of question she never tired of asking. Monsieur Jo put on an indifferent look.
>
> "Whatever kind you liked, I've already told you that."
>
> "And Joseph?"
>
> "I don't know that I would give a car to Joseph," said Monsieur Jo, precipitately. "That I cannot promise you. I've already told you so."
>
> Suzanne's gaze did not cease exploring the fabulous regions of wealth just beyond this obstacle which prevented her from enjoying herself there.

> Then her smile was wiped out. Her expression changed so much that Monsieur Jo went on almost at once:
>
> "It would depend upon you, you know very well. How you behaved with me…"
>
> "You could offer *her* a car," said Suzanne, with persuasive gentleness. "It would amount to the same thing."
>
> "There never was any question of offering a car to your mother," said Monsieur Jo, with an air of desperation. "I am not as rich as you think."
>
> "As for her, I'll not stand out. But if Joseph hasn't a car, then you can keep all your cars, mine included, and you can marry whoever you like."[119]

This quizzing and teasing game becomes regular practice between Suzanne and Monsieur Jo. As she does not desire him for himself, she redirects her desire and inquisitive words to the automobile object and transfers her request to her brother. She attempts to control the circulation of desire and to master the meaning and direction of her own mobility, becoming automobile herself. In addition, the car, as a technological object, fuels a desire for space and speed. Yet, this is only a game of abstractions, of mere words and ideas, to which Monsieur Jo easily gives in. He plays the game in order to distract the young woman's attention as he moves his hand further up her arm, trading his abstraction—the idea of marrying her—for hers: "Suzanne smiled. 'I'd bring the car under the bungalow at night, when he's out hunting and I'd hang on the steering wheel a card on which I'd write: For Joseph.'"[120]

All of these words are framed in the conditional mode, underscoring their unreality. Yet maintaining desire itself by abstraction is in fact a source of enjoyment for Suzanne and Joseph:

> For Suzanne, as for Joseph, to go every evening to the movies represented, along with motoring, one of the forms which human happiness could take. In sum, everything that carried you off, everything that bore you up–whether your soul or your body, whether along the roads or along the truer-than-life dream-paths of the silver screen, everything which could give the hope of living quickly the slow experience of adolescence–these things represented happiness.[121]

Mobility, defined not only as the movement of people and the physical transport of objects but also as imaginative travel, enables Suzanne and Joseph to live mobile lives while remaining immobile. For their mother,

abstraction through daydreaming is a source of pleasure as well as frustration, representing yet another side of desire:

> Ma was in a hurry. Once Suzanne was married off, Monsieur Jo would give her the money needed to rebuild the sea walls, which, next time, would be twice as big as the others and would be reinforced with concrete. He would also give her the wherewithal to finish the bungalow, change the roof, buy another car, and have Joseph's teeth attended to. Now she held Suzanne responsible for the delay in all these projects. This marriage was necessary, she said. It was, moreover, their last chance to get out of the plain. If the marriage did not take place, it would be one more defeat, in a class with the sea walls.[122]

In this process of abstraction, the family itself becomes a package that is "lugged around"[123] in Monsieur Jo's black limousine. Abstraction reaches its climax when the process of carving up the automobile ends, as the family decides that Suzanne will not marry Monsieur Jo. Once their mind is made up, Monsieur Jo is reduced to his car. The chapter of the break-up opens with this process of metonymy:

> Next day Monsieur Jo came as usual. Suzanne waited for him at the head of the bridge.
>
> As soon as she heard the honking of the Léon Bollée horn, Ma stopped work on her banana trees and looked up the road. She still had hope that everything might be settled satisfactorily. Joseph, who was washing the car in a *marigot* on the other side of the bridge, stood up and, with his back turned towards the road, fixed Ma with a significant stare, to prevent her from going towards Monsieur Jo.[124]

It is a different day: no one eagerly runs toward the disembodied automobile. Joseph's automobility, as a form of masculine power, dominates his mother by immobilizing her even as he focuses on cleaning and looking after his own means of mobility by washing the Citroën. The narrator confirms the separation by contrasting the scene with the habits of Monsieur Jo's previous visits:

> Then, at the usual hour, Monsieur Jo came over the bridge, seated in the back of his magnificent limousine. It had rained in the night and the car was all splattered with mud. But Monsieur Jo came, no matter what the weather and at fifty kilometers an hour to see Suzanne.

> As soon as he glimpsed her he had the car stop near the bridge. Suzanne went towards the car door and Monsieur Jo got out at once. He was dressed in his silk suit. Never had Joseph had a silk suit. All of Monsieur Jo's suits were silk. When they were ever so slightly used, Monsieur Jo gave them to his chauffeur. He said tussore silk was cooler than cotton and that he would never have been able to stand anything else because he had tender skin. There were certainly great differences between them and Monsieur Jo.[125]

The car is no longer means of communication, and it does not link them anymore. It is no longer "the magnificent black limousine," it is "all shitty." Monsieur Jo's degradation continues as he is stripped of the prestige of his clothes, which deteriorate and end up on the back of his chauffeur. This could serve as warning to those who have received his ring. None of his belongings are worth what they appear. Over time, they all deteriorate, and then they are handed down to inferiors.

The passage continues in free indirect speech, so that Suzanne's voice and that of the narrator become indistinguishable in a meta-commentary on the unfolding break-up:

> If only he would go away from here, I'd go over to Joseph. Today Monsieur Jo was like his car and his car was like him, they were the same thing. Yesterday the car still meant something to her, she was not indifferent to it as long as it was not utterly impossible that one day we could own it. But today the car was in relationship to Suzanne at a great distance. No thread, however fine, attached her now to that car. And the car had become ugly and cumbrous.[126]

The narrator of the passage, maybe Suzanne, explains the dynamics of desire and the process of abstraction of the automobile, assimilated to its owner. Just yesterday, the possibility of one day owning the car made it appear desirable, but now that it will never be hers, it has become a cumbersome burden, emptied of its power of attraction. The thread is broken by narrative repetition:

> He seemed to be suffering a great deal. But his suffering was like his car, it was bothersome and uglier than usual. And no thread, however fine, would now hold him to her.[127]

Just like they met around the car, they separate after a series of automobile maneuvers:

> He got up painfully. As he grasped the handle of the car door he waited a moment, then emitted a threat.
>
> "It won't finish this way. Tomorrow I'll be in the city, too."
>
> "It's not worth your trouble, going there won't do you a bit of good."
>
> He got into the car at last and said something to the chauffeur, who began to make an abrupt turn. The road was narrow and it took him some time to do this, and a great deal of effort. Usually the car turned at two goes, using the drive which led to the bungalow. Today, with great dignity, it avoided using that road. All the same, from the edge of the *marigot*, Joseph observed the maneuver. Ma, still motionless and as if crucified was watching the irremediable departure of Monsieur Jo. Before his car had completely turned, she went running into the bungalow.
>
> Suzanne walked down towards Joseph. When the limousine passed her she caught a furtive glimpse of Monsieur Jo, who gave her an imploring look through the car window. She turned aside, crossing the rice field to reach Joseph more quickly.[128]

Torn to pieces, reduced to spare parts, Monsieur Jo departs in twists and turns (*tours et détours*). The characters themselves swirl and twirl. Joseph, the other automobile man, has just finished washing the B-12, emphasizing the contrast with Monsieur Jo's dirty car. Now, he is inflating a tire, fixing the car that will take them to the colonial city, Saigon. Thus ends the first part of the novel: a fresh start on an old car without direction. This new attempt at making an abstraction of the territory will fail. Suzanne will wander on foot in the city before returning to the plain. Her brother, after leaving the family with a lover in her car, will come back only to bury the mother: "It was the honking of the eight cylinder Delage that woke up Suzanne. She ran out on the verandah and saw Joseph get out of the car. He was not alone; the woman followed him."[129] The scene is a counterpoint to the break-up with Monsieur Jo and his automobile, honk for honk. Suzanne is reunited with Joseph. The car represents the strongest thread in the family narrative, connecting the siblings and taking them away from the plain, from their dead mother, and out of the colonial quagmire.

Through automobile passengering, writers took to the road: French and Vietnamese journalists wrote reportages that circulated in France and in Indochina while French and Vietnamese novelists wrote fictions

inspired by their experience of colonial life and the changes brought about by automobility. Invested with symbolic meaning, roads became the realm of automobile objects, beings, and ideas, elements that were all able to move on their own, often just by the power of evocation in these journalistic and literary texts. Cars in French Indochina thus became powerful metaphors, both as colonial means of transportation and as narrative sources, to return to Michel de Certeau's observation on stories as spatial practices.

Notes

1. Eric Laurier et al., "Driving and 'Passengering': Notes on the Ordinary Organization of Car Travel," *Mobilities* 3, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 1–23, 7.
2. Andrée Viollis, *Indochine S. O. S.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), 6. All translations are mine.
3. Andrée Viollis, *Indochine S. O. S.*, 6.
4. Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 95–96.
5. André Malraux, preface to Andrée Viollis, *Indochine S. O. S.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), V.
6. On the politicization of Vietnamese students in France, see Gisèle Luce Bousquet, *Behind the Bamboo Hedge: The Impact of Homeland Politics in the Parisian Vietnamese Community* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).
7. Andrée Viollis, *Indochine S. O. S.*, 15.
8. Andrée Viollis, *Indochine S. O. S.*, 15.
9. In the French text, Viollis uses the phrase "*tours et détours*," which roughly translates to "twists and turns." However, the word "*détour*" in French conveys several meanings, from detour to digression to curve.
10. Andrée Viollis, *Indochine S. O. S.*, 15.
11. Andrée Viollis, *Indochine S. O. S.*, 16.
12. Andrée Viollis, *Indochine S. O. S.*, 17.
13. Andrée Viollis, *Indochine S. O. S.*, 25.
14. Andrée Viollis, *Indochine S. O. S.*, 25.
15. Andrée Viollis, *Indochine S. O. S.*, 27.
16. Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967).
17. Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997). See in particular Chapter 1, "Representing Indochina: The French Colonial Phantasmatic and the Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris," 14–33.

18. Roland Dorgelès, *Sur la Route mandarine* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1925), 35.
19. Nguyen Phan Long, "La lutte entre le chemin de fer et l'automobile," *Éveil économique de l'Indochine*, January 28, 1923, 4–5.
20. Nguyen Phan Long, "La lutte entre le chemin de fer et l'automobile," *Éveil économique de l'Indochine*, January 28, 1923, 4.
21. Vincent Kaufmann, Manfred Max Bergman, and Dominique Joye, "Motility: Mobility as Capital," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 745–56, 750.
22. Vincent Kaufmann, *Re-thinking Mobility* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).
23. Vincent Kaufmann, *Re-thinking Mobility*, 103.
24. Roads and automobiles (including buses and trucks) constitute a costly system that involves everyone: the economic capital of the Natives, the Europeans, and even French metropolitans. Indeed, tramway and transport companies were supposed to bring dividends to their metropolitan investors. See the minutes of the general meetings of the board of directors of the *Société foncière de l'Indochine* created in 1901, renamed *Compagnie des Tramways du Tonkin* in 1929 and *Société des transports en commun de la region de Hanoi* in 1952, held at the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail (ANMT), in Roubaix, France, in ANMT 2003 035, 1899–1962.
25. Nguyen Phan Long, "La lutte entre le chemin de fer et l'automobile," *Éveil économique de l'Indochine*, January 28, 1923, 4.
26. See David Del Testa, "Automobiles and Anomie in French Colonial Indochina," in *France and Indochina France and Indochina: Cultural Representations*, ed. Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 63–77. David Del Testa locates in the colonial transportation infrastructure what he calls an "imperial corridor," a linear zone or environment of cross-cultural contact and political struggle. In particular, he sees in the way Vietnamese authors portray trains and automobiles a reflection of the values attached to each mode of mobility and the sense of collaboration they implied. According to Del Testa, echoing "their more public presence, trains serve as a microcosm of all the tensions and ambiguities of that colonialism created in Vietnamese society, whereas automobiles appear to serve as sites particularly of symbolic, physical, and sexual violence" (70).
27. Peter Zinoman estimates that their number tripled, from 96 in 1922 to 267 in 1935, based on a history of the colonial press by Nguyên Thành, in *Báo chí cách mang Viêt Nam, 1925–1945* (Hanoi: Khoa Hoc Xã Hôi, 1984). See Peter Zinoman, *Vietnamese Colonial Republican: The Political Vision of Vũ Trong Phung* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 33.

28. Tam Lang, "I Pulled a Rickshaw," in *The Light of the Capital: Three Modern Vietnamese Classics*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996), 51–120. Tam Lang's text was first published in 1932 by the Vietnamese language newspaper *Hà Thành Ngọ Báo (Hanoi Midday News*) and in 1935 in book form. On the evolution of the Vietnamese language press during the first half of the twentieth century, see Thu Hang Lê, "Le Viêt Nam, un pays francophone atypique: regard sur l'emprise française sur l'évolution littéraire et journalistique au Viêt Nam depuis la première moitié du XXe siècle," *Documents pour l'histoire du français langue étrangère ou seconde* 40/41 (2008); Philippe M. F. Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916–1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
29. Tam Lang, "I Pulled a Rickshaw," in *Light of the Capital*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart, 52–53.
30. Tam Lang, "I Pulled a Rickshaw," in *Light of the Capital*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart, 53.
31. Tam Lang, "I Pulled a Rickshaw," in *Light of the Capital*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart, 53.
32. Greg Lockhart, introduction to *The Light of the Capital: Three Modern Vietnamese Classics*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6. Hazel Hahn notes that the rickshaw was imported into Vietnam from Japan in 1883 and that rickshaws were first introduced to the southern city of Cho Lon in 1887. See Hazel Hahn, "The Rickshaw Trade in Colonial Vietnam, 1883–1940," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 8, no. 4 (2013): 47–85, 47 and 53.
33. Derogatory term for unskilled workers. The word will be further discussed in the following chapter "Overtaking the Road: Careless Pedestrians."
34. Tam Lang, "I Pulled a Rickshaw," *Light of the Capital*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart, 113.
35. Greg Lockhart, introduction to *The Light of the Capital: Three Modern Vietnamese Classics*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996), 7.
36. Van Nguyen-Marshall, *In Search of Moral Authority: The Discourse on Poverty, Poor Relief, and Charity in French Colonial Vietnam* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 117.
37. Thúy Tranviet, "Vũ Trong Phung's *The Industry of Marrying Europeans: A Satirical Narrative*," in Vũ Trong Phung, *The Industry of Marrying Europeans*, trans. Thúy Tranviet (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2006), 11.
38. Vũ Trong Phung, "Household Servants," in *Light of the Capital*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford

University Press, 1996), 121–56. Originally published as "Com thây com cô," in *Hà Nôi Báo,* March 1936.
39. Vũ Trong Phung, "Household Servants," in *Light of the Capital*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996), 123.
40. Vũ Trong Phung, "Household Servants," in *Light of the Capital*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996), 154.
41. Vũ Trong Phung, "Household Servants," in *Light of the Capital*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996), 154.
42. Vũ Trong Phung, "Household Servants," in *Light of the Capital*, trans. Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996), 155.
43. Vũ Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck: A Novel by Vũ Trong Phung*, trans. Nguyen Nguyet Cam and Peter Zinoman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).
44. Vũ Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck*, 37.
45. Vũ Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck*, 47.
46. Vũ Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck*, 49.
47. Vũ Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck*, 65.
48. Vũ Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck*, 110.
49. Vũ Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck*, 111.
50. Vũ Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck*, 176
51. Vũ Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck*, 186.
52. Peter Zinoman, *Vietnamese Colonial Republican: The Political Vision of Vũ Trong Phung* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 148.
53. Peter Zinoman, *Vietnamese Colonial Republican: The Political Vision of Vũ Trong Phung*, 148–49.
54. Note Tân's high mobility. He not only owns a car but he also drives it himself. He is also well-traveled, having studied in France.
55. Vũ Trong Phung, *To Be a Whore*, translated and quoted by Peter Zinoman in *Vietnamese Colonial Republican: The Political Vision of Vũ Trong Phung*, 150.
56. Guillermo Giucci makes a similar case for Cuba. See Guillermo Giucci, *The Cultural Life of the Automobile: Roads to Modernity*, trans. Anne Mayagoitia and Debra Nagao (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 101–102.
57. Nguyen Phan Long, *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys* (Hanoi: Imprimerie Tonkinoise, 1921). The full title as it appeared on the title page is *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys (Journal d'une jeune fille Cochinchinoise moderne)* followed by the subtitle *Essai sur l'évolution des mœurs annamites contemporaines.*

58. Jack Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French: A Literary Response to Colonialism* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987).
59. Bamboo or straw hut.
60. Nguyen Phan Long, *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys,* 36.
61. Nguyen Phan Long, *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, 58.
62. Nguyen Phan Long, *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, 148–49.
63. Nguyen Phan Long, *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, 147–48.
64. Nguyen Phan Long, *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, 148.
65. Nguyen Phan Long, *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, 81.
66. Nguyen Phan Long, *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, 98–99.
67. Nguyen Phan Long, *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, 173.
68. This reference to Khmer origins also points to an implicit French reader who would not necessarily know to distinguish between Vietnam and Cambodia, and who would thus confuse them in a unifying but incorrect vision of Indochina. Adding to the Frenchness of their endeavor, the young woman and her father retrace more or less the Duke of Montpensier's journey from Saigon to Angkor. This trip initiated by the protagonist's father also reflects a new reality on the roads of Indochina. Through his study of the Annamese press and advertisements, Christopher E. Goscha identifies an emerging trend of Annamese tourism to Angkor Wat in the late 1920s and in the 1930s. See Christopher E. Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina*, NIAS Classics Series, no. 3 (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), 46.
69. On the role of French institutions, such as the *Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient* (EFEO), in restoring Angkor, see Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860–1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).
70. Pham Van Ky, *Frères de Sang* (Paris: Seuil, 1947). Quotations are from my own translation.
71. Pham Van Ky, *Frères de Sang*, 5.
72. Pham Van Ky, *Frères de Sang*, 17–18.
73. Paul Virilio, *The Original Accident* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 25.
74. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall* (*Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*), trans. Herma Briffault (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967). Page numbers refer to this English-language translation unless otherwise noted.
75. Jane Bradley Winston, *Postcolonial Duras: Cultural Memory in Postwar France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).
76. Panivong Norindr*, Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1997).

77. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 25.
78. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 16.
79. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 9.
80. Narratively, the death of the horse is in a contiguous relationship with the appearance of the automobile, insofar as part of the car's equipment—the blanket from the back seat of the B-12—helps to kill it (Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 29).
81. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991).
82. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 9.
83. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 11.
84. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 131.
85. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 131.
86. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 18.
87. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 53.
88. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 48: "'Joseph can drive any car,' said Suzanne."
89. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 55.
90. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 33.
91. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 16.
92. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 23.
93. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 30.
94. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 30–31.
95. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 32.
96. Duras did so in a series of interviews for the publication of the novel *L'Amant* in 1984, including "L'Inconnue de la rue Catinat," interview with Hervé Le Masson, in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, September 28, 1984, republished in Marguerite Duras, *Œuvres Complètes*, Vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 2014), 1545–50, 1546. In an interview televised on the same day, Duras noted that, as a fifteen-year old, she could already tell by the black car and the presence of a chauffeur that its owner was a very rich Chinese man. See "Extraits d'un entretien avec Bernard Pivot," *Apostrophes*, September 28, 1984, transcribed in Marguerite Duras, *Œuvres Complètes*, Vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 2014), 1536–45, 1537.
97. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 318–71.
98. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 34.
99. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 34–35.
100. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 37.
101. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 37.

102. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 37.
103. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 37–38.
104. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 40.
105. For a retelling of this story in a theatrical genre, see Marguerite Duras, *L'Éden cinéma* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986). Duras had prepared what she called the "song of the Corporal" at the end of the 1950s: "L'attente est longue / Sous le soleil / Les hommes traînent sur la route / Enchaînés à l'espoir // J'ai beaucoup attendu de la piste / La chaîne aux pieds, la chaîne au cou, / L'estomac vide, la trique au cul / J'ai beaucoup espéré / Car on est tous pareils // Quand les cars viendront me disais-je / Ah le cul libre et l'estomac plein / Ce sera la prospérité / J'ai beaucoup espéré." In the final version of the play, the song is sung by Suzanne instead of the Corporal. See Marguerite Duras, *Œuvres Complètes*, Vol. IV (Paris: Gallimard, 2014), n23, 1655 and 357.
106. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 39.
107. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 41.
108. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 46.
109. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 41.
110. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 48.
111. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 73.
112. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 70.
113. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 49.
114. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 58.
115. In later interviews, Duras insisted on her own mother's rural origins. For example, see *Les lieux de Marguerite Duras* in Marguerite Duras, *Œuvres Complètes*, Vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 2014), 210.
116. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 49.
117. For more on the *compartiment* in French colonial public housing projects, see Caroline Herbelin, "Des habitations à bon marché au Viêt Nam. La question du logement social en situation coloniale," *Moussons. Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est*, nos. 13–14 (December 1, 2009): 123–46.
118. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 50.
119. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 80–81.
120. This is my own translation from the 1996 French edition. See Marguerite Duras, *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950, repr., Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 103–104. The 1967 English translation uses the future tense on page 82 and does not reflect Duras's use of the free indirect style.
121. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 97.
122. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 98.

123. Duras uses the metaphor of the parcel to describe the family's habit of getting lugged around (*se faire trimbaler*) by Monsieur Jo's car. See Marguerite Duras, *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 90.
124. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 117.
125. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 119–20.
126. This is my own translation from the 1996 French edition. See Marguerite Duras, *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 152. Page 121 of the 1967 English translation does not reflect Duras's use of the free indirect style.
127. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 122.
128. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 123.
129. Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, 283.

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CHAPTER 6

Overtaking the Road: Careless Pedestrians

While the automobile was inserted into an already extant infrastructure in metropolitan France, the development of motoring in Indochina closely follows the development of the road network, both of which serve as tools of communication and domination. The intensification of automobile traffic upsets life on the roads in the cities and in the country. Roads become contested spaces. Who should be allowed to use them? Natives or Europeans? Animals or machines? How should traffic be organized and regulated? By whom? Should colonial roads be ruled with a specific signage and police system?

After World War I, as the illusion of Western superiority faded, so too did the potential for cooperation in the development of transportation in Colonial Indochina. After the global economic boom of the 1920s, the colonial economy collapsed in the early 1930s, leading to protests in Saigon in 1932 and 1933 by European landowners who had lost their lands to the *Banque d'Indochine*. Meanwhile, Vietnamese anti-colonial sentiment was on the rise. In an effort to regroup, French administrators stressed their social prerogatives vis-à-vis indigenous populations as well as sought to attenuate perceptions of class differences within the European population. In this context, they developed a specific discourse on driving within the pages of the motoring press and relayed it during joyous celebrations, such as the "Chat with Mr. Lécorché, president of CAMTAL at the soirée of January 9, 1932." The CAMTAL or

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Club Automobile et Motocycliste du Tonkin-Annam-Laos (Automobile and motorcycle club of Tonkin-Annam-Laos) played a significant role in colonial social life. Before the Governor General, who was invited to preside over the New Year's reception, Lécorché commented jokingly: "You probably wonder why our event tonight features a dancing party. What relation can exist between the automobile and the art of Terpsichore? I could reply that the Shimmy is a dance quite familiar to motorists."[1] Dancing and driving were indeed the preferred pastimes of French colonials. They were significant and signifying ways to move one's body through space, and they embodied mobilities that were at once pleasant and perilous, as both were becoming objects of desire for the upwardly mobile indigenous class in the context of the 1930s economic crisis. Public spaces, such as trains, exposed the French population to increasing disorder over which they had less and less control. Europeans deserted railways for other forms of transport while Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians increasingly used trains and buses.[2] In the 1930s, cars became the transportation of choice for the French in Indochina. By seeking independent and private vehicles, they tried to remove themselves from the shared space of the railways and the sense of cooperation that train travel implied.

Moreover, the Sarraut Plan of 1922 favored public investment in the road network rather than the construction of railways. For many French, the automobile had become synonymous with freedom and individuality. For the colonized populations, roads also became more attractive, as bus companies, often operated by Vietnamese or Chinese owners, offered cheaper and more flexible transport. These indigenous passengers isolated themselves from the French in the same way that the French retreated to their private cars. However, although insulated within their cars or buses, the French still had to share the road, now a renewed contact zone that also remained the only open space for the mass of indigenous pedestrian traffic. Thus, on this night of January 9, 1932, Lécorché reminds his audience that:

> We need a Road Police, not an irksome police only eager to fine, but an intelligent police, which would understand that it has, above all, a preventive, educational, and protective role. One should not invoke the bad excuse of a lack of funds. I say that it would be criminal, when human lives are at stake, to skimp for a few thousand piasters. The number of traffic fatalities is certainly higher than the number of deaths by cancer, for example. Haven't we taken costly measures to fight cancer? The

> same humanitarian considerations require us to take measures to fight the viruses that decimate road users and that are called: ignorance, carelessness, indiscipline, and, above all, imprudence.[3]

French administrators and observers often labeled car-less natives as the careless road users to blame for accidents.[4] Still, one can wonder about this overtaking of the road by careless pedestrians.[5] How did pedestrians become careless? What did their carelessness mean? How could the French remedy their carelessness?

6.1 The Construction of Careless Pedestrians: *Dressage* and the Ants

In the mid-1920s, leaving Hanoi to reach Saigon on Colonial Road 1—the so-called Mandarin Road—French journalist Roland Dorgelès notes:

> Coolies, coolies, a steady stream of them, on this road! It scarcely seems possible that this is an ordinary day; one expects to come upon a prodigious enterprise of some kind, a loading of one-knows-not-what, or to stumble upon a market. Not at all. They hurry along like ants. Rice-cultivation is difficult; there are hungry mouths to feed. The Tongkinese[6] simply never rests.
>
> I am not drawn by the secret of the temples everywhere to be encountered, either under the flamboyant-trees, glowing in spring with ruby flowers, or hiding in bamboo groves. It is not the thousand-year-old past of this fallen people with which I am concerned, but the real secret, the living secret of these *pauvres Jacques*, with their slanted eyes, who jog along barefoot and shy at the automobile spinning past.[7]

Looking on from the passenger seat, the Frenchman notes the rhythmic contrast between the passing of time impressed on seasons or the antique architecture on the one hand and the flows of coolie-laborers driven by hunger on the other. The narrator finds himself drawn to the new, mobile, present signs of otherness rather than to the static, exotic, and mysterious past. Restless pedestrians seemingly escape the strictures of the road by moving along “like ants,” avoiding the speedy modern car. The bodies of the Vietnamese laborers are likened to the insect, gregarious and organized by a natural order, whose logic is evident yet escapes the colonial observer.

This particular insect, the ant, is also associated with innumerable, seemingly identical creatures. Humans cannot tell them apart, just as European observers cannot distinguish individual Tonkinese/Annamites in colonial literature. They also are a seemingly endless supply of workers, which echoes the image of the Asian coolies. Jan Breman and E. Valentine Daniel's "The Making of a Coolie"[8] draws attention to the composite "coolie-identity [which] is as much the product of self-perception as it is the construction of a category by those who did not belong to it."[9] The present chapter focuses on the making of the "coolie" in Indochina by French observers, such as Dorgelès, that relied not only on a distinctive type of labor, but also on a mobility constructed as ethno-typical. This characterization extended to a conception of indigenous walking. Breman and Daniel note that "[w]hen capitalism penetrated into the world of Asia, the coolie-to-be was not so much a proletarian who stood ready to be transported to the rural and urban enclaves created by the new economy, but one who was available and vulnerable for recruitment by virtue of being cast adrift."[10] Mobilizing the indigenous workforce to serve the economic imperatives of the colony relied on ordering (*mise en ordre*) an allegedly unproductive and meandering population. This ordering was symbolic in its representations and material in its regulations. Eventually, the "coolie was perceived at one and the same time as both immobile and unstable."[11] To the French onlooker, the mobile indigenous pedestrian embodied unruliness amid a modern system of transportation that sought to integrate bodies in the larger economy of the colony, a sign of otherness resisting colonial abstraction.

In *Rhythmanalysis* (2004), geographer Henri Lefebvre emphasizes urban walking as a key example of "*dressage*," the breaking-in of the individual to reproduce "an automatism of repetitions."[12] Urban walking integrates the pedestrian's body in a so-called "Western" order of moving. In the West, according to Lefebvre, the walking body is subjected to diffuse social control orders through a regulated measure embedded in its musculature and exercised through practice and repetition, circumventing subjective will. Rhythmic movement emerges as an expression of the pedestrian's physiology, subsuming the historic and geographical specificities of walking. Vietnamese pedestrians puzzled the European observer by disrupting this movement, offering a rhythm of their own. Elsewhere, Lefebvre noted: "Everybody knows from having seen or appreciated this that familiar gestures and everyday manners are not the

same in the West (*chez nous*) as in Japan, or in Arab countries. These gestures, these manners, are acquired, are learned."[13] In Indochina, faced with unfamiliar gestures and manners labeled "Annamite," French colonists sought to transform them. Imposing colonial order implied imposing Western "*dressage*." According to Lefebvre:

> To enter into a society, group or nationality is to accept values (that are taught), to learn a trade by following the right channels, but also to bend oneself (to be bent) to its ways. Which means to say: *dressage*. Humans break themselves in [*se dressent*] like animals.[14]

What kind of "*dressage*" would apply to the Vietnamese? Lefebvre notes that in some cases "*dressage*" is limited:

> We can suppose that the Western order established since Latinity and the Roman Empire could not easily have broken-in Orientals and Africans. After the efforts that history calls *colonialism*, not without notable effects, the failure of this occidental dressage is today evident on a world scale. It finds ways for those who escaped our conjoined models (dressage-identifications-reduced and stereotyped differences).[15]

The attempt and failure at "*dressage*" in the colonial context invites us to consider the profoundly historical and geographical origins of pedestrian movement and its perception by the French through the emergence of protest marches on colonial roads and the development of road safety campaigns.[16]

The countries now known as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were colonized by the French from 1887 to 1954. Colonial rule extended into all areas of the indigenous population's daily life,[17] as the French tried to impose modern forms of state control, notably in everyday uses of the road.[18] France developed and maintained a road network in Indochina, starting with a systematized plan for road development in 1897. Road-building had multiple purposes for the French: economic armature for exports of raw materials, strategic networks for transporting troops against foreign aggression and domestic unrest, and framework for the civilizing mission (*mission civilisatrice*). Would the road also bring "civilization" through the regulation of Vietnamese pedestrians? Dorgelès's use of the ants as a racialized trope for the coolie is perplexing. As Lefebvre emphasizes, "Certain animals refuse dressage. One breaks in

elephants but not big cats (except in rare cases!). Can one break-in cats? Or only *educate* them?"[19]

If the number of French settlers never exceeded 34,000, colonial roads,[20] penetrating the inland, served as a constant reminder of the Western presence, even to isolated communities that rarely saw a Frenchman. Symbolically, Colonial Road 1, the backbone for the entire highway infrastructure, was called the "Mandarin Road," evoking splendors of the East and referring to the pre-colonial route for imperial officials and scholars between Hanoi and Saigon. Travelogues and colonial propaganda perpetuated its appeal. Still, however powerful, the myth of the exotic and civilizing colonial roadway was coming apart as early as the mid-1920s.

The emergence of automobility helped to foster the expansion of colonial policing as it encouraged the proper ordering and disciplining of all who used the colonial roadway, from carts, pedestrians, and other seemingly pre-modern forms of transport. The institution of specific "*Codes de la route*" (highway laws) for Cochinchina (1922) and Tonkin (1924), and their subsequent harmonization throughout Indochina (1931), along with the creation of local automobile clubs and the organization of races[21] point to colonial automobility as a laboratory of modernity[22] where European administrators and motorists—both amateur and professional—could carry out experiments in technological and social engineering. Yet colonial roads were not open fields for French domination; rather, they became new grounds for those trying to evade, criticize, and undermine the rules of the road and their underlying economic and political principles.

In translating popular sayings and newspaper accounts of French colonialism, Truong Buu Lam shows how pedestrian victims were portrayed as colonized and the colonizers as culprit-drivers.[23] Road traffic thus seemed to expose colonial society as being constituted of communities divided by political tensions, class conflicts, or competing cultural claims and economic interests among colonizer and colonized. However, the number of indigenous victims fueled discontent that did not neatly follow this categorization. As Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper[24] have remarked, scholars should attend more directly to the tendency of colonial regimes to create a stark dichotomy between colonizer and colonized without accepting that binary division themselves. Roads become ideal sites to measure the extent of the colonial encounter in Indochina. Few spaces offer such an opportunity to observe the

impact of colonialism at all levels of colonizer-colonized societies over time, rather than focusing on the elites. Indeed, as early as 1924, French motorists, preoccupied by the growing number of car accidents involving animals and pedestrians, nicknamed the 6000 kilometers of roads in Cochinchina "*l'écrasodrome*"[25] (the smashtrack) and by the early 1930s, roads had become openly contested spaces.

6.2 The Meaning of Carelessness: *Dressage* and *Files Indiennes*

February 11, 1930: A dispatch from Hanoi, capital of Tonkin and the Indochinese Union, informs Parisians of a mutiny of native soldiers in Yen Bai (Tonkin) and the killing of French officers the night before. More telegrams recount how students of the *École des Arts Appliqués* on bicycles threw bombs at the police stations, the *gendarmerie*, and the prison in Hanoi that same night, while the deputy police sergeant was shot dead trying to stop an automobile on the Doumer Bridge. France is stunned. From Paris, nothing foreshadowed such a dramatic turn of events. The press is quick to accuse local discontent and communist propaganda, describing the incidents as isolated and contained. In Indochina, when troubles[26] extend to Haiphong, a major port city located 120 kilometers east of Hanoi, administrators partly blame the events on easier access to cars,[27] specifically liveries that were typically hired with their native driver. In a February 24th decree in response to acts of banditry committed in Tonkin by individuals in rental cars, the Resident Superior mandates the "inspection of vehicles leaving shops either for testing or for hire"[28] by the Service of the Sûreté in Hanoi and Haiphong and elsewhere by the Police Commissioners. Automobility, a system once supported and facilitated by the colonial government, had become a political threat.

Louis Roubaud, French journalist for the *Petit Parisien* and a popular writer, leaves Paris to investigate the reasons for the uprising. He explains his motivation:

> Vinh, May 1930.
> India has a fever, China has a fever. I want to feel the pulse of Indochina.
> I set out by car, on beautiful French roads in a large landscape of Asia, and I arrived this morning in Vinh, the provincial capital, where rebellion

> has been brewing for over a thousand years, breaking out at times, from century to century against the Chinese masters first, then against the Annamite masters, and most recently against the French masters.[29]

Placing Indochina within the broader geographical context of Asia and within a "*longue durée*" encompassing centuries, Roubaud explores Vietnam on French colonial roads. Comparing his journalism to the work of a doctor, he uses a common metaphor for road traffic: blood circulation, a comparison that evokes notions of health and regulation. The automobile charged with these sanitary ideas and the qualities of modernity (speed, flexibility, and efficiency) becomes the ideal vehicle for inquiry. The journalist's experience of and in traffic allows him to "feel the pulse of Indochina" through its blood. Facilitating the diagnosis, the car enables quick and comfortable movement and opens up a mobile gaze:

> I went through the pretty village of Yendung on the promenade known as the Bois de Boulogne, before the citadel with three doors. Everywhere farmers and coolies, in single file like ants [*en file indienne comme des fourmis*], carried at both ends of a pole balanced on one shoulder living black pigs tied up, water or paddy jars, bundles of wood. Hunchbacked buffaloes, coming out sticky from the rice field, ran across the road, threatening the hood of the car with their large horns. A tiny naked child, their keeper, brought them back with a word or a gesture.[30]

From the car, the countryside gives the impression of pastoral harmony in the tropics. Roubaud's gaze encompasses the village and its inhabitants, and also a social and historicized vision of their movement: farmers in a single file, ordered and mobile, carrying the products of their labor. To the viewer moving effortlessly in his car, they appear like components of human capital ready for exploitation. Walking in single file, they become incorporated into a single efficient and docile body, productively self-aligned through its own habituated measures and embodied disciplines. The vision is completed by the representation of the car and self-awareness of the journalist's point of view, in contrast with the buffaloes, the only acknowledged threat to the automobile. The phrase "*file indienne*" refers to images of Native Americans popularized in adventure novels at the time and colors the indigenous pedestrians' walk with a racialized and primitive physiology. The label situates this way of walking as far as possible from Western *dressage* yet satisfies a different order, an oxymoronic organization of savage and disorderly bodies.

Roubaud did not wind up in Vinh by chance. After Yen Bai, a second wave of protests had arisen in areas where the destabilization of the already meager income of peasants and workers coincided with the establishment of a communist organization, which often included members of the intellectual elite, strong enough to compete with the power of the rural notables.[31] In April 1930, strikes hit almost all of the industrial areas of northern Annam and Cochinchina. Farmers converge on administrative centers in organized processions, in numerous "*files indiennes.*" A threshold is crossed on May 1, 1930, in Vinh, when gunshots from the Indigenous Guard cause the first fatalities. Roubaud reconstructs the history of the insurrection from interviews with Mr. Canaby, director of the match factory[32] in Ben Thuy:

> At the first ray of sun, fifteen hundred men had emerged from the earth. They were lined up in columns and were marching on Ben Thuy.
>
> What were they? No factory workers among them. Where did they come from? From all the villages. What did they want? One could not know.
>
> Fifteen hundred silent men, without flags, without badges, without signs. They marched in good order and their leaders were lining them on one side of the road to make way for the circulation of cars. We heard nothing but their three thousand bare feet striking the ground.[33]

The anonymous and silent crowd, their feet pounding the ground, embodies the reflux of discontent along conducts of power materialized by colonial roads. The same roads that took their taxes to colonial capitals and led colonial officials to their villages are now traveled by the rebels back to these administrative and economic centers. The image mirrors the column of productive ants seen from the car. However, these 1500 men are just as orderly as coolies. They let cars pass by, never threatening traffic. Unlike the secrecy of the Yen Bai revolt, discontent appears here in broad daylight, spreading and flowing over "beautiful French roads." Indigenous discontent enters the colonial bloodstream. According to Lefebvre:

> The *substance* [*matière*] is the crowd (or molecules, corpuscles), it is a body. The crowd is a body, the body is a crowd (of cells, of liquids, of organs). Societies are composed of crowds, of groups, of bodies, of classes, and constitute people. They understand the **rhythms** [Lefebvre's emphasis] of which living beings, social bodies, local groups are made up.[34]

The rhythms of pounding feet set the indigenous rebels apart from the rhythms of the automobile. Neither obstacle nor threat, their rhythms are understood neither by the French onlooker nor by the readers. These pedestrians appear, stand apart, and protest peacefully. Their march evokes the plural and conflicting meanings of the reflexive verb "*se dresser*,"[35] both the bodily discipline of *dressage* and the act of contestation. To paraphrase and nuance Lefebvre's assertion, "humans break themselves in [*se dressent*] like animals,"[36] and, just like them, humans can show resistance by standing up.

The recollection of Yen Bai sends Inspector Petit, head of the French militia, into a panic as he orders the first gunshots. Roubaud presents the contrasting testimony of one protester, a farmer, whom he names Phan Kau. The Vietnamese witness justifies the marches as demonstrations of popular discontent against the corruption of the mandarins and of solidarity with the factory workers who were worse off than peasants. The walking mobility of farmers on the road can be read as a deliberate act, meaningful and therefore political. The protesters "*se dressent*" and rise up against exploitation. In Vinh, walking embodies the alliance between rural-agricultural and urban-industrial workers, between tradition and modernity. Roubaud reports other similar incidents, in "Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina […] in very different regions, separated from each other by long days of railway or car travel, sprang up on the roads columns of 1,500, 2,000, 3,000 peasants" heading toward the house of the nearest administrator to ask for tax relief and met with gunshots. "These demonstrations occurring in the same form and at the same time on the most various points of the Indochinese territory, it became clear that a single direction had organized them."[37] By the prowess of technology, the European car and rail had brought remote regions closer together. The contrast between science's abolishing the "tyranny of distance"[38] and peasants' marching against the tyranny of taxes sets Western technology and the local labor force in direct opposition. Moreover, where once the coordination of transportation had challenged colonial governance, now stood "a single direction." Which one? Roubaud continues his diagnosis in terms of flows:

> It is in the Viet Nam Cong San Dang that we must seek the key to the events of Yen Bai, Vinh and elsewhere […]. Through it are channeled specific discontents against abuse by the mandarins, the increase in rice prices, low wages or exaggeration of tax.[39]

The Vietnamese Communist Party is deemed efficient because it facilitates the flow of discontent that it "channels," extending the generative sanguine metaphor. It becomes a communication network superimposed onto the colonial network of lines of communication with its own rhythms. As the Party advocates for the poor, Roubaud sees a gap between its leaders, young revolutionaries who are often the sons of wealthy bourgeois, transporting "muscovite leaflets" in "French limousines" to the hungry masses that they organize: "Indochinese fever seems to have a complex shape. / The diagnosis is difficult."[40]

The automobile placed its acculturated users in a position simultaneously more exposed and more favorable to the revolution. Just as the automobile facilitated Roubaud's entry into the Indochinese territory and across the social strata of Indochina, it now serves the revolutionary movement as both physical vehicle and cultural facilitator. Yet the car keeps the leaders apart from the mass of protesters who go by foot. Similarly, in the automobile, Roubaud acknowledges the limitations of his own investigation: "I will not disguise myself. I will only see what can be seen. I will not know everything."[41]

6.3 The End of Carelessness and *Dressage*: Incorporating Pedestrians into Road Safety

The use of colonial roads by indigenous pedestrians had become a hotly contested topic in 1930s French Indochina. Protest marches had erupted all over the land, glaring signs of political discontent against the exploitation practiced by the colonial government. On a more quotidian level, the *Club Automobile et Motocycliste du Tonkin-Annam-Laos* (CAMTAL) noted the local press's uproar at the increase in traffic fatalities in the 1930s:

> The statistics of traffic accidents in Tonkin noted by the local press, and there are undoubtedly others that newspapers do not mention, show that during the second and third trimesters of 1935 the number of accidents was 160, of which there were 29 dead and 114 injured recorded, an average of 6 weekly accidents with 1 dead and 4 injured.[42]

The number of pedestrians, mostly Vietnamese, killed on the roads of Tonkin, provided evidence for the alarming mismatch between speedy modern motor vehicles and the colonial road network. With automobiles, trucks, and tramways running alongside ox-drawn carts,

man-pulled rickshaws, and peasants with or without cattle, colonial roads were plagued by increasing entropy and confusion, as diverse types of road users attempted to negotiate each other's places and paces.

In response to this crisis, an ad hoc alliance of local bodies, colonial administrators, and interest groups tried to ameliorate traffic problems by organizing the movements of its component parts. Part of this response involved sustained critical attention to the movements of a particular group of road users and their perceptual modes of responding to the automobile. Alarming articles published by the automobile clubs and newspapers such as the *Courrier Saigonnais*, representing European bourgeois interests in the South, lamented pedestrian fatalities:

> The chronicle of reckless homicides and injuries caused by motorists is really too abundantly provided. The pedestrian is constantly taken into the whirlwind of high speeds, and neither government orders nor police measures nor the Highway Code and Street Code suffice to his defense. Saigon is not a commercial city, nor is it the Indochinese metropolis of business, it is the boulevard, the track, the Linas Montlhéry[43] of the Pacific. The express speeds favored by our drivers,—some female,—cannot be explained. […]
>
> But it is so, and if any citizen of any planet happened to arrive in Saigon around 11 o'clock in the morning or 6 o'clock in the evening, I would fear for his inexperience and his feet … if not more.[44]

Commenting on the 1925 *Code de la route du Tonkin*, Duclaux, director of the *Société des Transports Automobiles Indochinois*, had complained earlier to the chief engineer of Tonkin that:

> This code holds nothing that applies to pedestrians. Yet one does not see why pedestrians should not have to obey rules like vehicles, especially given that by their large number and their individual ease of maneuvering in all directions they are susceptible of causing significant disorder. [45]

The risk of pedestrian entropy leads to a significant threat, as Lefebvre notes:

> All becoming irregular [*dérèglement*] (or, if one wants, all *deregulation*, though this word has taken on an official sense) of rhythms produces antagonistic effects. It *throws out of order* and disrupts; it is symptomatic of a disruption that is generally profound, lesional and no longer functional.[46]

The unruly indigenous pedestrian poses a real threat to colonial order. For the colonial administration, the evidence is clear: drivers cannot be solely responsible for traffic accidents. Traffic becomes a moving mirror of French domination, reflecting back on the colonizers the ills of their administration. With increasing traffic, the responsibility of administrators is to employ tactics that will benefit the population as well as the state by using men and territory as instruments to ensure and facilitate the movement of goods and people and to avoid disruptions.

Throughout the 1930s, members of the Council of French Economic and Financial Interests of Tonkin (*Conseil des Intérêts Français Économiques et Financiers du Tonkin*) lobby for the development and improvement of roads and bridges by asking provincial leaders to require that villages establish their markets off-road. The administrator in charge of reviewing the Council's wishes for 1930 for the Resident Superior believes this modification to be easily "achievable on colonial roads where traffic is intense and where constant supervision may be imposed on village authorities, it is not the same on quiet roads where people do not understand the necessity of abandoning a clean, dry place which is used quite exceptionally by motorists." Yet he insists that "one cannot impose continuous surveillance on villages."[47] Indigenous pedestrians are free to wander on these roads rarely traveled by automobiles.

Another response comes from the Resident Superior of Tonkin who seeks to implement a traffic police in response to requests from motorists and European settlers. In his report to the Resident Superior, Captain Trémeau, commander of the gendarmerie in Annam-Tonkin, comments on the evolutions of traffic and what he calls "the problem of the road in Tonkin": "The Tonkinese road is no longer safe, and, if nothing comes to stop the current danger, in 10 years more than 5,000 people will have been sacrificed in vain and over 3,000 more or less seriously injured."[48]

To arrive at this estimate, the officer relies on the figures from the Public Works indicating that 6000 cars (including 430 trucks) are circulating in Tonkin as well as on the 1933 CAMTAL statistics, which record 400 accidents and 50 deaths. Road safety thus unites the colonial government and associations of road users to advocate for the establishment of a "traffic police." The road has become everyone's problem: "The frequency and severity of accidents on the road caused by automobile vehicles rightly move public opinion and reveal a state of things which one can say is, at the very least, an undeniable peril and constant for all."[49]

With traffic, danger is now universally shared and constitutes a "threat to community safety."[50] What then is the role of the colonial government?

The Council of French Economic and Financial Interests of Tonkin and the Automobile Club of Annam, Tonkin, and Laos report deficiencies in traffic monitoring on several occasions and request the creation of a special road police brigade, principally constituted by elements of the *Gendarmerie*.[51] The Resident Superior's initial responses reject this solution, citing budget limitations and staff shortages. The Governor General decides to reinforce the policing of road traffic by involving new categories of civil servants more actively. A May 21, 1934, order of the Governor General strengthens the powers of the Native Guards (*Gardes indigènes*) and allows native civil servants from the Public Works Department—who in some provinces fulfill the functions of Subdivision chiefs and hold the rank of engineer or assistant engineer and have the power to give out fines.[52] Therefore, the Resident Superior is able to extend the powers of traffic police to new categories of civil servants and military personnel beyond racial boundaries. Indeed, the problem of the road has become a problem for all, and the solution must involve all. Even if they are limited, the results seem convincing, judging by the number of violations reported. From January 1 to May 31, 1936, Trémeau[53] prides himself on reporting 2935 traffic offenses, mostly passenger overloads (856) and lighting defects (819). While it remains difficult to regulate livery cars, the Governor General and the Resident Superior of Tonkin pursue road governance through other initiatives.

Responding to the concerns of the colonial population in 1936, the Resident Superior of Tonkin launches a survey on the number and causes of car and mass transport accidents during the previous three years (1933–1935). He solicits the critical eye of colonial administrators, from the smallest to the greatest, and circulates a standard table,[54] urging heads of provinces, commanders of military territories, and the mayors of Hanoi and Haiphong to duly complete and return it:

> The columns relating to the cause of the accident shall be filled in with special care. It is not enough to put down abstract or general statements, such as clumsiness of the driver, imprudence of the victim, breach of regulations, etc. Rather, the material facts of the accident shall be indicated, such as: brutal braking, pedestrian crossing the road carelessly, vehicle not holding its right, poor state of the brakes, … as long as the facts have been established.[55]

The Administration asks its representatives for an accurate count, a detailed description, and a critical analysis of the material conditions of traffic in Indochina, what the Resident calls "material facts of the accident." The table's predetermined labels offer a breeding ground for an inglorious and nevertheless endorsed account of the effects of the colonial presence. The elements of the narrative are: date, time, and place, nature of the accident. Causes or grievances are to be shared between road, weather, vehicle, driver, and third parties (other road users). Categories of impact are divided between death, minor injuries, serious injuries, and property damage. The impact of motoring on colonial life is clearly set before the eyes of the administrator and implies nature, the machine, and man. The arithmetic becomes a technique for determining the most appropriate actions in an environment rendered predictable.

For the year 1935, the Hanoi Municipal Police report fourteen accidents on or caused by mass transit vehicles, including one fatal, with eight caused by the driver.[56] In 1937, the Commissioner of Police Fabiani reports to the mayor that "traffic accidents concerning pedestrians are few."[57] However, the situation is worse in rural areas,[58] as in the province of Ha Dong in 1934, where, for eight comparable accidents, there were three deaths, two serious injuries, and seven minor injuries.[59] The risks are known, analyzed, and subsequently moderated. In most cases, mass transport accidents were due to drivers or third parties: pedestrians. The "material facts of the accidents" on the colonial road are first and foremost human factors. To be able to smooth out the flow of Natives and Europeans on the roads of Indochina, the official approach becomes critical, prescriptive, and punitive. It involves the participation of all representatives of colonial rule in the diagnosis and the administration of the remedy, joining individual decisions with the general interest.

Once data is collected and conclusions are drawn, the Resident Superior reiterates his instructions of 1932 and 1935: repression of the most serious offenses against the provisions of the Highway Code, by giving appropriate penalties, revoking licenses, and educating the population. According to him:

> Accidents caused by third parties and of which there are almost always victims generally come from the carelessness of pedestrians or children, crossing the road unexpectedly without ensuring that it is safe to do so, and from straying domestic animals. It is also important to reduce the number of accidents, to educate the population without waiting for it to happen by itself at the expense of a costly experience both in money and in lives.[60]

Automobility has an economic and labor cost paid in damages to vehicles, a human cost paid in indigenous lives, and therefore a political cost, always at the expense of Europeans and now unaffordable, even to colonial administrators. The Resident Superior looks to written suggestions from his administrators to fight "the difficulty of trying to cure the natives of their carelessness,"[61] seeking "*dressage*" as a remedy. The answers vary according to commitment to the project and depend on measures already in place. The Mayor of Haiphong proves quite fatalistic and seems to reject the diagnostic: "The education of the Natives is now done in the city where pedestrians walk on sidewalks. The rare accidents that occur in the city are due to the carelessness of children against which no precautions can be taken."[62] The use of sidewalks seems to adapt "*dressage*" to urban colonial settings. In the countryside, Maynard, the Resident of France in Sontay, calls into question the Resident Superior's characterization of careless natives. To avoid a systematic gnawing away of the roadway by traders blocking traffic, he has them pushed back into an enclosure separated from the road by a brick wall or a bamboo hedge. He hopes that all of these roads will be released gradually from this "dangerous servitude to markets formerly on the road and the establishment of large drying sections on the asphalt."[63] Dependence on the road varies according to its use. The colonial road—flat, uniform, relatively waterproofed, and modernized for the needs of the modern car—enables pre-modern use by its rural pedestrians.

In the economic crisis of the 1930s, road space is used to guarantee farmers a minimum subsistence, not by ensuring the mobility of production goods, but by saving their harvest from flooding. In rural areas, colonial "*dressage*" fails to break in the indigenous body, as it cannot correlate the Native's physiological rhythms to the requirements of the wider colonial system. Between June and December 1935 in Tonkin, the president of CAMTAL complains repeatedly of the "breaches of traffic committed by villages along the road Hanoi-Nam Dinh-Minh Bich" that "persist in covering the roadway with straw and sheaves of rice and the sides with large piles of straw and trays, making it difficult for and dangerous to automobile traffic."[64] Not only would roads allow grain to dry, but the passing of trucks or cars would also facilitate threshing. In this instance, two uses of the road, as means of communication and as production space, and two rhythms, that of modern automobile traffic and that of rice cultivation, clash. For the president of CAMTAL, the road must be reclaimed: "At a time when justice is

particularly severe for drivers as instigators of accidents, it is essential that the Administration finally take effective measures to ensure the proper use of the road."[65] Yet, what is the proper use of the colonial road? Road safety rests on a tension between the rhythms of automobility and control of the pedestrian population. In his reply to the Resident Superior, the Resident of France in Hanam explains and justifies "the vagaries of nhaquês"[66] by first questioning the expertise of the driver:

> The distinguished President of the Automobile Club is a man too well-informed of things in this country to ignore the unique situation in this section of the lower delta that includes the sections of Hadong South - Phuly North and Phuly South - Namdinh North, a situation that justifies a certain flexibility in the application of regulations whose principles are not in question.[67]

Climatic and economic circumstances dictate the measures to be taken. The road benefits commercial production and has a role in the economic exploitation of the country: "Without leaving to farmers in these regions moderate use of the shoulders of the road for drying rice straw, we would be doomed to the almost complete loss of this part of the crop that provides the nhaquê in this crisis most of his income."[68] More importantly, the justification for this moderation is in the very participation of Vietnamese peasants and pedestrians in the colonial automobile system through their labor, which also gives them a measure of control over the mobility of "road users":

> I have no doubt that, better informed of the special situation of the crop in the lower delta, French and Annamite users of the road for their part will agree to moderate their average speed for a fortnight in July and in November-December to avoid bringing misery to a population whose labor provides much of the resources needed to maintain this beautiful road network of which motorists are the primary beneficiaries.[69]

The entanglement of road users and cars, the diversity of possible uses and competition between their goals, lead to a critical conception of colonial power as "more or less vaguely conceived as a unitary system, organized around a center which is simultaneously the source, which is supported by its internal dynamics to expand forever,"[70] to use the words of Michel Foucault.

In Sontay, Resident of France Maynard considers pedestrians to be sufficiently aware near roads with high traffic. He claims that buses and coaches are familiar to the "Annamite who knows their benefits as well as dangers." His diagnosis focuses not on behavior but on the narrowness of the road itself.[71] Where the colonial system presents government as palliative to traffic,[72] it is the road that must be improved; in turn, it will ensure social regulation. Despite his reservations, Maynard meets the request for preventive policies and equates legal qualifications in road safety with automotive use. He suggests measures that would influence pedestrians' behaviors, ranging from displaying notices written in *Quoc Ngu* and *Chu Nom*[73] in markets and locations bordering roads to the education of schoolchildren to

> advice given by the heads of districts to village chiefs and local authorities during conferences; each Mandarin indeed has a car, knows how quickly an accident can happen and generally has had more or less painful personal experience of accident causes; Mandarins will be particularly qualified, as much in their functions as because they drive a car themselves, to give the necessary instructions to their agents.[74]

Mandarins are solicited not only as auxiliaries of the colonial administration[75] but also as drivers, individuals enjoying the freedom of movement granted by the car. Expertise stems from car usage and driving.[76] Technology provides legitimacy to their word among both Europeans and Natives. Mandarins participate in building knowledge and recognizing the Natives as road users. Gineste, the Resident of France in Hoa Binh, reports their suggestions:

> Mandarins consulted on the most convenient way to inform the public about the risks it runs have asked me to provide all schools in the province with a highway code translated into Quoc Ngu. Teachers could thus give quick and simple lectures to children who would repeat them to their parents.[77]

Colonial road safety now relies on Mandarin automobile and cultural expertise. They are sought out to transform the road system by displaying, in addition to signs, specific instructions in Vietnamese. To be safe

on the road means to be able to read rhythms and signs through other signs, both pictorial representations (signage) and written characters. In Thai Binh, for example, Mandarins extend road safety to affect the social behaviors of children, daydreaming and playing, and farmers, pulling carts or carrying loads:

> Mandarins and district heads are invited by the care of Mr. Tong-Dôc of the province to prescribe the following emergency measures:
> - display in all Dinh and markets a notice in Quoc Ngu and Chinese characters written in very large letters in red ink and containing the following tips:
> "Do not daydream while walking on the road, do not rush under cars for lack of having seen or heard them.
> When a car has passed, see whether another is following before taking the middle of the road or crossing the road.
> Do not let your children play or domestic animals wander on the road, for fear they would be injured or cause serious accidents.
> When, while carrying a load, you stop, put your baskets or bundles on your side of the road, as far as possible out of the way of automobiles.
> Do not walk through the middle of the road: shoulders are best suited for pedestrians.
> When you pull a cart, pay attention to the signals of automobiles; avoid putting your vehicle across the road."[78]

The education or "*dressage*" of children seems easier to manage than that of adults.[79] It continues in youth organizations such as scouting. The president of the Boy Scouts[80] society of Haiduong promises to make "as many propagandists of the proper comportment of the pedestrian on the road"[81] as possible, so that his scouts would relay "*dressage*" to grown-ups. Parents are held responsible and accountable for the mobility and wandering of children.[82] For Merlo, Resident of France in Quang Yen, customary laws of neighboring villages should fine parents whose children are found enjoying themselves on the road without supervision.[83] Automobility in Indochina participates in communal and intergenerational relationships and rhythms. It requires the cooperation of French and native administrators, governors and, heads of districts. Its risks are perceived differently depending on geography and territories. Two interventions finally attempt at incorporating colonial discipline into the pedestrian.

Based on the moral and "anthropological" observation that "the Native has a naive faith in his star, the accident that happens to his neighbor he does not think possible for himself,"[84] Massini, Resident of France in Haiduong, recommends that periodical lists of "typical accidents due to the carelessness of the natives followed by brief comments" be widely distributed in the provinces. Pettelat, Resident of France in Bac Giang[85] circulates a notice in French in primary schools and in Quoc Ngu in elementary schools. Students learn by heart the rules of cautiousness after copying them on the first page of their notebook. The Saturday physical education session is replaced by a practical lesson in pedestrian education. Children become pedestrians in mind as well as in body. In addition, a text in Vietnamese verse[86] was given as a recitation in all schools in the province:

> Walking on the right side is prudent
> Upon meeting of a car, exit immediately
> To the edge of the road.
> Often several cars come and go,
> Hastening back to the middle of the road after
> The passage of one of them is risking one's life.
> Crossing the road, hurry
> After making sure that there are no cars coming from both directions.
> In the middle of the road, having fun with playmates,
> Playing ball, reading books, is getting run over by one's own fault.

Games and rhymes imprint new rhythms on native bodies, attempting further "*dressage*" on colonial roads.

Indigenous bodies almost entered road signage to be incorporated in the vast semiotic system through which colonial road users traveled. In 1936 Tonkin, Captain Trémeau led a signage project for the blind and the deaf, whose mobility appears affected by a biological handicap, a corporeity.[87] Their circulation and identification also concerned the good works of Mrs. Robin, wife of the Resident Superior, and the Committee for the Blind in Hanoi. The fully stigmatizing solution consisted of marking their clothes with a crossbar, turning them into literal ambulant warning signs, a mobile empire of signs (Fig. 6.1).

The detailed sketches show patches mending holes on worn-out outfits and clearly locate the pedestrians on a country road. The project

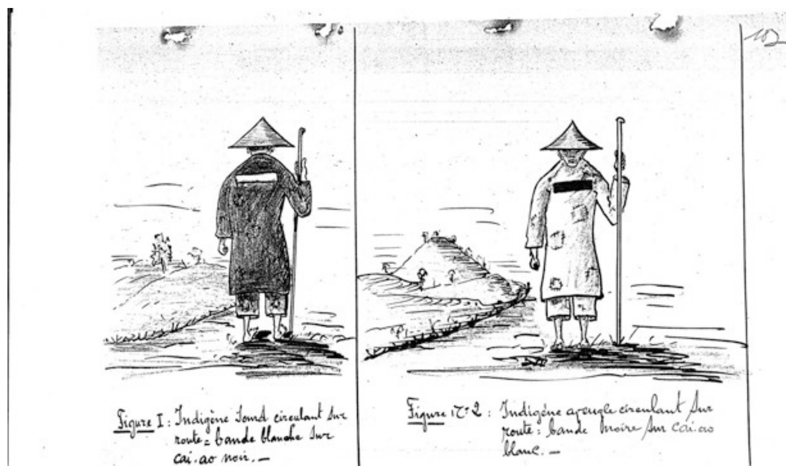

Fig. 6.1 Captain Trémeau's signage project for labeling deaf natives with a white stripe on a black *cai-ao* and blind natives with a black stripe on a white *cai-ao* (Archives Nationales du Vietnam 1, Résidence Supérieure du Tonkin 77762, "Sur la signalisation des aveugles usagers de la route au Tonkin," 1936–1937)

was quickly abandoned because, as pointed out by the official in charge of reading the note, "Mr. Commander Gendarmerie probably did not notice the mosaic pieces of different colors indicating the level of seniority and dirt which already consists of the clothing of the poor class."[88]

By incorporating the body within an assemblage of supervisions, controls, regulations, instructions, signs, structures, architectures, classifications, and mechanical apparatuses, colonial road safety tried to correlate the native's physiological rhythms to the requirements of the wider colonial system. It sought to produce an efficient and docile body, productively self-aligned through its own habituated measures and embodied disciplines. Indigenous pedestrians were precariously managed by a dynamic complex of both human and non-human factors. Their movements were systematically structured yet contingently impacted by local particularities. The incorporation of indigenous pedestrians, bringing them into one body, that of the corporeity of the indigenous subject and that of the colonial body of subjects, failed in colonial Indochina. The indigenous body remained an irregularity with its politically disruptive potential characterized by Lefebvre:

> All becoming irregular of rhythms […] can also produce a lacuna, a hole in time, to be filled in by an invention, a creation. That only happens, individually or socially, by passing through a *crisis*. Disruptions and crises always have origins in and effects on rhythms: those of institutions, of growth, of the population, of exchanges, of work, therefore those which make or *express* the complexity of present societies. One could study from this perspective the rhythmic changes that follow revolutions.[89]

Although originating in the political and economic imperatives and regulations of the colonial state, the issue of the indigenous pedestrian expressed a wider discursive and experiential turn that questioned colonialism itself and fed into its crisis. The Vietnamese eluded, criticized or undermined the rules of the road by the simple act of walking, some even escaping literal incorporation as ambulant signs of otherness. The road at times became a site of open opposition to colonial authority or, through the deliberate disruption of traffic, a key location for the exercise of political disobedience. Beyond colonialism, "angry feet" still embody and enact defiance in contemporary Vietnam. In an open editorial published in the *New York Times* on June 6, 2013, Tuong Lai, a sociologist also known as Nguyen Phuoc Tuong, reported on anti-Chinese demonstrations of "so-called angry feet [who] have pounded Vietnam's streets in demonstrations that have united intellectuals and urban youth," joined by farmers. Long after the phenomenon of motorized traffic and its attending "problem of the road" became commonplace, the roads remain a public arena where pedestrians "*se dressent*," embodying the ambivalence of the verb, ambling between the discipline of *dressage* and the potential for physical display of contestation and uprising.

Notes

1. Bibliothèque Nationale du Vietnam in Hanoi (BNHV), M 5 6798, CAMTAL, *Causerie de M. Lécorché Président à la soirée du 9 janvier 1932* (Hanoi: Imprimerie Tân-Dân, 1932).
2. See David Del Testa, "Paint the Trains Red: Labor, Nationalism, and the Railroads in French Colonial Indochina, 1898–1945" (PhD dissertation, University of California Davis, 2001), 153.
3. See also letter from Lécorché to Resident Superior, n°283, January 7, 1932 and letter n°39 from Captain Louis Serre, commander of the of Annam-Tonkin police acknowledging receipt of a Peugeot motorcycle

on January 15, 1932 in Archives Nationales du Vietnam 1 (ANV1), Résidence Supérieure du Tonkin (RST) 77769-01, "Organisation d'un service spécialisé de Police de la route au Tonkin."

4. On the perceived carelessness of native pedestrians by Vietnamese intellectuals, see Linh D. Vu, "Careless and Carless Natives: Automobile Accidents and the Project of Modernity in French Indochina," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 27, no. 2 (2012): 328–41.
5. Part of this present chapter is adapted from a previous publication. See Stéphanie Ponsavady, "*Indigènes* into Signs: Incorporating Indigenous Pedestrians on Colonial Roads in 1920s and 1930s French Indochina," *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies* 4, no. 3 (2014): 4–23.
6. Tongkin (or Tonkin) was the Northern protectorate of the Union Indochinoise, now Northern part of Vietnam. The other parts of Vietnam were then known as Annam (Central Vietnam) and Cochinchina (Southern Vietnam).
7. Roland Dorgelès, *On the Mandarin Road* (New York and London: The Century Co., 1926), 10.
8. Jan Breman and E. Valentine Daniel, "The Making of a Coolie," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 19, nos. 3–4 (1992): 268–94.
9. Jan Breman and E. Valentine Daniel, "The Making of a Coolie," 268.
10. Jan Breman and E. Valentine Daniel, "The Making of a Coolie," 270.
11. Jan Breman and E. Valentine Daniel, "The Making of a Coolie," 270.
12. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 40.
13. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life*, 38.
14. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life*, 39. The French translation "*se dressent*", in italics, is Lefebvre's emphasis.
15. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life*, 42.
16. Regarding the racialization of walking by French scientists, see Peter J. Bloom in *French Colonial Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). He shows the anthropological construction of the "flexioned gait" as a means of distinguishing the posture of the "savage" from the posture of "civilized" man in the late nineteenth century.
17. For an overview of the social order in the colonial city, see Philippe Peycam's, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916–1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). See in particular "The City as Colonial Apparatus," 15–19. This section focuses on mobility in and in between cities.
18. Similarly, David Arnold in his article "The Problem of Traffic: The Street-Life of Modernity in Late-Colonial India," *Modern Asian Studies* 46, Special Issue 1 (2012): 119–41, shows how the introduction of

motorized transport in India in the early twentieth century and the modern phenomenon of traffic fostered the expansion of late-colonial policing and the growth of the "everyday state."

19. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life*, 40.
20. In this section, "colonial roads" refers to all roads built under French rule. Historically, the phrase "*route coloniale*" referred to an administrative category of roads designed, built and maintained under the general budget of the colony. However the term was used loosely in colonial literature and archives.
21. See previous chapters and, in particular, the discussions of the Automobile Club of Cochinchina in the June 1923 issue of its official publication, *La Revue du tourisme indochinois*, regarding the type of races in which Vietnamese drivers were allowed to compete. In Cochinchina, races would play a moral and educational role. The Automobile Club only allowed Vietnamese participation in endurance races and gymkhanas, as they would reinforce the economy and personal agility.
22. Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).
23. Truong Buu Lâm, *Colonialism Experienced, Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900–1931* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 46.
24. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).
25. "Un enfer évité," *La revue du tourisme indochinois*, February 22, 1924, 20.
26. Archives Nationales du Vietnam 1 (ANV1), Résidence Supérieure du Tonkin (RST) 77763, "Réglementation de la profession de garagiste-loueur d'autos 1930."
27. David Arnold notes that in colonial India car usage was also monitored for potential terrorist activities.
28. ANV1, RST 77763, arrêté 810A, February 24, 1930.
29. Louis Roubaud, *Viet-Nam. La Tragédie indochinoise* (Paris: L. Valois, 1931), 27. Note: all translations of Roubaud's *Viet-Nam* and archival material are mine.
30. Louis Roubaud, *Viet-Nam*, 28.
31. Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hemery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858–1954*, trans. Ly-Lan Dill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 316.
32. This is the *Société indochinoise forestière et des allumettes.*
33. Louis Roubaud, *Viet-Nam*, 31–32.
34. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 42.
35. The French phrase "*ils se dressent*" could be translated as "they are tamed" as well as "they rise up."

36. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 39.
37. Louis Roubaud, *Viet-Nam*, 13–14.
38. Penny Edwards, "The Tyranny of Proximity: Power and Mobility in Colonial Cambodia, 1863–1954," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37 no. 3 (2006): 421–43.
39. Louis Roubaud, *Viet-Nam,* 39.
40. Louis Roubaud, *Viet-Nam*, 39.
41. Louis Roubaud, *Viet-Nam*, 38.
42. ANV1, RST 77769-01, letter from the CAMTAL to the Governor General, October 11, 1935.
43. Linas Montlhéry is a famous car racetrack in France.
44. Cited in "Les accidents d'automobile," *Tourisme, Revue des Études Indochinoises, de l'Automobilisme et du Tourisme, REIAT*, n°130 (November 13, 1925), 13.
45. ANV1, RST 77759, letter from P. Duclaux in Haiphong to Ingénieur en Chef de la Circonscription territoriale du Tonkin in Hanoi, March 26, 1925.
46. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 44.
47. ANV1, RST 77764, "Vœux du Conseil des Intérêts Français Économiques et Financiers du Tonkin sur la police de la route," 1930.
48. ANV1, RST 77762-10, letter n°339/2, Captain Trémeau to Resident Superior in Hanoi, May 19, mai 1935.
49. Ibid., rapport n°339/2, Trémeau to Resident Superior, Hanoi, May 19, 1935.
50. Ibid.
51. ANV1, RST 77765-03, circulaire n°254-A, Résident Supérieur au Tonkin à Tous les Résidents Chefs de Province, Commandants de Territoire Militaire, July 8, 1935.
52. ANV1, RST 77762-10, letter n°206 A/I, Resuper aux résidents, Hanoi, June 6, 1934.
53. ANV1, RST 77762-10, letter n°404, Trémeau à Resuper, Hanoi, July 3, 1936.
54. ANV1, Mairie de Hanoi (MDH) 4333.
55. ANV1, Mairie de Hanoi (MDH) 4333, memorandum by Resident Superior, May 8, 1936.
56. See also ANV1, RST 76767-01. They claimed 7 dead in Hanoi from 1929 to 1934.
57. ANV1, MDH 4333, letter N514-M, from Commissaire central de Police Fabiani to Mayor of Hanoi, May 5, 1937.
58. ANV1, RST 077765-05.
59. ANV1, MDH 4333.
60. Memoranda n°14-A, June 9, 1932 and n°254-A, July 4, 1935.
61. ANV1, MDH 4333, circular n°141-A, April 5, 1937.

62. ANV1, RST 077765-05, letter 141 cabinet du Maire de Haiphong, April 9, 1937.
63. ANV1, RST 077765-05, letter 5349 E, June 18, 1937.
64. ANV1, RST 77764, letter 2221, Hanoi, CAMTAL to Resident Superior, December 6, 1935.
65. ANV1, RST 77764, letter 2127, CAMTAL to Resident Superior, Hanoi, June 14, 1935.
66. The word "*nhaquê*" means "peasant" in Vietnamese. It is often used pejoratively in French.
67. ANV1, RST 77764, letter 3/159-L, Résident de France à Hanam to Resident Superior, January 14, 1936.
68. ANV1, RST 77764, letter 3/159-L, Résident de France à Hanam to Resident Superior, January 14, 1936.
69. ANV1, RST 77764, letter 3/159-L, Résident de France à Hanam to Resident Superior, January 14, 1936.
70. Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*, *tome IV*, *1980–1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 214.
71. ANV1, RST 077765-05, letter 5349 E, June 18, 1937.
72. The birth of a road safety plan in rural areas releases a prescriptive voice as European administrators read vehicular traffic but also the circulation of power between local authorities to for their own benefits. They use the relay of mandarins in both directions, as diagnosis and as remedy, and, similarly, rely on the youngest Vietnamese, and most exposed to colonial culture, to educate the oldest, activating conduits of colonial culture and power. With the beginnings of road safety in Tonkin, colonial "government" is less institution and more processes. Instead of erecting universal, general, and mandatory standards, regulation of mobility is done by more subtle means of influence. Differing from the empire of colonial law, the process of government emerges as a tension or balance between forces in constant interaction. Far from universal and general, it is local and particular, adapted to places, circumstances, and people. This type of government does not relay a split between the "political" and "non-political." Instead, there is continuity and interlocking between the forms of government of ing behaviors that unfold at all social levels in the colony.
73. *Quoc ngu* is the writing system for the Vietnamese language based on the Latin script. *Chu nom* is a script formerly used to write Vietnamese based on Chinese characters.
74. ANV1, RST 077765-05, letter 5349 E, June 18, 1937.
75. ANV1, RST 077765-05.
76. It should be noted that the Mandarins in this case drove their own automobile. Traditionally, Mandarins used palanquins and servants would carry them. This shift in practices denotes the attractiveness of automobility that made it socially acceptable to be one's own driver.

77. ANV1, RST 077765-05, note postale 555 R, Hoa Binh, May 13, 1937.
78. ANV1, RST 077765-05, note postale n°427 A, Guiriec Résident de France à Thai Binh, April 13, 1937.
79. ANV1, RST 077765-05, note postale 707 du Lieutenant Colonel Maffre, commandant du Premier Territoire Militaire, undated.
80. On the relationship between French Boy Scouts, Indochina, and the car, see also the travelogue by Guy de Larigaudie, *La Route aux aventures: Paris-Saïgon en automobile* (Paris: Plon, 1939).
81. ANV1, RST 077765-05, note postale 980, Résident de France Massimi à Haiduong, June 3, 1937. On the development of the scout movement in the colonies, see Nicolas Bancel, Daniel Denis, and Youcef Fatès, *De l'Indochine à l'Algérie: la jeunesse en mouvements des deux côtés du miroir colonial, 1940–1962* (Paris: Découverte, 2003).
82. Later, in *The Sea Wall* (first published as *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* by Gallimard in Paris in 1950), trans. Herma Briffault (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), Marguerite Duras designates the colonial road as the realm of children, who "interfered with the circulation of [Europeans'] cars, damaged the bridges, tore up the stones from the roadways, and even created problems of conscience. 'Too many of them die,' said the whites" (261).
83. ANV1, RST 077765-05, note postale 1285 AG, Quang Yên, May 26, 1937.
84. ANV1, RST 077765-05, note postale n°980 L, June 3, 1937.
85. ANV1, RST 077765-05, note postale 6517 B, Pettelat, Résident de France à Bac Giang, June 15, 1937.
86. ANV1, RST 077765-05. The text appears in Vietnamese and in French. The French translation is only given as an indication to the administrator. Students learn the Vietnamese version.
87. ANV1, RST 77762, letter n°404/2, July 3, 1936.
88. Undated handwritten note inserted in file ANV1, RST 77762, "Sur la signalisation des aveugles usagers de la route au Tonkin," 1936–1937.
89. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 44.

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CHAPTER 7

Conclusion: Driving Metaphors and Myths

At the turn of the twentieth century, the automobile heralded the advent of a new era. Humans seemed no longer limited by space and time and could rise up as their masters. Italian futurism, in particular, glorified this rupture. When Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published the manifesto of futurism in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909, he wrote of a new aesthetics infused with obvious epic and moral undertones:

> 4. We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath… a roaring automobile, which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.
>
> 5. We want to sing the man at the wheel, the ideal axis of which crosses the earth, itself hurled along the track of its orbit.[1]

While it celebrated the motorcar and its novelty, the futurism manifesto also pointed to the inherent violence and barbarism of this new era of modernity.[2] The man at the wheel and the colonizer became one and the same in Southeast Asia, as the ideal axis of the French motorcar pierced through Indochina. For the French, the introduction of the automobile coincided with another movement of mastery over space: The nation's colonial expansion overseas in the late nineteenth century. The pleasures

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and thrills of the automobile became intrinsically linked to France's history of conquest, colonialism, and exploitation.

The improvement of transportation infrastructure and technology was—and is still often—considered as a barometer for the progress of colonialism as well as a stock argument in public debates about the "positive effects of colonization." The automobile thus became a metaphor anchoring the image of French Indochina as a successful and thriving colony. Focusing especially on the automobile and roads has helped us to address the contradictions of the "progress" of French colonialism. Bringing together the emerging field of mobility studies with the field of French colonial studies, this book offered a reading of the automobile as a metaphor for colonialism. Automobility had political, economic, social and psychological aspects, and helped maintain French beliefs in the Republic and its colonial enterprise at times when the public questioned their utility and morality. In the early years, the colonial road system emerged as a masterful piece of propaganda for France's "*mission civilisatrice*," which became palpably more imperative following the French military humiliations in the Franco-Prussian War. Seeing themselves as the heirs of Rome, the French felt compelled after their defeat to reassert their mastery of civilization. Nothing fostered the ideal of autonomous mastery more than the car, which French colonial culture and literature celebrated as a mobile capsule for the self, a vehicle for thrilling explorations, and a promoter of self-determination, appealing to both colonizer and colonized. To some extent, cars and literature powered France's mobility at the time. Drawing on a series of high moments of colonial automobile history told us the fascinating story of how automobiles became much more than just a means of transport or passive literary vehicles; rather, they turned out to be powerful metaphors in the purest sense of the word.

One episode took the form of the allegory, a story in which the characters and events serve as symbols of ideas about human life or for a political or historical situation. The story of Ferdinand d'Orléans, Duke of Montpensier, forbidden to take up arms to defend France, who rode a "pure-bred car" from the capital of French Colonial Indochina to the ruins of the seat of the Khmer kingdom in 1908 is a real-life fairy tale that magically reconciles competing values and histories. In *La Ville au Bois Dormant, de Saigon à Angkor en automobile* (1910), the French Prince tells the story of the reunification of the amputated territory of Angkor as Cambodia's Alsace-Lorraine, while advancing the motorist,

colonial and Republican causes. Indeed, Ferdinand d'Orléans explicitly identified the automobile as "an allegory of anachronism."[3]

This book also told us a very "pedestrian" story, that of daily traffic on the roads of Colonial Indochina. It was a process that turned indigenous pedestrians into walking signs of otherness. Signs stand for something else, indicate through symbolic phenomena the presence or existence of some other entity. On the side of the road, they signpost danger, they provide information, indicate directions, etc. In the mid-1920s, leaving Hanoi to reach Saigon on Colonial Road 1—the so-called Mandarin Road—French journalist Roland Dorgelès noticed that restless pedestrians seemed to escape the discipline of the road by moving along "like ants," avoiding speedy modern automobiles. He equated the bodies of the Vietnamese laborers to the animal, the insect, gregarious and organized by a natural order, whose logic was evident yet undecipherable to the colonial observer. To the French car passenger, the mobile indigenous pedestrian embodied unruliness amid a modern system of transportation that sought to integrate bodies in the larger economy of the colony. It was a sign of otherness resisting colonial abstraction, so much so that in the 1930s, a signage project suggested labeling them according to their disability. This road safety project was quickly dropped after someone remarked that disabled natives were just too dirty for their clothing to remain visible. Labeled "disorderly," "dirty," and "dangerous," indigenous pedestrians posed a threat to modern automobility in Colonial Indochina.

The private car in Colonial Indochina long remained the vehicle of choice of the elites, French colonists, administrators, and planters. It held the promise of autonomy, mobility, and relative comfort and safety. It would enable movement and exploration all through the territory while keeping the disagreeable things and people away. This mythology of independence was offset by the opportunities that automobility created for increased surveillance, regulation, and control by the colonial state and, as the state's influence waxed and waned, by each group of road users over the other. Soon automobility in Indochina extended to the upwardly mobile Asians, such as the Chinese traders or Vietnamese bourgeoisie. The development of car travel narratives exposed these inconsistencies in the rhetorical emphases on the civilizing roadway and modern vehicle in works by French and Vietnamese writers.

In postcolonial France, the automobile has continued to play a mythical role. In his 1957 *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes mused:

> What is a myth, today? I shall give at the outset a first, very simple answer, which is perfectly consistent with etymology: *myth is a type of speech*.[4] (107)

In colonial times, automobility became a myth, a type of speech that ordered, structured, and enabled the mobility of some while it disrupted, limited, and halted the mobility of others, through the regulations, infrastructures, and values brought about by the automobile. This would also be true of postcolonial times.

In another essay, also later reproduced in 1957 in his collected *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes commented on the “New Citroën” DS:

> I think that cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals: I mean the supreme creation of an era, conceived with passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage by a whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object.
>
> It is obvious that the new Citroen has fallen from the sky inasmuch as it appears at first sight as a superlative object. (88)

Indeed, the car was still a magical object in France then. In 1961, only 1 in 8 French people (as opposed to 1 in 3 Americans) owned a car. In her 1995 book *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, Kristin Ross noted that the importance of representations of the car preceded the car’s becoming commonplace in the French middle class. For most French, the automobile indeed was first a myth. Furthermore, these representations eluded the conditions of production of these cars and the existence of a new workforce: immigrant workers from France’s former colonies, often hired in large recruiting campaigns. The new Citroen and the other French cars, such as Renault’s *Colorales*,[5] were not falling from the sky but rather coming from France’s periphery and recent past.[6]

A new realist push in literature soon challenged the automobile myth. In 1966, Claire Etcherelli’s novel *Elise ou la vraie vie*[7] introduced the figure of the Algerian immigrant working in the car factories at the outskirts of Paris. It presents the failed union between the French working class and the immigrant Algerian population during the Algerian war, with the story a doomed love affair between a provincial French woman and an Algerian worker.

The reality of this divided working class would pose a threat to the French economy in the 1980s. Between 1982 and 1984, the Talbot Poissy factory became the site of strikes that pit against each other immigrant workers and French workers. Peugeot had acquired Talbot in

1978 and was now downsizing its workforce[8] in response to a decrease in sales. The layoff plan targeted first and foremost immigrant workers, who accounted for 80% of the terminations, while most of the terminated French employees were from the DOM-TOM.[9] When immigrant workers protested and occupied the factory with the support of the CGT (*Confédération Générale du Travail*) and the CFDT (*Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail*),[10] another union, the CSL (*Confédération des Syndicats Libres*), made up of French workers from the far-right and close to the Peugeot administration attacked them, claiming the strikers were encroaching on their right to work. On January 5, 1984, the CSL launched a "cleaning operation" in Poissy with slogans such as "Arabs to the fire, Blacks to the Seine!" In the face of this new form of violence, the strikers voiced new claims for an *aide au retour*, a repatriation grant, so to speak, and longer vacation breaks that would allow those remaining employed to spend their summers back home.[11] A new figure of mobility was emerging: the North African unskilled laborer of the auto industry leaving France to go home, either indefinitely or temporarily, with his car.

Roland Barthes called the new Citroën DS a cathedral car and compared the popular cult of this novelty to that of the devotion to Gothic cathedrals. The *Cathedral Cars* of Thomas Mailaender[12] illustrate something else, even though at the port of Marseille, the longshoremen use the same phrase to refer to the unlikely sculptures that cross the Mediterranean, to Algeria, Morocco, or Tunisia, with their creators. The workers filled and loaded Renault, Peugeot, or Citroën cars with gifts, small and big, from child toys to washing machines, to be doled out to their loved ones back home. These cars evoke the iconography of vacation after the Popular Front in 1936.[13] They materialize a moment in the circulation of people and objects between two continents, reflecting contemporary mobilities, between France and its former colonies. Mailaender's series entered the permanent collection of the Museum of the History of Immigration in Paris and was presented in the 2011 exhibit entitled "*J'ai deux amours*" ("I have two loves").[14] Visitors can detail the 4-foot tall prints and deconstruct the cars and their cargo piled up toward the sky.

The case of postcolonial Vietnam is fascinating. Today, streets are flooded with motorbikes, which are the most popular means of transportation in Vietnam, with a population of around 92 million people and 45 million registered motorbikes, according to the Ministry of Transport

in 2016. Motorbikes play a vital role in all aspects of everyday life in Vietnam, particularly in major cities, filled with the noise of their engines and the sound of their horns. Despite fears of a saturated market and government efforts to reduce the number of motorbikes on the road to curb traffic congestion, the number of newly registered vehicles is still on the rise. Many of Vietnam's roads are simply too narrow for four-wheeled vehicles. With incessant traffic jams occurring in the major cities, motorcyclists can just simply weave through tight spaces or use the sidewalks. The intensity of traffic and pollution is such that in 2017, the Hanoi city council voted to ban[15] motorbikes by 2030. The interdiction would not include cars, which are becoming increasingly popular, despite the lack of parking spaces and the presence of tariffs for imported brands.[16]

Today, the automobile in Vietnam remains replete with ideological significance and has never been a neutral object. Introduced under French rule, the Western automobile was not only a symbol of what it meant to be civilized but also of having access to what was modern. With the triumph of nationalism and communism, however, the perception of the automobile changed: it became seen as an artifact of a corrupt, decadent society. Before independence, the automobile had seized hold of the popular imagination. Cars symbolized progress and modernity, available for purchase and possession, "consumed in image if not in usage," to paraphrase Barthes. The automobile occupied a strategic and complex place in the representation of national identity and individual self-expression. Popular and literary culture in Vietnam lost no time in incorporating motifs of motorization. A new sort of freedom was in the air, particularly for the upper-middle-class. Vietnamese writers[17] of the colonial era, such as Vũ Trong Phung, used urban changes stemming from the automobile as subject matter. Later after the end of the Vietnam war, from the mid-1970s up until the 1990s, road traffic.

In Postcolonial Vietnam, Viêt Linh's 2004 movie *Mê Thao, Thoi vang bóng* (*Mê Thao, in its Glorious Time*) captures the ambivalence of the automobile in her recreation of 1920s' Indochina. Adapted from Nguyên Tuân's novel *Chùa Đàn* (*Pagoda*) published in 1946, the film tells the story of Nguyên, a rich Vietnamese man, first shown wearing Western clothing, and owner of an estate named *Mê Thao*. Inspired by the automobiles he sees in Hanoi, he decides to send for his fiancée in a new car he has bought especially for the occasion. Offscreen, on the way to *Mê Thao*, the car has an accident and his fiancée is killed.

Grief-stricken, the protagonist blames himself and "civilization" for her death. He decides to reject all signs of modernity, burning his Western furniture and clothes, and forcing his villagers to destroy their few modern possessions, including tools, books, and toys. The estate falls into decay and Nguyên descends into madness. Meanwhile, the French colonists want to build a train line right through Mê Thao. Motorized means of transportation appear in the movie as obvious signs of modernity, opposed to Vietnamese tradition. Yet the film opens with a scene located in present-day mobility: Traveling on a train along the coast of Vietnam, a young Vietnamese man and a young Vietnamese woman are each listening to music in their headphones and bobbing their heads as they watch the scenery go by. As the train enters a tunnel, the screen fades to black and the title of the movie appears, soon followed by a street scene in Hanoi at the beginning of the twentieth century. Such sequencing simultaneously marks the distance and bridges the gap between now and then, leaving the audience to ponder the relationship between present and past and the meaning of the myths of modern transportation, while embarked on a cinematic and kinetic story. This reminds us that automobility as a figure of speech, a Barthesian myth, can transport us from one geographical space to a remote other, from our contemporary times to bygone eras, jumping over vast stretches of space and time.

To some extent, the present work was shaped by such gaps, some clearly identified in the introduction, others suggested over the preceding chapters, and more often than not, hidden in the blind spot of my own linear writing. The book's focalization on Tonkin, for instance, is a bias that results from archival gaps that made documentation pertaining to this area more accessible. It might skew the reader into overlooking the situation in Cochinchina, and most importantly Saigon, or encourage a generalization over all the territories that French Indochina comprised. In particular, the case of Laos, a landlocked territory where the colonial government never quite developed a working road system, deserves specific attention. My hope is that by pointing to these gaps, I can engage others to critically research automobility in Southeast Asia.

Again, stories and means of transportation, narratives and cars, are metaphors, enabling movement not only from one place to another but also from one time to another. Today, many in France and in the countries that formed its colonial empire express a sort of nostalgia through reminiscence around the automobile. It could take the form of reenactment of past motoring expeditions, such as the 2005 journey[18] in a Deux

Chevaux by two young Frenchmen in the spirit of Guy de Larigaudie, from Paris to Saigon, or the collection of old models.[19] This nostalgia also informs the strategy of automakers or the tourism industry. In Vietnam, French automakers have not yet made a full comeback, but they have kept an eye on the motoring market there and made efforts to enter in with products that appeal to modern sensibilities and conditions. Over 60 years after their departure, Peugeot returned to the Vietnamese market in 2016 with a new motorcycle, a neo-retro scooter named Django. Inspired by the 1954 S55 scooter and the 402 Darl'Mat automobile of 1937, the Django is curvy and available in pastel colors. Design manager Didier Roze explains his choice: "In order to elicit emotion and nostalgia, we wanted to design a compelling vehicle that drew its aesthetics from within the history of the legendary Peugeot brand."[20] The launch of the model in Vietnam was accompanied by a marketing event: leaving Paris on August 29, 2016, two young Frenchmen rode Django scooters across Europe to Asia arriving in Ho Chi Minh City just in time for the Vietnam International Motorshow (VIMS 2016) on October 26. Named the "Django Aventure," the expedition was inspired by a 1956 exploit by two French Naval officers who rode Peugeot S57 scooters from Saigon to Paris. In 2017, Peugeot reiterated the experience by sponsoring the expedition of two young French women riding Djangos from Paris to Casablanca.[21] These 2016 and 2017 reenactments materialized the links between the French capital and France's former colonies as well as brought them to a new audience through social media. Both editions of the Django Adventure could be followed on Instagram, Youtube, or Facebook. In Vietnam, this recent example of retro-marketing in the motor industry was followed by the commercial launch of the Peugeot 3008 and 5008 SUV's cars in on December 5, 2017.[22] These cars are now locally produced at the THACO (Truong Haï Auto Corporation) factory near Danang through a joint-venture partnership and are not subjected to the tariffs on imported vehicles.

Through nostalgia, colonial past and motoring become travel companions. Does this nostalgia for old rides make it more palatable to reminisce about empire? To some extent, automobile heritage and tourism[23] in Southeast Asia continue the "legacy of 'Indochina adventures,'" a phrase coined by Panivong Norindr. In *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature* (1997), he traced the emergence of Indochina as a "mythic place of unlimited possibilities in the French imaginary, as an invention motivated by economic,

political, and so-called humanitarian considerations disguised and promoted as military, erotic, textual, and visual 'adventures'".[24] Mobilities reinforce the emotional, political, economic work of the *Indochine* myth as described by Norindr. Automobility in particular has become a legitimate vehicle for nostalgia, enabling Indo-chic, a fashion fad rooted in a wistful vision of Indochina conjuring up images of luxury.[25] As such, it helps to perpetuate the colonial roadshow, of which this book highlighted a few stops. Today, celebrated as a mobile capsule for the self by modern cultures through literature, art, and marketing, the car remains the keeper of a myth of autonomous mastery. One wonders if it is still impermeable to the outside. Let us return to Marguerite Duras's works, and in particular to *L'Amant* and our first encounter with the automobile. Now, the scene opens in a hotel in Ho Chi Minh City in 2006:

> […] I descended from room 205 in an Italian linen suit, the closest thing I had to the lover's raw-silk outfit. Outside was a topless, white 1930's Citroën Traction, a substitute for the lover's black Morris Léon Bollée, which I'd hired to take Sita and me to Sa Dec and back. The driver was Mr. Chien, a fit, dashing Vietnamese in his late 30's, who gently steered the Citroën's luxurious bulk through the crammed streets to Sita's house across the river.
>
> She emerged looking like Marguerite Duras reincarnated. Thin as a teenager, she had on a light sundress, and her hair hung down in braids from under the fedora she wears even when she's not pretending to be someone's fictional mistress.
>
> For 15 minutes, we reveled in the image we presented — two stylish travelers off for a weekend in the country. Then we began to feel guilty; this was a little too neocolonial.[26]

American journalist and travel writer Matt Gross[27] thus tells the story of his personal reenactment of colonial life in then-Saigon. This is a thrice-remote recreation: it is inspired by the visual elements of the movie *The Lover* (1992) by Jean-Jacques Annaud, who himself adapted Marguerite Duras's *L'Amant* (1984) based upon her recollection of her childhood and teenage years in Sa Dec and Saigon. All the elements of the scenery are present and as faithfully recreated as possible, with the ironic substitution of a mass-produced white Citroën for a luxury black Morris Léon Bollée. In addition to this automobile trade, the costumes are the next best thing to the original, Italian linen replacing Asian raw silk, and the ethnicity of the protagonists is reversed: The ride is shared

by a Caucasian male and an Asian female. After a short period of self-satisfaction, this mirror-stage ends on an uneasy conclusion: mimicking Duras nowadays feels too degraded and exploitive. In an article published in 2014, literary critic Cécile Hanania considers the representations of Duras's places in Southeast Asia in contemporary art and commercial publications, such as tourist guides. Hanania clearly demonstrates the impact of Duras's work on French popular representations and tourism practices and she concludes:

> The Asian places of Duras, imaginary elements, representative of a singular esthetic and symptomatic of a loss of childhood, are today at the heart of editorial, commercial and ideological practices that have not ceased to grow since the late twentieth century. These competing endeavors to extend the echo of Duras in Asia, regardless of their noble or greedy intentions, convey simplifications, myths and counter-truths that not only distort the Durassian text but also do not advance at all the preservation or knowledge of the sites. From now on captive of a society of the spectacle, their recuperation and reinterpretation make them commercial baits and political tools, while their actual traces keep fading and disappearing.[28]

Hanania rightly points to the gaps between the Asian places of Duras, literary artifacts which result from the expression of an individual, and their utilization to the detriment of the actual sites that inspired Duras. These textual mobilities displace Duras's sites to what one might call an *alibi*, as suggested by the title of Hanania's article, far from the author's experience and sensibility into the market of tourism or political scene. *Alibi* etymologically derives from the Latin alibi meaning "elsewhere, somewhere else." In her 2017 autobiographical text *Le Pays sans nom*,[29] Vietnamese-born French writer Anna Moï deliberately undertakes such a textual displacement alongside Marguerite Duras to an eponymous *nameless country*. Explicitly linking textual and material mobilities, she recounts her "*déambulations avec Marguerite Duras*," also the subtitle to the book, which roughly translates to "ramblings with Marguerite Duras." Moï provides a roadmap in the form of a foreword: "In this book, I revisit the legends of Marguerite Duras, which are also mine. In fact, these are the legends of Vietnam. Sometimes, they lead to the Corrèze." (9) Through her writing, Moï creates links between France and Vietnam, between Duras and herself, embracing the mythical work of literature. One of the chapters is thus entitled "D'un mythe à l'autre," from one myth to another, as Anna Moï directly engages with Duras's

Asian places as imaginary elements. Moï is a keen observer and astute reader of Duras's works. She revisits their major sites or *lieux de mémoire*, including a chapter on "Voitures de légende" or "Cars of legend," where she weaves her own autobiographical ramblings and remembrance of the automobile with a reading of *the Seawall* and *the Lover*, Moï's personal legend joining Duras's myths. Addressing an unnamed lover, she recounts their joyous purchase as a young couple of a Topolino car, the story of their 4CV Renault in Paris, and that of the cars they rented or bought in Vietnam in the 1990s. Moï compares the Simca-Fiat Balilla co-owned by her lover in France to the "Morris Léon Bollée of the Chinese lover of Marguerite D.," (91) directly citing from the *Seawall* the dialogue scene between Suzanne and M. Jo about his beautiful automobile. She adds her critical interpretation:

> M. Jo is not described as an autochthone. Marguerite D. did not make, in the *Seawall*, the confession of her dishonoring sexual relationship with a Chinese man: the book was published in 1950, a time when "it was not done." A strict hierarchy was established between colonizer and colonized. The topic of the *Seawall* was doubly taboo, for social hierarchy was, in this case, reversed: a poor French teenage girl gave herself to a rich *native* [Moï's emphasis]. The interracial character of her relationship with Huynh Thuy Lê, a Chinese man from Cholon, remained her literary secret for thirty-four years, until the publication of *The Lover* in 1984, when it was, on the contrary, good form to be scandalous. (92–93)

With Anna Moï, we return to our first encounter with colonial automobility. Duras had presented this same encounter a number of times, all different except for the description of the car. Moï notices how in the first published depiction, in *The Seawall* (1950), the rich owner ethnically unidentified as I discussed in Chapter 4. In the novel *L'Amant* (1984) and the movie *The Lover*, the owner of the car is Chinese. In *The North China Lover*, the owner comes from a Manchurian town. This instability points to the historical permeability of car ownership and automobility in Indochina. By re-staging and quoting the same story and the same car in a self-aware and self-critical manner, Moï draws our attention to the ways the meanings of mobilities, from colonial rule to postcolonial nostalgia, are constructed by readers. Here we are reminded that between France and Indochina, it was not only people and goods that circulated on roads and in automobiles, but also texts, images, desires and attachments. Through narratives, automobility, an embodied

practice of mobility, entered the French imaginary. This work of imagination continues to inform contemporary thinking on colonization, facilitating unequal and literal forms of mobility in former French colonies, while helping settle a precarious peace with a troubling past at home.

Notes

1. This is my own translation from the French.
2. Postcolonial critics have highlighted the affinity between primitivist avant-gardes and European imperialism, in particular in Africa. In an article, Lucia Re argues that Italian futurism cannot be simply assimilated to the imperialist European incorporation of the African 'other'. She historicizes Italy's and particularly southern Italy's traditional representation by northern Europeans as an inferior, barbaric and 'primitive' other akin to Africa, in contrast to 'civilized' Europe. She demonstrates how Italian futurists ironically reclaimed, embraced and valorized both Italy's southern-ness and its African-ness. At the same time, the futurists exposed barbarism and civilization in technology-driven modernity as two faces of the same coin. See Lucia Re, "'Barbari Civilizzatissimi': Marinetti and the Futurist Myth of Barbarism," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17, no. 3 (June 1, 2012): 350–68.
3. Ferdinand François Philippe Marie d'Orléans, duc de Montpensier, *La ville au bois dormant: de Saïgon à Ang-Kor en automobile* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1910).
4. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957). English translations are from Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).
5. The Colorale model owed its name to a portmanteau that joined the adjectives "colonial" and "rural," as the car was aimed to these two markets. See Marc-Antoine Colin, *La Renault Colorale de mon père* (Boulogne-Billancourt: Editions Techniques pour l'Automobile et l'Industrie, 2001).
6. Barthes further referred to the discursive reflection around the car in the early 1960s in another essay published in 1963 in *Réalités* in which he described the car as a "projection of the ego" ("*la voiture, projection de l'ego*") of the French middle-class.
7. Claire Etcherelli, *Élise, ou, La vraie vie: roman*, Les Lettres nouvelles; Variation: Lettres nouvelles (Paris: Denoël, 1967). It won the Femina literary prize and was soon adapted on the big screen.
8. From 27,000 workers in 1977 to 16,800 in 1983, including 7328 immigrants, of which 60% were Moroccans.
9. French overseas departments and territories.

10. The French leaders of these unions also lobbied for prayer breaks and prayer rooms for Muslim workers.
11. Vincent Gay, "Lutter pour partir ou pour rester? Licenciements et aide au retour des travailleurs immigrés dans le conflit Talbot, 1983–1984," *Travail et Emploi*, no. 137 (March 15, 2014): 37–50.
12. Thomas Mailaender, *Cathedral Cars* (Paris: RVB Books, 2011). In this series of photographs, retouching is minimal. On the car, Mailaender only erased part of the license plate. He transformed the setting in a unified and grey background, as if under a leaden sky. The cars seem to be floating on a pontoon, in the middle of the sea.
13. Nassira El Moaddem, "C'était au temps béni des départs en voiture au bled," *Bondyblog*, June 21, 2009, https://www.bondyblog.fr/reportages/autour-du-monde/c-etait-au-temps-beni-des-departs-en-voiture-au-bled/. In her blog post entitled "Those were the blessed times of leaving for the village in the car," Nassira El Moaddem, longs for the ritual of loading and departure by car: "Parents, dinosaurs who used to drive Peugeot 504s overflowing with gifts of all kinds, from household appliances to re-sell and old beat-up bikes, have now become choosy."
14. It is not surprising that the anthropologist Marc Augé, the author of *Non Lieux* (Non places), wrote an essay entitled "Ici Ailleurs" ("Here Elsewere") as an addendum to Mailaender's book.
15. "Hanoi Plan to Ban Motorbikes by 2030 to Combat Pollution—BBC News," accessed March 25, 2018, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40498052.
16. On the problematic moralization or pathologization of certain forms of mobilities in emerging markets, given their economic and environmental impacts, see Gordon Pirie's essay on mobilities in Africa. Gordon H. Pirie, "Virtuous Mobility: Moralising vs Measuring Geographical Mobility in Africa," *Afrika Focus* 22, no. 1 (February 8, 2009): 21–35.
17. Adultery as a consequence of automobility, and in particular of being able and free to move around easily, is a common trope in the French-language literature of the time. In the particular case of Colonial Indochina, Christiane Fournier, a teacher, journalist and feminist, published in 1937 a novel entitled *Hanoi, Escale du Cœur* (Hanoi: éditions Nam-Ky, 1937) that tells the story of Hélène, a French woman, who is literally chauffeured back and forth by her indigenous driver Ngan from her husband Bernard, a colonist, to her lover Serge, an adventurer. I am very grateful to Paul Sager for telling me first about this text.
18. Édouard Cortès, Jean-Baptiste Flichy, and Dominique Lapierre, *Paris-Saïgon: 16000 km en 2 CV, dans l'esprit de Larigaudie* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 2005).
19. Social media have been key to such activities. In the case of Vietnam, where Facebook is available, see, for example, the Saigon Classic Car

Club which runs a public group, https://www.facebook.com/groups/saigonclassiccar/about/.

20. "Django Adventure—From Paris to Saigon with Django Scooters," Django Adventure, accessed April 1, 2018, http://www.django-adventure.com/. They flew from Istanbul to Mumbai.
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