

For "the Love of Order:"  
Race, Violence, and the French Colonial Police in Vietnam, 1860s-1920s

By

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## Abstract

This dissertation uses the history of French colonial policing in Vietnam to expand our understanding of racial hierarchy and violence in colonial societies. By concentrating on personnel themselves, it considers the police not as an institution removed from colonial society but as individuals embedded in a larger colonial order. Police encounters further speak to the texture of colonial life and serve as a lens to view how colonialism became constituted at the street level. Understanding the police through society and society through the police are the dual objectives of this study.

Race was the primary variable governing the colonial order, yet racial boundaries in French Vietnam proved fluid. Assimilationist policies permitted Pondicherry Indians, naturalized Vietnamese, métis, and others with citizenship to join the European ranks, while in the lower hierarchy Vietnamese subjects made up the remaining 65% to 80%, along with a minority of Cambodians and Chinese interpreters. However, race remained deeply connected to individual authority, prestige, and violence in ways that proved problematic for a colonial policing institution.

Focusing on Saigon, Cholon, Hanoi, and Haiphong, this study probes the logic and limits of race as the ordering principle in the police and in colonial spaces more broadly. One result was that intermediary Vietnamese agents exercised a degree of independence because of their role as translators, as interpreters but also as filters of colonial knowledge. In the upper cadre, the employment of Vietnamese and Indians embodied the radical potential to subvert the colonial order because it gave, at times, non-Europeans authority over Europeans in matters of police. Meanwhile, the many conflicts between white policemen and more affluent civilians, in particular Chinese businessmen, reveals that class differences did not overlay neatly with the

racial order. But rather than obviate the importance of race, socioeconomic discrepancies magnified it. As police agents jockeyed for colonial privilege they exposed a gulf between modest wages and expectations about colonial lifestyle that fueled petty corruption and more serious abuses. Police violence resulted less from a directive of state repression and more from a police culture fed by expectations of privilege and shielded by de facto impunity.

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As an undergraduate at the University of Washington my passion for history was first kindled by Robert Stacey, while my interest in Southeast Asia and colonialism began in the classrooms of Christoph Giebel and Vicente Rafael. I have many fond memories of my years there. In 2007, I made the move from Seattle to Madison and the “other UW” (or, from u-dub to u-double-ew). UW-Madison's Center for Southeast Asian studies warmly welcomed me and provided a vibrant intellectual community and also vital financial support. My thanks go to the center's Dr. Mike Cullinane and Mary Jo Wilson, as well as our dedicated librarian Larry Ashman. Leslie Abadie, the History Department's superlative graduate student coordinator, deserves an extra special mention for her tireless support over the years.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my family. My wonderful parents, Richard and Carol Campbell, instilled in me of love of learning and a passion for traveling at a young age. I could not have asked for a more supportive family over these many years. Finally, my husband Mark Anderson went above and beyond as a sounding board for ideas, an occasional editor, and even once as an archive assistant. Mark remains my best friend and copilot on life's many adventures.

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## Abbreviations

**CAOM:** Centre des archives d'outre-mer/French Colonial Archive in Aix-en-Provence

**GGI:** Gouverneur général de l'Indochine/Governor General of Indochina

**Goucoch:** Gouverneur de Cochinchine/Governor of Cochinchina (title changed to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de Cochinchine, 1887-1911)

**PAJ:** Police Administrative et Judiciaire

**PM:** Police Municipale (name changed temporarily to Police Urbaine after 1918)

**RST:** Résident supérieur au Tonkin/Resident Superior of Tonkin

**TTLT I:** Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia I, Vietnam National Archive I in Hanoi

**TTLT II:** Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia II, Vietnam National Archive II in Ho Chi Minh City

## Introduction

Colonial police forces were intrinsically important to the everyday exercise of colonial power and governance in modern European empires. The police service was among the first municipal services the French established in Saigon following military conquest in 1861, and by World War II the Sûreté political branch of Indochina's police had become one of the most notorious institutions in the empire. Elsewhere in Asia, and in Africa, historians show that police forces were not only essential to enforcing colonial rule, but that examining these institutions illuminates problematic legacies with which post-colonial nations are still coping.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have nonetheless only recently begun to scrutinize colonial polices themselves in more detail, including their practices and personnel, as well as their limits and characteristics. By contrast, the literature of policing in Europe has, in recent decades, been prolific, particularly for the British and French policing systems as they emerged in their modern forms in the long nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Studies concerned with the post-colonial legacies of policing include: David M. Anderson and David Killingray, eds., *Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism, and the Police, 1917-65* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); David Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras, 1859-1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); David H. Bayley, *Police and Political Development in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); Anthony Clayton and David Killingray, *Khaki and Blue: Military and Police in British Colonial Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989); Kirpal Dhillon, *Police and Politics in India: Colonial Concepts, Democratic Compulsions, India Police 1947-2002* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005); Anthony Harriott, *Police and Crime Control in Jamaica: Problems of reforming ex-colonial constabularies* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2000); Joan R. Mars, *Deadly Force, Colonialism, and the Rule of Law: Police Violence in Guyana* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002); Georgine Sinclair, *At the end of the line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame 1945-80* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> This is a vast historiography, but some of the major studies include: Malcolm Anderson, *In Thrall to Political Change: Police and Gendarmerie in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); David Bayley, "The Police and Political Development in Europe," in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Jean-Marc Berlière and René Lévy, *Histoire des polices en France: De l'Ancien Régime à nos jours* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Editions, 2013); Jean-Marc Berlière, *Naissance de la police moderne* (Paris: Tempus Perrin, 2011); Egon Bittner, *The Functions of the Police in Modern Society* (Washington: US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1970), reprinted in *Aspects of Police Work*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990); Jean-Paul Brodeur, *The Policing Web* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Marco Cicchini et al., *Métiers de police: Etre policier en Europe, XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008); Clive Emsley, *Crime, Police, and Penal Policy: European Experiences 1750-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Clive Emsley and Barbara Weinberger, eds., *Policing Western Europe:*

Colonial policing studies first emerged as a separate field in the 1980s, when an interdisciplinary group of scholars working on the British Empire sought to use the police to understand better the nature of the colonial state.<sup>3</sup> Police were a central part of the colonial coercive apparatus, and as a result the literature on policing has been largely devoted to studying political repression, in Vietnam and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Also known as "high policing" (*haute police*), political police aim to protect the state from internal threats using surveillance, intelligence, informers, subterfuge, and sometimes extra-legal means of investigation.<sup>5</sup>

Historian Patrice Morlat has shown for Vietnam that colonial policing took on a particularly strong high policing character due to the rise of nationalist and communist opposition to French rule after World War I.<sup>6</sup> The studies on Vietnam's colonial police trace the rise of the Sûreté's political and intelligence branch starting in 1917 as it gained notoriety in the interwar period.<sup>7</sup> At present, Vietnam's colonial police are synonymous with the politically repressive aspect of their work. In David Marr and Hue-Tam Ho Tai's important studies of Vietnamese anti-colonialism, the police appear in the narrative to arrest suspected agitators or infiltrate communist party cells, to devastating effect.<sup>8</sup> From the perspective of Vietnamese

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*Politics, professionalism, and public order, 1850-1940* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1991); Clive Emsley, ed., *Theories and origins of the modern police* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> See especially: Anderson and Killingray, *Policing and Decolonisation*; David M. Anderson and David Killingray eds., *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority, and Control, 1830-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); David Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule*; Bayley, *Police and Political Development in India*; Clayton and Killingray, *Khaki and Blue*.

<sup>4</sup> William Berridge, "Guarding the Guards: The Failure of the Colonial State to Govern Police Violence in Sudan, ca. 1922-1956," *Northeast African Studies*, 12, 2, (2012): 1-28; Martin Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918-40* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). See also footnote 1.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of high vs. low policing see: Brodeur, *The Policing Web*.

<sup>6</sup> Patrice Morlat, *La Répression Coloniale au Vietnam 1908-1940* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* See also: Patrice Morlat, *Indochine Années Vingt: Le Balcon de la France sur la Pacifique* (Paris: Les Indes Savants, 2001); Patrice Morlat, *Affaires Politiques de l'Indochine, 1895-1923: les grands commis, du savoir au pouvoir* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1995); George Dioque, *Félix Dioque, un colonial: Six ans en Guinée ... quarante ans en Indochine, de 1898 à 1946* (Gap: Société d'études des Hautes-Alpes, 2008); Philippe Franchini, "Paul Arnoux et la Sûreté," in *Saigon 1925-1945*, ed. Philippe Franchini (Paris: Editions Autrement, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971);

historiography, the history of the police remains very much a part of the field's resistance/repression-oriented tradition.<sup>9</sup>

As a result of this focus on political repression, Vietnam's police are usually portrayed as modern and efficient and have earned a considerable reputation for, in the words of Daniel Hémerly, "the devastating efficacy of its repressive operations."<sup>10</sup> David Marr refers to the police as the "dreaded Sûreté,"<sup>11</sup> while Philippe Franchini writes that the *Sûreté générale de l'Indochine* was "a kind of super-police."<sup>12</sup> Stein Tønnesson describes "that peculiar institution called the Sûreté" as "a political octopus with tentacles spread out in every section of society."<sup>13</sup> Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly characterize the colony as "first and foremost a 'police state,'" an assessment echoed recently in Philippe Peycam's *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism*.<sup>14</sup> Others, meanwhile, have explored how this intelligence network transcended colonial borders in the interwar period to monitor overseas Vietnamese students, revolutionaries, and intellectuals.<sup>15</sup>

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David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). See also: Daniel Hémerly, *Révolutionnaires vietnamiens et pouvoir colonial en Indochine. Communistes, trotskystes, nationalistes à Saigon de 1932 à 1937* (Paris: François Maspero, 1975); Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism 1925-45* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: the missing years, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Without denying the fundamentally coercive nature of colonialism, recent scholarship has begun to move beyond the binaries of colonizer/colonized, resistance/repression. Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization 1858-1954*, trans. Ly Lan Dill-Klein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 181, 197; See also: Christopher E. Goscha, "Widening the Colonial Encounter: Asian Connections Inside French Indochina during the Interwar Period," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 5, (Sep., 2009): 1189-1228.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Hémerly, foreword to Patrice Morlat, *La Répression Coloniale au Vietnam*, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Marr, *Vietnam 1945*; Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*.

<sup>12</sup> Franchini, "Paul Arnoux et le Sûreté," 193.

<sup>13</sup> Stein Tønnesson, *Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh, and De Gaulle in a world at war* (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1991), 43. Tønnesson does mention that the European leadership had "at their disposal" Vietnamese and *métis* interpreters and personnel. But exploring the implications of this arrangement is not the aim of his study.

<sup>14</sup> Brocheux and Hémerly, *Indochina*, 110-11; Philippe Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 16-17.

<sup>15</sup> Anne L. Foster, "Secret Police Cooperation and the Roots of Anti-Communism in Interwar Southeast Asia," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 4, 4, (1995): 331-350; Christopher E. Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954* (Surrey, UK: Curzon, 1999); Brian G. Martin, "The Pact with the Devil: The Relationship between the Green Gang and the French Concession Authorities, 1925-1935," in *Shanghai Sojourners*, eds. Frederic Wakeman and Wen-hsin Yeh (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992); Scott McConnell, *A Leftward Journey: The Education of Vietnamese Students in France*

The intrinsically political nature of colonial policing is an unquestionably vital topic and unavoidable in any study of this institution. Colonialism was never consensual, and would have to be maintained through force or the threat of force.<sup>16</sup> In his work on colonial India, David Arnold similarly makes the point that crime and political protest were indistinguishable to the state.<sup>17</sup> Yet the rise of the Sûreté and its particular methods occurred relatively late in the colonial timeline—the mid-to-late 1920s. No study has yet investigated what policing looked like during the sixty years prior to this date or what police work entailed beyond political policing. Neither has the question of why the French created the Sûreté so late (especially given France's longer tradition of high policing) and at this particular juncture been fully explored. Also missing are the many individuals working in the police. With the exception of scholarship on a handful of Sûreté elites, no studies have yet examined who the police personnel were, or questioned what it meant for colonial rule that most French colonial policemen in Vietnam were not French.

In Indochina's colonial cities, civilian polices were primarily responsible for everyday urban governance.<sup>18</sup> Prior the 1917 police reorganization, there were two polices in the cities: a

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1919-1939 (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction publishers, 1989); Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control Between the Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Martin Thomas for instance argues that violence was "integral to the structures of colonialism" in Martin Thomas, ed., *The French Colonial Mind, Volume 2: Violence, Military Encounters, and Colonialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012). See also: James Barnhart, "Violence and the civilizing mission: Native justice in French colonial Vietnam, 1858-1914" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1999); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1963] 2004); Jock McCulloch, "Empire and Violence, 1900-1939," in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 220-239; Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule*, introduction.

<sup>18</sup> Excepting cases of rebellion and gambling which involved the PAJ, rural policing in the south fell to a few dozen French Gendarmes who served as provincial commissaires and oversaw the militia-like Vietnamese civil guard (*garde civile* in Cochinchina). In the north, rural policing was the responsibility of the *garde indigène* in Tonkin and Annam, a force that employed both European officers and Vietnamese subordinates. The local Vietnamese authorities also had responsibility for security and employed *linh* or soldiers for this purpose. J. De Galembert, *Les Administrations et Les Services Publics Indochinois*, deuxième édition, revue et augmenté par E. Erard, (Hanoi: Imprimerie Mac-Dinh-Tu, 1931).

*police municipale* (PM)—founded in Saigon in 1861, Cholon in 1865, Hanoi in 1884, and Haiphong in 1884—and a *police administrative et judiciaire* (PAJ) founded in Cochinchina in 1871, Tonkin in 1902, and Cambodia in 1903.<sup>19</sup> The municipal polices were responsible for enforcing city ordinances and ensuring general security and sanitation, while the administrative and judicial polices investigated crimes, worked with the Justice Service, and had jurisdiction beyond the cities. In practice, the PAJ and PM services worked together under the same leadership and had similar responsibilities in the 1900s, making the distinction, as Commissaire Central Belland observed in 1896, somewhat moot.<sup>20</sup> In 1917, Governor General Albert Sarraut merged all the PAJs together with the various municipal polices, creating in 1917 for the first time a centralized Indochinese Police (*Police de l'Indochine*), based in Hanoi.<sup>21</sup> Later that same year, Sarraut divided the Indochinese Police into a Sûreté branch in Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, and Cambodia, which assumed the now defunct PAJ's functions, and an urban police (*police urbaine*) which corresponded closely with the former municipal police.<sup>22</sup>

For most of the colonial period, political policing was just one part of everyday police work. In the French tradition, municipal polices at this time were tasked with generally ensuring *l'ordre public*, as opposed to the more criminal-focused British model, and the French police's "limited but vague mandate" extended to the colonies.<sup>23</sup> In his study of policing in early nineteenth century France, John Merriman cites Nicolas Delamare's 1729 *Traité de la Police* to make the point that "the very notion of police," in Delamare's words, "seems extendable to

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<sup>19</sup> Neither Laos nor Annam had civil police forces prior to 1917. For dates see: CAOM, GGI, 7779, Projet de réorganisation de le police de Sûreté générale en Indochine, 1905-06; CAOM, GGI 3836, Police administrative III Tonkin, Letter from RST to GGI, "A.S. de M. Brisson, Commissaire Central à Hanoi, 1902," Hanoi, July 1902.

<sup>20</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB24/047, Commissaire central Belland to Lieutenant-gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, "Au Sujet du règlements concernant la police de Saigon," November 29, 1896.

<sup>21</sup> Prior to 1917, the Tonkin, Cochinchina, or Cambodian polices were separate from each other.

<sup>22</sup> The name was changed back to municipal police in the early 1930s.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, *In Thrall to Political Change*, 164.



infinity."<sup>24</sup> After French military conquest in the 1860s, the newly introduced public order police became for many the most visible incarnation of the new government in Saigon and Cholon, and later in Hanoi and Haiphong, where the city governments deployed agents in public spaces and tasked them with regulating myriad aspects of daily life. Policemen could be found at the markets, docks, slaughterhouses, hospitals, cemeteries, courthouses, town halls, and patrolling streets and intersections. They dealt with violent crime, thefts, immigration, gambling, prostitution, vagrancy, smuggling, tax collection, barroom brawls, animal control (including runaway horses and stray dogs), traffic regulations, suicides, missing persons, and health and sanitation issues. They responded to fires, floods, accidents, epidemics, and anything else that fell within the wider (potentially infinite) purview of public order policing.

"High" political policing can never be disentangled from "low" or public order policing in the colonies; to attempt to separate the two kinds of policing would be to miss the point. My argument is that recasting all police work as following from a single state project overshadows the broader and more complex role police agents played in making colonial rule a lived reality at the street level. As Marieke Bloembergen argues in her work on the Dutch East Indies, the police were for many the "face of colonial state," and brought the state "most deeply" into lives of colonial subjects.<sup>25</sup> Everyday policing then become a useful point of departure to address Cole Harris's important inquiry, "how was colonial power deployed," and bring us closer to the matter of understanding "the diverse, on-the-ground workings of colonialism in colonized spaces."<sup>26</sup> The street-level view also brings to light the multitude of ways in which individuals engaged

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<sup>24</sup> John Merriman, *Police Stories: Building the French State, 1815-1851* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>25</sup> Marieke Bloembergen, "The Dirty work of empire. Modern policing and public order in Surabaya," *Indonesia* (April 2007): 119-150.

<sup>26</sup> Cole Harris, "How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, 1 (March 2004): 166.

with the new colonial system—whether by joining it, working within it, avoiding it, manipulating it, or resisting it. Vietnam's police appear no less brutal in this telling; confrontations with police agents were often arbitrary and violent. It is precisely in order to explain why this was the case that we must look beyond state repression alone for the origins of colonial police violence.

To parse out what made a colonial police *colonial* historians must also look closer at colonial societies themselves. We must consider the police not as institutions apart or removed from the societies they police but as individuals embedded in a larger colonial order. Conversely, examinations of everyday policing reveal a great deal about the contours of this underlying order and the interplay between the many people French colonialism brought together. In short, police stories can speak to the texture of colonial life and serve as a lens to get at broader questions of how colonialism itself became constituted in the city streets. Understanding the police through society and the society through the police are the dual objectives of this study.

The colonial order was foremost a racial order, and as such this dissertation is primarily concerned with the question of race in the colonial police, specifically the employment of a segregated racial hierarchy as the guiding organizational principal ordering the police's personnel internally. In colonial Vietnam, this differentiation came in the form of an upper and lower personnel hierarchy comprised of a European cadre overseeing a subordinated, much larger *indigène* (native) work force. This typical ordering of a minority of Europeans assisted by non-white police auxiliaries was also the rule in British and Dutch colonies, yet it is often taken for granted as self-evident and effectual.<sup>27</sup> This study asks, what were the implications,

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<sup>27</sup> Questions about race and racial difference are interrogated in the colonial policing literature in terms of persons external to the police, such as with racial profiling. Important recent examples of studies looking at police employees themselves include Marieke Bloembergen's work on Dutch Indonesia, Timothy Stapleton on British Zimbabwe, and Joël Glasman on French Togo, each discussed below.

characteristics, and limits of this ordering in a colonial police, as an institution dependent both on the selective use of force and capacity to wield authority?<sup>28</sup>

French Colonial Vietnam is an especially provocative case study with which to explore this relationship between racial ordering and colonial policing because racial boundaries under the French proved more fluid than in other European empires. Due to assimilationist policies, the French colonial state officially adhered to legal categories (*statut personnel*) and not categories based on race or ethnicity *per se* as the basis for defining who was and who was not French, which had potentially radical results.<sup>29</sup> A considerable number of Vietnamese, Indians, and others were able to obtain French citizenship and work in the police's upper, European hierarchy, *à titre européen*. While never employed in the most senior positions, they constituted a large part of the middle police ranks where they worked alongside Europe-born colleagues, wearing the same uniform, earning the same salary, and enjoying the same benefits. In addition to the police's French-Vietnamese *métis*, naturalized Vietnamese Frenchmen, French Indians, and metropolitan French recruits, the European cadre also employed Belgians, Vietnam-born Frenchmen (*créoles*), and a large number of Corsicans. In the lower, native hierarchy, meanwhile, Vietnamese personnel made up the remaining 65% to 80% of municipal police forces, along with a minority of Cambodians and Chinese interpreters.

While nationality seemingly overrode race as the basis for ordering society in this calculation, race mattered in the police because violence was tied to preserving and upholding a racialized colonial order. Ideas of state authority and the everyday use of legitimate violence—

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<sup>28</sup> As discussed below, historians of colonial militaries have been more inclined to examine these intermediaries, the nature of police work is often very different, more autonomous and discretionary.

<sup>29</sup> There are several excellent studies on French colonial rhetoric, assimilation theory, and the "civilizing mission," including: Barnhart, "Violence and the civilizing mission;" Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, first edition 1961, reprinted 2005); Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Gary Wilder, *The Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

that is, violence that followed the logic of colonial hierarchy—were tangled up with the French settler community's investment in notions of racial prestige as the basis for their privilege, as well as classed and gendered ideas of colonial respectability. Racial ordering in the police thus became a source of vulnerability when the imperatives of social hierarchy undermined the authority of the majority non-European policemen. In this instance, the legal hierarchy which privileged nationality ran directly counter to the informal, "common sense" hierarchy in ways that were problematic for a multiracial policing institution. By the same token, criminal behavior on the part of white police agents and civilians often went unpunished due to the logic of racial prestige, behavior that at times greatly concerned the French leadership and contributed to problems with lawlessness and ill-discipline in the police more generally. Indeed, if looking at political repression shows the strengths of colonial police, looking at racial ordering reveals its major weaknesses.

What the urban police's surprisingly diverse racial profile also indicates is that the French found themselves—for reasons explored in this study—dependent on non-European agents to carry out everyday police work. This had material consequences for both police and policed. I found that low-level Vietnamese agents came to exercise influence disproportionate to their rank because of their intermediary or "middle" position in the colonial power structure. Vietnamese policemen were not just colonial pawns, but rather interpreted, adapted, and accommodated colonial rule at the ground level. These agents' influence stemmed in large part from their unique role as *de facto* police translators, linguistically and also in a broader sense of the term. In the upper personnel cadre, meanwhile, France's intermittently assimilationist approach to race and citizenship—which led to the employment of Vietnamese and Indians as Europeans—embodied the radical potential to subvert the colonial order because it gave, at times, non-Europeans

authority over Europeans in matters of law and police. This inversion of the racial hierarchy then produced an inversion in police violence when European civilians targeted non-white police agents with attacks and retaliation.

This study and the many encounters described within present a very different picture of colonial police than we are used to seeing, one that is far less modern and sophisticated, if no less feared or violent. My findings about the disorder of a colonial institution in Indochina is not unlike Peter Zinoman's findings on Vietnam's colonial prisons, Shawn McHale's work on interwar Vietnamese print culture, or Gerard Sasges' argument for the Tonkin alcohol monopoly.<sup>30</sup> By looking at personnel (as opposed to institutions or policy) this study further considers how policemen at different ranks exerted influence from within. As Joël Glasman writes in a recent article on French Togo, "the emphasis on the police as an instrument of state power has often blinded researchers to the question of policemen's agency and to the historical changes in police institutions."<sup>31</sup> Disaggregating and scrutinizing the layers of the hierarchy shows colonial policemen less as synonymous with the state and more as a collection of actors with divergent goals operating within the framework of colonial rule. From this perspective, we can examine the police not as an institution apart from colonial society, but as one embedded within it, at once embodying and reproducing the colonial order of things.

### **Race, Class, Gender, and Order in the Colonial Literature**

My title, "For 'the love of order'" (*l'amour de l'ordre*) comes from an instructional guide for rural policemen in Cochinchina in 1909. All policemen should, the manual stated, "be guided

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<sup>30</sup> Shawn McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004); Peter Zinoman, *Colonial Bastille: A history of imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). George Sasges also argues for the colonial state's fundamentally un-modern nature in: Gerard Henry Sasges, "Contraband, capital, and the colonial state: the alcohol monopoly in Northern Việt Nam, 1897-1933" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Joël Glasman, "Bureaucratization, and Policemen's Agency in Interwar Togo," *The Journal of African History* 55, 1, (March 2014): 80.

by...the love of order, discipline, law enforcement, and a sense of duty."<sup>32</sup> I borrow "the love of order" because it embodies well the particular notion behind policing in the French tradition: all police work was unified by the deceptively simple, but in practice impossible to define (as several other historians have noted), directive of ensuring "order."<sup>33</sup> The ambiguity of this mandate and the breadth of police tasks is precisely why policemen became key actors in the colonial interface, and why studying them can shed light on how colonial social orders were constituted.

I use the phrase "the love of order" to evoke as well another kind of order integral to police work in the colony: the police in Vietnam both embodied and reproduced social ordering. With this second meaning I am also deliberately invoking Ann Laura Stoler's work on "the colonial order of things," which has greatly shaped my thinking about race, power, and colonial life. Stoler describes the preoccupation of white colonizers with the construction and maintenance of racial boundaries in the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina, as well as the inevitable transgression of these same boundaries in the realms of sexual liaisons and domestic life. In a play on Foucault's "order of things" Stoler employs the phrase "the colonial order of things," which I borrow to describe the informal (but no less potent) common sense rules governing everyday colonial behavior. Like Stoler, I am interested in the "connections between the broad-scale dynamics of colonial rule and the intimate sites of implementation" in order to locate "what Foucault might have called the microphysics of colonial rule."<sup>34</sup> But while Stoler

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<sup>32</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB55/313, "Police local et Police Rural, année 1910," The full quote is: "Les principes généraux qui doivent les guider, sont l'amour de l'ordre, la discipline, l'exécution des lois et le sentiment des devoirs." Instruction Professionnelle des Gardes Civils, arrêté du 19 Mars 1909.

<sup>33</sup> Anderson, *In Thrall to Political Change*, 154-155.

<sup>34</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 7.

focuses on the quite literally intimate—sexual liaisons and domestic life—I look at the often very public encounters between police and policed for colonial "sites of implementation."

Race and racial hierarchy have been relatively understudied in French colonial scholarship more generally. In both the French language literature on colonialism and in popular memory in France, there has been a tendency to deny that racial difference mattered. Colonial hierarchy in the French case, the argument goes, was exceptionally defined by nationality and legal status, and assimilationist policies seem to validate this inclusionary argument, especially when juxtaposed with the British or Dutch colonies where the line between European and non-European was much more rigid. (Timothy Stapleton, for instance, shows for colonial Zimbabwe that the police eschewed hiring mixed-race employees until the 1970s, thus averting entirely the unsettling question of where they fit into the hierarchy).<sup>35</sup>

Herrick Chapman and Laura Frader argue that the belief in a "republican model" of "color blindness" seen in the historiography goes back to the French revolution.<sup>36</sup> France's census includes no mention of individual race, at least since the 1970s. As a result, there has been a general "aversion" to discussing race and French historians have been slow to take race as a subject of study until the 1980s, when political events (many of which were legacies of colonialism) provoked its study. This new literature has started to show, as Chapman and Frader put it, "how French authorities made race a salient social reality by distinguishing colonial subjects from the French and different colonial subjects from each other."<sup>37</sup> Historian Gilles de Gantès is a notable exception in the French language literature on Vietnam. He argues that the

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<sup>35</sup> Timothy Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1923-80* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader, "Introduction: Race in France," in *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference*, eds. Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

major feature that set Vietnam's colonial society apart from the metropole was the simple fact that the French community was always a racial minority. There was therefore a "permanent confrontation with a racial problem not found in the metropole."<sup>38</sup> This also made colonial policing fundamentally different from its metropolitan counterpart.

Historians Todd Shepard and Michael G. Vann have begun to correct this tendency to downplay the importance of race in French colonies.<sup>39</sup> Each examines an area of French colonial history in which the importance of race as an underlying "common sense" marker of difference was thrown into sharp relief.<sup>40</sup> Shepard shows for Algeria that one of these moments occurred in 1962 when "some nine million" Algerians who had French citizenship lost it after 1962. What is remarkable is that the French state went to such efforts prior to 1962 to claim legal categories overrode religious or racial ones. In his study of colonial Hanoi, meanwhile, Vann demonstrates how race became "an active variable in the formation of this colonial city and its social system" and how the construction of "whiteness" as a normalized (non-ethnic) identity was intrinsic to the exercise of colonial privilege.<sup>41</sup> Another important study on race in the French Empire is Patricia Lorcin's *Imperial Identities* in which she unravels the historical specificities and contingencies (the experience of conquest, the emergence of race science) which conditioned French thinking about the different groups of people encountered in colonial Algeria.<sup>42</sup> Policing

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<sup>38</sup> Gilles de Gantès, "Coloniaux, gouverneurs et ministres. L'influence des français du Viet-nam sur l'évolution du pays à l'époque coloniale, 1902-1914" (PhD diss., Université Paris Diderot - Paris 7, 1994), 83.

<sup>39</sup> Michael G. Vann, "White City on the Red River: Race, Power, and Culture in French Colonial Hanoi, 1872-1954" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 1999); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> "Common sense" is his wording: Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Vann, "White City on the Red River," 16. See also: Michael G. Vann, "The Good, the Bad, and The Ugly: Variation and Difference in French Racial Thinking in Colonial Vietnam," in *The Color of Liberty: The History of Race in France*, eds. Tyler Stovall and Sue Peabody (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 187-205; Michael G. Vann, "Fear and Loathing in French Hanoi: Colonial White Images and Imaginings of 'Native' Violence," in *The French Colonial Mind, Volume 2: Violence, Military Encounters, and Colonialism*, ed. Martin Thomas (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Michael G. Vann, "Of Rats, Rice, and Race: The Great Hanoi Rat Massacre, an Episode in French Colonial History," *French Colonial History* 4 (2003): 191-203.

<sup>42</sup> Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London: I.B. Tauris,



is another area in which "common sense" anxiety about race comes to the fore because legitimate violence, colonial authority, and access to privilege followed unwritten racially guided conventions. Police encounters offer therefore an opportunity to explore how this rupture between formal and informal hierarchies played out in ways that mattered in the lives of individuals.

Foregrounding race in a study of colonial policing also raises important questions about the role played by social class and gendered hierarchies. Recent scholarship highlights the complex and dynamic relationship between race, class, and gender in the exercise of colonial power, but these insights have not yet been fully applied to the colonial police in Indochina, a major site of imperial power and authority.<sup>43</sup> Social status and class anxieties further complicated racial identities and the colonial order of things. Some have argued that social or other non-racial hierarchies in the colonies superseded racial differences.<sup>44</sup> In *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their empire*, for instance, David Cannadine argues that individual rank or status were often more important in the British colonies than "collective race."<sup>45</sup> I found quite the opposite result in the case of a low prestige institution like the police however.<sup>46</sup> Socioeconomic proximity between the majority of white French policemen on the one hand, and Indians, *métis*, and Vietnamese policemen on the other, heightened the stakes of race and caused interpersonal

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1995).

<sup>43</sup> An important exception is Isabelle Tracol-Huynh's work on prostitution in colonial Tonkin. Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, "The Shadow Theater of Prostitution in French Colonial Tonkin: Faceless Prostitutes under the Colonial Gaze," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 7, 1, (Winter 2012): 10-51; Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, "Between stigmatisation and regulation: prostitution in colonial Northern Vietnam," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 12, Sexuality and Health in Vietnam—New Directions (August 2010), S73-S87; Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, "Encadrer la sexualité au Viêt-Nam colonial: police des mœurs et réglementation de la prostitution (des années 1870 à la fin des années 1930)" *Genèses* 86, (2012/1): 55-77. See also: Jennifer Anne Boittin, Christina Firpo, and Emily Musil Church, "Hierarchies of Race and Gender in the French Colonial Empire, 1914–1946," *Historical Reflections* 37.1 (2011): 60-90. <http://works.bepress.com/cfirpo/4>

<sup>44</sup> Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

<sup>45</sup> David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8-9, 126.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

conflicts within the ranks. As argued in chapters 1 and 2, the discrepancy between modest police wages and high expectations about white colonial lifestyle fueled the petty (and sometimes not so petty) corruption and more serious abuses for which the police became known.

Studies by Kathleen Keller, Paul Sager, and Satoshi Mizutani highlight the importance of considering class alongside race in the colonies. In her dissertation on policing suspicious persons in French West Africa, Keller examines the considerable efforts the state went to manufacture and preserve the prestige of whiteness in the face of poor Europeans in the colony.<sup>47</sup> Most recently, Sager's dissertation is an overdue interrogation of France's limited indigenization of Indochina's colonial bureaucracy. He argues that France's indigenization projects were connected to promoting colonial legitimacy both from the perspective of removing poor whites from low-prestige positions but also by offering employment opportunities to educated Vietnamese in the bureaucracy. Sager draws attention as well to the omission from the historical discussion of the many "not-white" and "not-quite-white" Europeans (Corsicans, West Africans, Reunionese, Indians) who made up a large portion of the colonial French.<sup>48</sup> In a similar vein, in his work on "whiteness" in British India, Satoshi Mizutani argues that "'to be white' had fundamentally to do with both class origin and place of upbringing, as well as with race itself."<sup>49</sup> In the colonial police, similarly, jarring social discrepancies in the ranks made race matter more, not less.

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<sup>47</sup> Kathleen Keller, "On the Fringes of the 'Civilizing Mission': 'Suspicious' Frenchmen and Unofficial Discourses of French Colonialism in AOF (1918-1939)," *French Colonial History* 9 (2008): 103-129; Kathleen Keller, "Colonial Suspects: Suspicious Persons and Police Surveillance in French West Africa, 1914-45" (PhD diss., Rutgers, 2007).

<sup>48</sup> Paul Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina: Race, Class, and the French Colonial Employer-State, 1848-1945" (PhD diss., New York University, 2014). Many thanks to Sager for sharing a draft of his dissertation with me.

<sup>49</sup> Satoshi Mizutani, "Historicising Whiteness: From the Case of Late Colonial India" *ACRAWSA e-journal* 2, 1 (2006); Satoshi Mizutani, *The Meaning of White: Race, Class, and the 'Domiciled Community' in British India 1858-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also: Jock McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902 to 1935* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Gregor Muller, *Colonial Cambodia's "Bad Frenchmen": The Rise of French Rule and the Life of Thomas Caraman, 1840-87* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Much of the literature on race and power in the colonies comes from the study of domestic life, gender, and sexual encounters, sites where imperial power was both enacted and subverted. Categories of gender, class, and race are, as Stoler and others have shown, inseparable in practice.<sup>50</sup> Isabel Tracol-Huynh reminds us that "the colonial encounter was a masculine adventure, a 'male power fantasy'" and her work on prostitution in colonial Tonkin builds on this literature's insights.<sup>51</sup> This study asks what the police's male-dominated culture meant for police work and colonial power dynamics, although much remains to be covered on the topic. Gender and sexuality (like class) embodied the potential to destabilize racial boundaries, most visibly through mixed-race unions. Studies by Christina Firpo, Emmanuelle Saada, Owen White, Erica Peters, and others looking at colonial preoccupation with gender roles and sexuality as it connected to *mestissage* in the colonies contribute important insights about the simultaneous urgency of persevering, and the inherent fragility of, racial boundaries in the colonies.<sup>52</sup> As I argue in chapter 5, the often ambivalent employment of *métis* in the police reflected these larger boundary anxieties.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Marie-Paule Ha, "Engendering French colonial history: The case of Indochina," in *The French and the Pacific World, 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. Annick Foucrier (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005); Philippa Levine ed., *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue*; Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*; Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's history of sexuality and the colonial order of things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Tracol-Huynh, "The Shadow Theater of Prostitution;" Tracol-Huynh, "Between stigmatisation and regulation;" Tracol-Huynh, "Encadrer la sexualité au Viêt-Nam colonial."

<sup>51</sup> In this passage Tracol-Huynh is of course citing Edward Said. Tracol-Huynh, "Between stigmatisation and regulation," S74.

<sup>52</sup> Christina Firpo, "Lost Boys: 'Abandoned' Eurasian children and the management of the racial topography in colonial Indochina, 1939-1945," *French Colonial History* 8, (2007): 203-221; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Erica J. Peters, "Colonial Cholon and its 'missing' *Métisses*, 1859-1919, *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* (September 2009): 21; Emmanuelle Saada, *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Emmanuelle Saada, "The Empire of Law: Dignity, Prestige, and Domination in the 'Colonial Situation,'" *French Politics, Culture & Society* 20, 2, (Summer 2002): 113; Owen White, *Children of French Imperialism: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>53</sup> Rettig makes a similar argument for the army in: Tobias Rettig, "Contested loyalties: Vietnamese soldiers in the service of France, 1927-1939" (PhD diss., London: School of Oriental and African studies, 2005).

## Colonial Policing Literature: The British Empire and beyond

This dissertation is also a contribution to the relatively recent but fast growing field of colonial police studies. British historians pioneered colonial policing studies as a distinct subject of study in the 1980s, and the field expanded in the 2000s to feature innovative work on French, Dutch, and Belgian colonial polices as well. Among the first contributions was David H. Bayley's 1969 *Police and Political Development in India*, which asked how the relationship between police and citizens affected political development in the colony.<sup>54</sup> The 1980s saw an outgrowth of histories of policing in the British colonies. David Arnold's *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras 1859-1947* is a dense, insightful institutional and political history on the police. Arnold argues that the police service, established in 1850s, was central to colonial control in India as "an essential part of [the] strengthening and refining of the state apparatus."<sup>55</sup>

For British Africa, Anthony Clayton and David Killingray's published in 1989 *Khaki and Blue*, an empirically rich overview based on interviews of retired policeman which details law enforcement and police practices from the eve of decolonization to independence.<sup>56</sup> In another important development, David M. Anderson and David Killingray co-edited two compilation volumes on policing in the British colonies, the first of which (1991) looked at policing as an instrument of state control.<sup>57</sup> In their second edited volume (1992), *Policing and Decolonisation*, they highlight problematic continuities between pre-colonial and post-colonial policing practices. A sizable number of publications on policing in the British Empire have since emerged.<sup>58</sup> These

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<sup>54</sup> Bayley, *Police and Political Development in India*.

<sup>55</sup> Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule*, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Clayton and Killingray, *Khaki and Blue*.

<sup>57</sup> Anderson and Killingray, eds., *Policing and Decolonisation*; Anderson and Killingray, eds., *Policing the Empire*. Also of note is work by David Arnold.

<sup>58</sup> A few of the more recent contributions are: Georgine Sinclair, *At the end of the line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame*; Timothy Stapleton, *African police and soldiers in colonial Zimbabwe*.

studies further show the inter-connectedness of metropolitan and colonial policing systems, and the ongoing, problematic legacies left behind in former British colonies.

Until recently, the study of policing in the French Empire was far less developed than its British counterpart, although this is rapidly changing. Patrice Morlat's 1990 *La Répression Coloniale au Vietnam* traced the rise of Vietnam's colonial Sûreté in response to growing anticolonial activities in Vietnam in the 1920-30s.<sup>59</sup> In 2007, Kathleen Keller completed her dissertation on the French colonial police in French West Africa (AOF)<sup>60</sup> in which she examines the development of AOF's police surveillance practices as a direct response to interwar colonial anxieties about "suspicious persons" and a larger desire to impose urban control on diverse populations in Dakar.<sup>61</sup> The first major conference dedicated to French colonial policing took place in Paris in 2009, the second in a series of recent conferences about policing European empires, which in turn led to an outpouring of articles.<sup>62</sup>

There have also been challenges to the earlier generation of policing literature, including a 2010 co-authored article by Blanchard, Dulermoz, and Glasman, "La Professionnalisation policière." The authors unsettle an evolutionary, linear view of policing (in both Europe and its colonies) which assumes that through efforts at professionalization and modernization a police becomes ever closer to a policing ideal: more liberal and less militarized.<sup>63</sup> Police development, they argue, was never linear or uniform and the idea of professionalization as an endpoint is over-determined and assumes that professionalization cannot accommodate brutal practices. They also argue for the role of colonies and pre-colonial practices in shaping institutions and that

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<sup>59</sup> Morlat, *La Répression Coloniale*.

<sup>60</sup> Keller, "Colonial Suspects."

<sup>61</sup> Kathleen A. Keller, "Political Surveillance and Colonial Urban Rule: "Suspicious" Politics and Urban Space in Dakar, Senegal, 1918-1939," *French Historical Studies* 35, 4 (Fall 2012).

<sup>62</sup> Emmanuel Blanchard, *La Police Parisienne et les Algériens (1944-1962)* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Editions, 2011); Tracol-Huynh.

<sup>63</sup> Emmanuel Blanchard, Quentin Deluermoz, and Joël Glasman, "La Professionnalisation policière en situation coloniale: détour conceptuel et explorations hectographiques," *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés* 15, 2 (2011): 33-53.

the key distinction of the police as a civilian institution from a military one (a marker of modernity) was impossible in the colonies where the police were largely militarized.

Along these lines of refining a theory of colonial policing are several recent publications devoted to colonial policing on a global and comparative scale. Martin Thomas' 2012 *Violence and Colonial Order Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918–1940*, is the first to argue that political economy is key to understanding the variants in colonial police between the colonies.<sup>64</sup> Where others have pointed to a rise in political opposition or nationalism in the empires, Thomas asserts that it was primarily the need to manage economic interests (such as worker protests, unions, industries, land) which drove colonial police concerns and thus police organization in the 1930s in colonial Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. In Vincent Denis and Catherine Denys' 2012 compilation volume, *Polices d'empires XVIIIe-XIXe siècles*, the essays examine the local modifications that European police models underwent in a variety of colonies.<sup>65</sup> In a compilation volume on policing in Africa, *Maintenir l'ordre colonial* devoted to a variety of "public order" questions in colonial Africa, the volume's editors describe this field as an "emerging historiography."<sup>66</sup> In their introduction, Joël Glasman and Emmanuel Blanchard also make an appeal to scholars to "banalize" colonial police history, to study it "as one would the metropolitan police" in order to help colonial police studies escape the intellectual confines of the colonies.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, they argue against separating "artificially" the history of colonial police from the colony's "brutal colonial means of control."

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order*.

<sup>65</sup> Vincent Denis and Catherine Denys, eds., *Polices d'Empires: XVIIIe-XIXe siècles* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012).

<sup>66</sup> Jean-Pierre Bat and Nicolas Courtin, eds., *Maintenir l'ordre colonial: Afrique et Madagascar (XIXe-XXe siècles)*, (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012).

<sup>67</sup> Emmanuel Blanchard and Joël Glasman, "Introduction générale, Le maintien de l'ordre dans l'empire français, une historiographie émergente," in *Maintenir l'ordre colonial: Afrique et Madagascar (XIXe-XXe siècles)*, eds. Jean-Pierre Bat and Nicolas Courtin (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 11-41.

A handful of studies have examined the question of race and intermediaries internally to the police. Among these is Timothy Stapleton's 2011 study of Africans in Zimbabwe's colonial police and military, which offers a multifaceted, complex portrait of the African agents' lives as policemen.<sup>68</sup> Of particular interest is his discussion of racial boundaries and the paradox of the intermediary: "African police and soldiers upheld colonialism, yet they also experienced the racial discrimination characteristic of that system, both inside and outside the security forces."<sup>69</sup> There is also a telling parallel in the recurring problem of how the police went about policing a white minority in cases where the policemen were not white. Stapleton writes that the colony's "racial taboo" made it nearly impossible for an African policemen to assert his authority over a European. Zimbabwe policemen were furthermore subject to violence at the hand of minority whites and attacked for "challenging racial restrictions."<sup>70</sup> Focusing on the lowest ranks, Stapleton shows how African constables overcame certain barriers. Starting around 1941, constables started to challenge their inferior status in terms of pay and uniform, which he connects to a rise in formal education and agents' higher social status.

Joël Glasman describes a similar development of police agency in Togo as he too looks at "strategies used by colonial African policemen to defend their interests."<sup>71</sup> Like Stapleton, Glasman identifies how African agents asserted their interests vis-à-vis the state: "even though the colonial state kept a very close watch on its policemen, they still had space not only for individual but also for collective agency."<sup>72</sup> He argues that police bureaucratization, and the creation of a *Service de Sûreté* in the 1930s, enabled subordinate policemen to organize and

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<sup>68</sup> Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers in Colonial Zimbabwe*.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Joël Glasman, "Bureaucratization, and Policemen's Agency in Interwar Togo," *The Journal of African History* 55, 1, (March 2014): 81.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

assert their interests. Whereas more subtle forms of individual resistance could be seen prior to the 1930s—the kind I observe for Vietnamese agents—only in 1936 did agents in Togo organize to write a petition and provoke the firing of an abusive French superior. By the 1950s, a similar timeline to Zimbabwe, the police had unionized and was clearly influencing policy from within. While not concerned with race *per se*, Glasman's article speaks to the topsy-turvy nature of colonial hierarchy and the power imbalance inherent in policing through intermediaries.

Finally, Marieke Bloembergen, in her work on policing in Indonesia, deals with key questions of agency, police hierarchy, racial imbalance, intermediaries, and the use of violence in sustaining colonial rule.<sup>73</sup> Bloembergen is one of the few historians of colonial police to write explicitly about the problem of racial hierarchy:

The Indonesian element within the colonial police exemplified a key aspect of colonial state formation: the state's cooperation with the local population on which the colonial state depended. At the same time, the police force reflects a different aspect of the colonial state, by demonstrating how the racial hierarchy of its organization generated and consolidated ethnic distinctions.<sup>74</sup>

She describes the central conundrum of the police as both an institution of modernization and a tool of repression, and concludes that these mutually exclusive objectives characterized the police (what makes a colonial police colonial). As a result, the Surabayan police appear again and again "powerless."

These studies suggest the possibility of generalizing a theory of colonial policing, as well as the impact of local particularities in creating unique policing institutions. There is still much work to be done however on the question of race and intermediaries, not to mention attention to class and gendered hierarchies among police personnel. My intervention in the historiography is

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<sup>73</sup> Marieke Bloembergen, "The Perfect Policeman: Colonial Policing, Modernity and Conscience on Sumatra's West Coast in the early 1930s," *Indonesia* (April 2011): 165-193; Marieke Bloembergen, "The Dirty work of empire. Modern policing and public order in Surabaya," *Indonesia* (April 2007): 119-150.

<sup>74</sup> Bloembergen, "The Perfect Policeman," 170.



to use Vietnam's colonial police and its atypical racial profile as an example of how looking at race and racial hierarchy can open up opportunities to examine different questions related to colonial polices, including intermediaries and internal class disparities. It also speaks to the enduring importance of race as a primary variable ordering not just in the police but everyday colonial life, in all the messiness and contradictions that ordering necessarily entailed.

### **Project Parameters**

This study is interested in how a diverse police went about policing diverse colonial societies, which included European communities. Consequently, I focus on the police in Indochina's cities with sizable European populations—Saigon, Cholon, Hanoi, Haiphong, and to a lesser extent, Phnom Penh. The French also approached rural policing differently from urban policing, relying more on local intermediaries and also employing more military tactics in the countryside. I draw on rural examples as they are useful to the discussion of social order and policing, but my focus remains on urban spaces as nodes of colonial contact.

In terms of temporal boundaries, this study begins with the founding of the first colonial police in Saigon in 1861 and ends roughly in the late 1920s. I choose this somewhat unusual (and imperfect) latter periodization for several reasons. My interest in police work extends beyond the strictly political aspect of their work, which in many ways eclipses other police priorities in the interwar period. I would pinpoint this ascendancy in political policing—usually dated to the 1917 police reorganization reforms that created the *Sûreté* but in practice more of a gradual process—to the mid-to-late 1920s.

To understand later police developments, what did and did not change, we must examine what the police looked like prior to 1917. More generally the field of colonial Vietnamese history focuses on the tumultuous interwar period, and the literature on the police is devoted

entirely to the years 1917-1940.<sup>75</sup> Yet the period 1860-1914 were formative years for police and colonial society alike. It was during the decades prior to WWI that Indian employment in the Saigon police was most fervently challenged, Chinese immigrants fought the state's introduction of new surveillance technologies, and Vietnamese intermediaries performed the lion's share of translation and interpretation because French policemen did not, by and large, learn local languages. With colonialism firmly established in this period, yet no major populist, anti-colonial movement underway, individuals and groups had to negotiate as best as they were able their own interests in the new order.

A convenient place to stop then might seem to be WWI, which also serves as an endpoint for other studies on the early colonial period. Or it might seem reasonable to end where others working on the colonial police pick up, in 1917, the year Governor General Albert Sarraut passed his major reforms which led to the rise of the political police. Yet to start (or stop) the story in 1917 gives Sarraut's reforms a transformative power they did not have, at least not instantly. The ideas behind the reforms themselves had deeper roots in the colony, as I argue elsewhere,<sup>76</sup> but also the 1917 merger was only in the first of a half dozen police reforms extending through 1934. There remained significant continuities which merit highlighting between pre-1917 and post-1917 policing in terms of personnel and institutional practices. Since I seek to nuance our understandings of the limits and reach of the "dreaded Sûreté," and stress these ongoing continuities, it is necessary to push the story past 1917. Yet something did change for the police in the 1920s, which makes the later period a subject for another study, hence the imprecise break on the eve of the Great Depression. The social order to which the police

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<sup>75</sup> Morlat, *La Répression Coloniale au Vietnam*; Dioque, *Félix Dioque*; Hémery, *Révolutionnaires vietnamiens et pouvoir colonial en Indochine*.

<sup>76</sup> Melissa Anderson, "'La plus discrète vigilance': The 1916 Cochinchina Revolts and the local origins of the French colonial *Sûreté* in Vietnam," Policing Empires Conference: Social Control, Political Transition, and (Post-)Colonial Legacies, Brussels, Belgium, December 2013.

belonged also underwent rapid change during and after WWI for reasons I return to in my conclusion.

### **Chapter Overviews**

Chapter 1 starts at the top police ranks with metropolitan Frenchmen, from the entry-level *agents* to the *commissaires central*. Most entry-level recruits came to the colony from rural areas in France, had little formal education, and transferred directly from military service. Most were recruited locally in Vietnam among demobilized colonial troops and more than a few were facing poverty and unemployment at the time of their applications. High-ranking *commissaires*, by contrast, were more likely to own land, belong to scholarly societies, and become wealthy by colonial standards. By stressing internal socio-economic divisions within the European ranks, this chapter challenges the received notion that the Vietnam colonial police was a particularly elite or prestigious institution. Although the colony offered opportunities for social advancement, most police recruits were not especially wealthy, nor did they become wealthy (with a few important exceptions) through their work in the police.

Chapter 2 looks closer at ongoing problem with discipline, health and work hazards, and near-constant vacancies in the European cadre. These challenges had several important consequences. First, the state could not place too high a barrier to joining the police, and leadership proved hesitant to dismiss mediocre or unruly agents or allow their detachment to other services. The limited number of locally available French candidates also prevented the state from compelling French policemen to acquire special skills such as linguistic competency, and as a result very few became fluent in a local language prior to the 1920s. Neither did understaffing help the ongoing, often serious problems with discipline and insubordination. This chapter argues that the overriding desire on the part of the French administration to protect prestige—

both of the uniform (the police) and of the European (whiteness)—ended up being the primary rationale behind how the leadership dealt with badly behaving agents. The same concern for prestige that caused French superiors to worry over their police personnel's uncouth actions ultimately limited the police's capacity to sanction both white policemen and white criminals. The demands of racial hierarchy thus, counter-intuitively, restricted how colonial policemen could discipline and be disciplined.

These two chapters together show how class disparities within the white personnel ranks raised the stakes of racial privilege. They also consider how gendered hierarchies and expectations shaped in specific ways police practices and abuses. If colonialism was a "masculine adventure," colonial police culture was a hyper-masculine enterprise.<sup>77</sup> Threats to masculinity (such as being berated by a police superior in front of his wife) led to posturing and violence between agents, and between agents and civilians. At the same time, liaisons between European men and native women were part and parcel of expected white colonial privilege, and sexual violence is a recurring theme in police discipline cases. Police abuses discussed in these chapters illustrate the chaotic grey area between competing colonial hierarchies of race, gender, and class, a space in which violence proliferated.

Chapter 3, the final chapter on the European hierarchy, examines French personnel who were not from mainland France, with a particular focus on Saigon's especially diverse municipal police. It illustrates the enduring importance of race as a meaningful variable in the police service by juxtaposing the Saigon police's two sizable intra-colonial groups: French Indians and Corsicans. Both groups included French citizens who immigrated to Vietnam from France's periphery in large numbers and actively maintained a distinctive linguistic and cultural identity

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<sup>77</sup> David G. Barrie and Susan Broomhall, eds., *A History of Police and Masculinities, 1700-2010* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012); Philippa Levine, ed., *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

vis-à-vis the metropolitan French in Vietnam. In the police, however, Corsicans became more normalized as white—and therefore "French"—while Indians were singled out for criticism and violence in racial terms in ways that Corsicans were not. This is most clearly illustrated by a 1907-1908 episode in which the Saigon mayor openly challenged the Indian's legal claim to "Frenchness" by creating a third employment category for Indian police personnel, effectively demoting them from the European cadre. After an eighteenth-month campaign waged by Saigon's Indian community, nevertheless, a Paris commission overturned the law and the mayor resigned. This episode shows that despite the apparent hollowness of the promise of assimilationism in the colony, the Indians' effective use of France's colonial rhetoric exposed the state to demands for racial equality which could not be ignored in Paris. This chapter concludes by looking at how non-European French agents, Indians in particular, struggled to police white criminals because the nature of racially coded legitimate and illegitimate violence mitigated against their intervention in cases involving white crime.

Another unintended result of colonial hierarchies ordered (however messily) by race was the empowerment of those at the bottom. Chapters 4 and 5 turn to Vietnamese police recruits, along with Cambodians, Chinese interpreters, and others employed in the native personnel hierarchy. Chapter 4 looks at the external factors that contributed to the state's reliance on intermediaries. It argues that France's approach can best be understood as the negotiated if conflicted product of countervailing attitudes and imperatives that are explored in turn. Police work involved both visible police (detering crime through police presence) and invisible police (intelligence gathering and infiltration of potential threats), and the French colonial state depended entirely on Vietnamese agents and their informers for the latter. Economic and other practical pressures further forced the question in favor of hiring Vietnamese policemen.

Tendentious racial assumptions about the "mentality" of Vietnamese agents guided both pro- and anti-intermediary attitudes and these stereotypes affected how the state employed and deployed Vietnamese agents. Understanding the underlying tensions in French policy (to employ or not to employ) helps explain why the state employed Vietnamese policemen the way it did—in large numbers but with limited authority, and often without meaningful supervision or support.

Benefiting from the insights of colonial Africa historians Nancy Rose Hunt and Emily Osborn, chapter 5 advocates for a reframing of low-ranking intermediaries in the police as "colonial middle figures."<sup>78</sup> Because of their numerical supremacy, and the discretionary nature of police work, these agents were at times able to operate within a sort of sovereign space in surprising ways. Their role as translators, both literately as interpreters but also as filters of knowledge about colonialism and French laws, gave low-level agents on occasion enormous leverage vis-à-vis both the French and other colonial subjects. An examination of the foot soldiers of police shows that colonial influence did not just emanate from the metropole, or even from European administrators in the colony, but could be dispersed at the lowest levels. The racial hierarchy itself generated these openings for instability and subversion.

Chapter 6 moves beyond the police to explore the special case of the Chinese, a group generally considered to have been a privileged class within the colonial system because of their wealth, commercial dominance, and certain legal exemptions. But even as the French depended on Chinese taxes, and encouraged the influx of Chinese laborers, colonial politicians—worried about this community's large numbers, lingering foreignness, and cross-border mobility—singled

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<sup>78</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Emily Lynn Osborn, "'Circle of Iron': African Colonial Employees and the Interpretation of Colonial Rule in French West Africa," *The Journal of African History* 44, 1 (2003): 29-50. See also on the importance of middle figures in colonial administration in Africa, Benjamin N. Lawrence, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, eds., *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

out this community for more surveillance, taxes, and regulation than any other ethnic group. For this reason, they were largely excluded from police employment, yet the Chinese were also more inclined to appeal discriminatory treatment and invite protection. Whether as police advocates or targets, the Chinese became intricately connected to the development of the colony's policing institutions. Along with the Indian police campaign from 1907-08, turn-of-the-century protests against the use of Bertillon anthropometrics on Chinese immigrants suggests how immigrant groups were able to exert influence on behalf of their communities. While the Indians' leverage derived from citizenship, the influence of the Chinese had more to do with their sheer numbers, political organization, and economic dominance. Both benefited also from international networks, the Chinese as foreign nationals and the Indians as French constituents, connections that could be mobilized in ways not available to colonial subjects.

### **Sources**

The bulk of the study's sources come from three archives: the French Colonial Archive (Centre des archives d'outre-mer, or CAOM), in Aix-en-Provence, the Vietnam National Archive I (Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia I, or TTLT I) in Hanoi, and the Vietnam National Archive II (Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia II, or TTLT II) in Ho Chi Minh City. I also utilized dozens of years of colonial newspapers from the CAOM and the French National Library (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, BNF) in Paris and other printed primary sources obtained at these sites. I consulted as well the French Military Archive (Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, SHAT), in Vincennes; the Aude Departmental Archives (Archives Départementales de l'Aude, ADA), in Carcassonne (for Albert Sarraut's private papers); the French National Archives (Archives Nationales, AN) in Paris; and the French Diplomatic Archives (Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, CADN and Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, MAE) in

Nantes and La Courneuve respectively. In Vietnam, I also made use of the Vietnam National Libraries (Thư Viện Quốc Gia Việt Nam, TVQG) in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Many municipal level administrative documents remained in Vietnam, and the reports and letters I found in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City provide a sense of the complexity of everyday life absent in higher-level correspondence. They also give a better sense of how debates unfolded and were in turn shaped locally. In Chapter 6, for instance, I show how the Cochinchina River Police—the precursor to the Sûreté's infamous mobile brigades in the 1920s—can actually be traced back to 1) demands from the Chinese community seeking to protect their rice merchants in the 1890s and 2) the overriding preoccupation of local French leaders with practicing a close surveillance of this community. In these instances, the Vietnamese archives revealed a different power dynamic at the level of local colonial encounters including the involvement of non-Europeans, even though the sources themselves are in French.

I am conscious of the fact that most of my sources were written by and for Frenchmen, including administrators, elected officials, and *colons*. The backbone of the first three chapters is the dozens of enormously rich French police personnel files I explore closely, which include such sources as job applications, pension records, medical records, disciplinary records, annual reviews, and correspondence, yet there are no comparable sources for Vietnamese agents. One of my major challenges was how then to get at the story of Vietnamese and *métis* police agents. The only *métis* police agent biography I found (discussed in chapters 4 and 5) belongs to Jean Jacques Maitam, and he did not join the police until 1942.<sup>79</sup> The prison memoirs examined effectively by Peter Zinoman, meanwhile, come from the later colonial period.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Jean Jacques Maitam, *A House Divided* (n.p.: Tudor Pub, 1999).

<sup>80</sup> Peter Zinoman, *Colonial Bastille*. Ngo Van's autobiography for example is an excellent source which illustrates the extreme cruelty of colonial police practices in the 1930s, but which takes place after my period of study: Ngo Van, *Au Pays de la Cloche Fêlée* (Montreuil: L'insomniaque, 2013).



I found however that a careful reading of the same sources used in chapters 1, 2, and 3—newspapers, police reports, and internal correspondence—revealed much as well for chapters 4 and 5. The French police agents' personnel files in particular contain intriguing details about their Vietnamese police subordinates, especially the disciplinary records involving internal conflicts, including testimony from *indigène* agents. I extrapolate from mundane police reports looking for clues about power dynamics in the police and the relationship between the European and non-European cadres. Finally, written complaints from both Vietnamese and Chinese civilians, many of which were anonymous, ended up in the police files. Further research into such questions as how the police were represented in Vietnamese print culture, in newspapers, and in fictional sources would surely add to understandings of colonial polices and how they worked, but were beyond the scope of this study.

A brief note on methodology is also warranted. This dissertation tells its story mainly through many, many smaller stories, including individual biographies and umpteen police conflicts. These stories form a large portion of my argument, both as "data" and also as jumping off points for discussing larger phenomena. I find stories engaging and also enormously useful for thinking through the sorts of questions this dissertation seeks to address: what did assimilationism mean in practice, how did encounters between police and policed play out on the street, how were the rules of colonial order enforced and subverted in ways large and small. Stories which feature bit players, so to speak—and almost everyone in this dissertation would be considered a bit player in the colonial project—can also be a way to shake up the usual colonial narrative and draw out individual perspectives. When possible, I present conflicting accounts and draw conclusions as much from how the incident is being recounted and handled as the events

themselves. In that sense, a story becomes not just a springboard to flesh out what abstract ideas meant in the lives of everyday people, but the point itself.

Stories also present an opportunity to bring out the significant but often elusive role affect played colonial encounters, allowing emotions to take center stage. It is often difficult to recapture or recreate feelings in historical narrative because of the nature of the sources, yet emotions and sensibilities play a powerful role in human history. Police encounters sparked and revealed indignation, anger, outrage, fear and many other sentiments which are a vital part of explaining why events happened the way they did. Individuals within and outside the police jostled for respect, for prestige, and for dignity, and nowhere is that more visible than at the level of everyday conflict.

## Chapter 1: Recruiting the European Cadre, the Metropolitan French

French citizens from the metropole travelled to Vietnam in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to staff the highest ranks of the European police personnel. This chapter examines their recruitment, salary and benefits, and education and training to put forward a more complex socio-economic profile of white colonial policemen. It argues that while some may have enjoyed a more comfortable lifestyle in the colony in comparison to what they would have been able to afford in France, many police *agents* and their families subsisted more than thrived. Recruits came predominately from rural and peripheral areas in France, in particular from Corsica, and had military or working class backgrounds. Many in the lower and middle ranks belonged more to the "white administrative proletariat"—a colonial-era term recently interrogated by Paul Sager—than to the colonial "bourgeoisie," the prevalent depiction of white male *colons*.<sup>1</sup> The colonial police service's low pay and prestige also had direct bearing on its ability to attract and retain agents, a problem explored further in chapter 2.

### Conquest Origins: The *garde urbaine*

The first police in French Indochina, the *garde urbaine*, was officially founded in Saigon in 1862, although police records go back to 1861 when the *corps expéditionnaire* were charged with ensuring public order.<sup>2</sup> The *garde* emerged slowly and incompletely from the occupying

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Michael Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina: Race, Class, and the French Colonial Employer-State, 1848-1945" (PhD diss., New York University, 2014). To be precise, his interest in this term is to interrogate the understudied popular discourse around white poverty in the colonial administration (to explain the turn to indigenization of the bureaucracy). Sager's dissertation is less concerned with the material realities of low ranking white colonial employees, in short, were they actually poor or not. He does conclude on page 195 that theirs was an in-between class, both privileged and relatively impoverished: "One might therefore think of colonial functionaries as a section of the middle class that was being 'proletarianized' and simultaneously as a section of the working class that underwent 'embourgeoisement' in the colony." My findings also support Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur's argument that the French colonial project was not entirely an "elite affair," which suggests that the domestic effects of French colonialism were potentially more pervasive than previously thought. Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, eds., *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IB25/135(1), Commissaire de Police Tourillon, "Police de Saigon: projet de réorganisation du service," Saigon, April 13, 1880; Le commissaire de police, chef du service Tourillon, "Rapport au Conseil Colonial, Police. Historique, Situation, Besoins," Saigon, August 12, 1881.

military into a distinct, civil service. In June 1862, Cochinchina's Admiral-Governor Bonard created this police service in Saigon "to protect a handful of respectable European civilians, and to keep surveillance of some adventurers inclined to extravagances, and to inspire the respect of an apparently peaceful indigenous population."<sup>3</sup> In 1862, Saigon's police consisted of twenty-one Frenchmen: three sergeants, three corporals, and fifteen infantry and marine soldiers.<sup>4</sup>

Organized and staffed by the armed forces, Indochina's first colonial police force was "very much a military institution from the point of view of organization, salary, and uniform."<sup>5</sup> The *garde urbaine's* employees remained on the military's payroll, but as a bonus for working in the police they were paid an additional 2.15-3.33 francs per day. Designated the "police of European centers," according to the original order, the agents received a distinctive uniform. The police were responsible for exercising surveillance "during the day but especially at night of the different quarters throughout the area of the city's new perimeter."<sup>6</sup>

By 1865, the *garde's* ranks changed from the original sergeant, corporal, or soldier, to standard French police ranks: inspecteur, brigadier, and agent. The first *commissaire*, Alexandre Mathieu, was appointed in 1865 to oversee the *garde*.<sup>7</sup> In 1865, in another development that signaled the *garde's* move away from its military origins, the local colonial budget began contributing to salaries. Soldiers and officers had to be formally detached to the agency.<sup>8</sup> Cholon received its first *commissaire* in 1867, followed by the establishment of a police there "under the

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Meyer, *Les Français en Indochine, 1860-1914* (Paris: Hachette, 1996), 74.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Bouchot, *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de Saigon, 1859 à 1865* (Saigon: Imprimerie Nouvelle A. Portail, Rue Catinat, 1927), 351.

<sup>5</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IB25/135(1), Commissaire de Police Tourillon "Police de Saigon: projet de réorganisation du service," Saigon, April 13, 1880; Le commissaire de police, chef du service Tourillon, "Rapport au Conseil Coloniale, Police. Historique, Situation, Besoins," Saigon, August 12, 1881.

<sup>6</sup> Bouchot, *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de Saigon*, 351.

<sup>7</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IB25/135(1), Commissaire de Police Tourillon "Police de Saigon: projet de réorganisation du service," Saigon, April 13, 1880; Le commissaire de police, chef du service Tourillon, "Rapport au Conseil Coloniale, Police. Historique, Situation, Besoins," Saigon, August 12, 1881.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Bouchot, *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de Saigon, 1859 à 1865*, (Saigon: Imprimerie Nouvelle A. Portail, Rue Catinat, 1927), 449.

same conditions of salary, uniform, and armament as that of Saigon."<sup>9</sup> A *commissaire central* in Saigon oversaw both the Cholon and Saigon police.

During the conquest years, virtually everyone in the new colonial government came from the navy or military. This period ended in 1879 when the Minister of Colonies and Navy in France replaced the Admiral-Governor with a civilian Governor General. Following this date, many services shifted away from the recruitment of former soldiers in favor of Republican recruits. This followed political developments in the metropole, specifically the establishment of the Third Republic in 1871.<sup>10</sup> The applicants' qualifications did not necessarily improve over the military recruits however.<sup>11</sup> As GGI Klobukowski wrote of the colonial administration more broadly in 1911, comparing his French employees unfavorably to their Vietnamese counterparts, "half the functionaries were veterans whose instruction and education are wanting" and "their inferiority, even vis-à-vis our native auxiliaries, is all too apparent."<sup>12</sup> For the police, meanwhile, the military connection continued. France launched the Tonkin campaign to conquer the north of Vietnam in the 1880s, and war provided another wave of demobilized soldiers to the administration. It also led to the creation of municipal polices in the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong in 1884.<sup>13</sup>

The police grew tentatively in the 1870s and 1880s. On June 18, 1867, the Colonial Council increased Saigon's police to 49 employees, including 23 Europeans (2 commissaires, 3

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<sup>9</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IB25/135(1), Commissaire de Police Tourillon, "Police de Saigon: projet de réorganisation du service," Saigon, April 13, 1880.

<sup>10</sup> Gilles de Gantès, "Administrer une colonie à la française au XIXe siècle, Le cas de l'Indochine (1860-1911)," in *Les Grands Commis de l'Empire colonial français* ed. Patrice Morlat, (Domont, France: Les Indes Savantes, 2010), 31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. See also, same volume: Patrice Morlat, "Introduction," *Les Grands Commis*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Gilles de Gantès, "Administrer une colonie à la française au XIXe siècle, Le cas de l'Indochine (1860-1911)," in *Les Grands Commis de l'Empire colonial français* ed. by Patrice Morlat, (Domont, France: Les Indes Savantes, 2010), 38.

<sup>13</sup> TTLT I, RST 076405, "Proposition du résident de Ninh Binh sur la création d'un service de sûreté générale 1906;" Le Commissaire de police de la ville de Hanoi à Monsieur le Secrétaire général de l'Indochine, Hanoi, September 25, 1895.

inspectors, 4 brigadiers, and 14 agents) plus 20 Asian agents.<sup>14</sup> The commissaries in 1868 earned 5,000 francs annually while the lowest ranked European agents made 1,500 francs per year.<sup>15</sup> At this time, Asian agents (*agents asiatiques*) made 780 to 1,020 francs per year, and the 3 interpreters (Chinese, Indo-Malay, and Vietnamese) each earned 1,600 francs.<sup>16</sup>

By 1880, the personnel numbers had risen to:

	European Agents	Asian Agents	Interpreters	Total
Saigon <i>Police Municipale</i>	32	100	4	136
<i>Police Administrative et judiciaire</i> (Cochinchine)	5	24	2	31
Total	37	124	6	167

Source: TTLT II, Goucoch, IB25/135(1), Commissaire de Police Tourillon "Police de Saigon: projet de réorganisation du service," Saigon, April 13, 1880.

Aside from general growth, the most notable change in these 12 years came in the relative number of intermediary agents, those working in the *indigène* cadre (who were still called Asian agents in this period). The European cadre increased from 23 to 37 policemen while the Asian cadre went from 20 to 124 agents, bringing their overall percentage to 77%. Yet the police remained a small service relative to city size. In 1881, the total population for Saigon alone was 16,000, including the garrison.<sup>17</sup> Personnel numbers increased more quickly around the turn of the century following Paul Doumer's administrative reforms. In 1905, for all of Indochina, including Saigon, Cholon, Haiphong, Hanoi, and Phnom Penh, there were 316

<sup>14</sup> André Baudrit, *Contribution à l'histoire de Saigon: extraits des registres de délibérations de la Ville de Saigon (Indochine Française) 1867-1916, Deuxième Partie* (Saigon: Imprimerie J. Testelin, 1936), 60. Their salaries were, in 1867: commissaire 5,250 francs per year, inspecteur 2,600 francs per year, brigadier 2,300 francs per year, and European agents ranged from 1,500-2,100 francs per year. The highest commissaire salary was reduced to 5,000 francs the following year in 1868.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>17</sup> André Baudrit, *Contribution à l'histoire de Saigon: extraits des registres de délibérations de la Ville de Saigon (Indochine Française) 1867-1916, Première Partie*, Saigon: Imprimerie J. Testelin, 1936, 48. "La population en 1881. Séance du 11 avril 1881."

Europeans and 572 *indigène* policemen for a total of 888, meaning 64% of personnel were in the indigenous hierarchy.<sup>18</sup> In Cholon, the percentage was as high as 83%.<sup>19</sup>

### Police Organization and Ranks

The police hierarchy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was divided, from lowest to highest rank, into agents, sous-brigadiers, brigadiers, secrétaires, and commissaires. These were further divided by classes: agents of the 2nd class were under agents of the 1st class who were subordinate to senior agents, *hors classe*, and so on.<sup>20</sup> The rank of agent of the 3rd or 4th class was the entry-level rank for a European recruit. Prior to 1917, the *commissaire central* was the highest ranked policeman in the colony, and Tonkin, Cochinchina, and Cambodia each had a *commissaire central* (based in Hanoi, Saigon, and Phnom Penh, respectively). The *commissaires central* ran both the municipal police (PM) and the administrative and judicial police (PAJ). The PAJ had broad jurisdiction in each region, so dealt with policing outside municipal borders, and worked with the Justice Service to investigate and prosecute crimes. The PM was responsible for municipal ordinances and ensuring public safety more generally.<sup>21</sup> Their work overlapped a great deal in the cities.

In terms of their place in the bureaucracy, the *commissaires central* reported to the Governor (for Cochinchina) or *Résidents supérieur* (for Cambodia or Tonkin). Although the *commissaires* belonged to the PAJ, controlled by the Governor or RST, they also had to work

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<sup>18</sup> CAOM, GGI 7779. "Projet de réorganisation de le police de Sûreté générale en Indochine (Mission de M. Gautret), 1905-06;" This broke down (by city) to: Saigon had in the municipal police 76 Europeans and 110 natives (59% native); Cholon's PM had 20 Europeans and 95 native agents (83%); the Cochinchina PAJ has 63 Europeans and 139 natives (69%); Phnom Penh's PAJ had 14 Europeans and 41 natives (75%); the Hanoi PM had 75 Europeans and 112 natives (60%); Tonkin PAJ (covers both Hanoi and Haiphong) had 23 Europeans and 10 native agents (30%); Haiphong's PM had 45 Europeans and 65 natives (59%).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Following the 1917 reforms, the police's highest ranks were expanded upwards to include regional *chefs de service* as well as numerous ranks of *contrôleurs* and *contrôleurs généraux* who outranked the commissaires.

<sup>21</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Arrêté du Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine du 23 Janvier 1888, sur le service de la police.

closely with the mayors who appointed the municipal police personnel.<sup>22</sup> The cities—and police jurisdictions—were divided into districts, or *arrondissements*, each with its own *commissariat* and several smaller police posts staffed with lower ranking policemen. The head of the smaller posts were "*chefs de poste*" and their ranks were usually low (agent or brigadier).

Both the European and *indigène* hierarchies included an active cadre and a sedentary cadre, or primarily street work and office work respectively. For the *indigène* cadre, only the interpreters were considered "sedentary" while in the European cadre this corresponded to the *commissaires*, *secrétaires*, and *brigadiers* if they were assigned as chiefs of posts. The lower ranks (*agents*, *sous-brigadiers*, *brigadiers* who were not *chefs*) engaged in street policing, which included walking beats or patrolling on bicycles. Another important distinction was active duty policemen wore uniforms. The *commissaires* were plainclothes policemen and typically lived in or next to the police station. The *chefs de poste* were also supposed to live at the post. The remainder of the police (both Vietnamese and French) were sometimes provided central housing, along the lines of a barracks, but just as often were left to find their own lodging prior to 1917.

### **Who Joined the Police? Recruiting the French Cadre**

Prior to the late 1920s, most French colonial policemen in Vietnam shared a working class or military background, came from small towns and villages in rural France, and were not formally educated. Some agents were only semi-literate, and very few became proficient in local languages. While policemen were hired both locally and from the metropole, recruitment practices favored men already living in the colony. Hiring locally was logistically more practical,

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<sup>22</sup> The *commissaire central* position was abolished in the 1917 reforms, although the *commissaire* ranks were expanded to allow for promotions and raises. After 1917, *commissaires* of the 1st class could advance to the rank of *commissaire principal*, *commissaire de classe exceptionnelle*, and finally *commissaire hors classe*. They were accountable then to newly established *chef de service* for their region (*pays*), and ultimately to the *Sûreté générale* in Hanoi which was in turn directly under the Governor General of Indochina. This reorganization centralized policing and intelligence work in a single department and standardized the police service between regions.



cheaper, and the recruits already had some familiarity with the colony and the language. There was also pressure from the *colon* or French settler community to provide employment to those already in the colony over metropolitan imports. What this meant for the police was that the recruitment pool was limited, and it was very difficult to impose admission requirements if the police hoped to fill its vacancies. (Underemployment was in fact a near constant problem, as discussed in chapter 2). Indochina's police also had no formal connection to metropolitan police institutions until after World War I; only a handful of men who had worked as policemen in France went on to work as policemen in the colony.<sup>23</sup>

There does not appear to have been a concerted recruitment effort in the metropole. Police recruits who applied while still in France came from a wide geographical area and do not reference organized recruitment in their application letters. The origins of recruits do reflect larger trends of immigration to the colonies—the Pyrenees, Corsica, Bouches-du-Rhône, and Brittany provide a large share of both *colons* and police recruits. Nonetheless, policemen came from all over France, seemingly at random, from along the border with Germany to the Atlantic coast to central France. Most came from small towns and villages, some with only a few hundred people, although a minority came from Paris and its environs.

Candidates for the European police cadre had to prove they were legally French and show that they had satisfied the laws regarding military service (either served or been officially exempted).<sup>24</sup> There was also a medical exam and height requirements.<sup>25</sup> Applicants had to provide a birth certificate, a clean police record, a certificate of good morals, a certificate of

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<sup>23</sup> After 1918, France created the *Service de Contrôle et d'assistance des indigènes des colonies françaises* (CAI) to monitor colonial subjects living in France, and Indochina's top sûreté chief rotated through this service's headquarters in Paris and Marseille. But the two police hierarchies remained separate and each had its own admissions and advancement protocols.

<sup>24</sup> "Justifier de la qualité de Français."

<sup>25</sup> The only applicant I found excluded based on height alone however was Vietnamese. TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/167, "Concours de recrutement des sous-brigadier stagiaires des Polices urbaines" April 15, 1930.

military service, and a medical record attesting that they were fit for colonial service.<sup>26</sup> There were age restrictions, although the personnel files indicate that these were not strictly adhered to as some were recruited in their 40s. A Hanoi law from 1904 specified that police recruits had to be between 25 and 30 years old unless they had more than fifteen years military service.<sup>27</sup> In the Hanoi and Haiphong police in 1913, candidates had to be between 21 and 26 years of age with an exception for military officers for whom the upper limit was 36.<sup>28</sup>

Would-be policemen addressed their applications directly to the colonial administration—either the Governor of Cochinchina, the Resident Superior of Tonkin, or the Governor General of Indochina—who would then pass them on to their *commissaire central* or local mayors for review.<sup>29</sup> Administrators reviewed applications on a case-by-case basis. In 1883, two unrelated applicants, Jacques and Bouchot, wrote from Reims and St. Denis in France respectively to the government in Cochinchina asking to join the Saigon municipal police.<sup>30</sup> Cochinchina's Director of the Interior consulted with the Saigon mayor who agreed to reserve

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<sup>26</sup> TTLT I, RST 34200 "Au sujet de la réorganisation des polices municipales de Hanoi et Haiphong 1912-1913," Le Commissaire Central de Police au Tonkin à Monsieur l'Administrateur Maire de la Ville de Hanoi, Hanoi, September 12, 1912. "Project d'Arrêté, Réorganisation des Polices Municipales d'Hanoi et d'Haiphong;" See for example documents the file of Marcel Kérébel. CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/19 Ministère des Colonies, Police en Indochine, Kérébel, Marcel, Jean; Letter from Kérébel to the Director of Personnel for the Colonial ministry, Paris, January 3, 1922.

<sup>27</sup> "Arrêté portant réorganisation du personnel de la Police municipale des villes de Hanoi et de Haiphong," Albert Sarraut, Hanoi, le 17 janvier 1913, *Journal Officiel de l'Indochine Française*, January 23, 1913, pages 113-118. Found in CAOM, Sarraut archive privée, 9PA5/1.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Gautret writes in 1905 that the age limit was 25-30, with an exception for retired soldiers at 36 years old: CAOM, GGI 7779. Projet de réorganisation de la police de Sûreté générale en Indochine (Mission de M. Gautret), 1905-06.

<sup>29</sup> An entry-level personnel exam was introduced in 1917 that tested a candidate on French dictation and spelling, arithmetic, and geographical knowledge of either France or Indochina. For more on the exams and their content, see: TTLT I, RST 34200 "Au sujet de la réorganisation des polices municipales de Hanoi et Haiphong 1912-1913," Le Commissaire Central de Police au Tonkin à Monsieur l'Administrateur Maire de la Ville de Hanoi, Hanoi, September 12, 1912. "Project d'Arrêté, Réorganisation des Polices Municipales d'Hanoi et d'Haiphong;" TTLT I, Mairie de Hanoi 002508, "Examen de police pratique et de police scientifique de Service de la Sûreté à Hanoi 1932-33;" "Note postale, Hanoi le 9 Janvier 1933, Chef de services de police au Tonkin à tous Chefs de section et Commissaire Central (signé Arnoux);" Le chef de la section de l'identité Directeur de l'école de police à Monsieur le contrôleur général de la sûreté, Chef des services de police au Tonkin à Hanoi, Hanoi, February 8, 1933.

<sup>30</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/1, Police Administrative, Indo-chine, Cochinchine, Jacques, Jules, Christophe. Letter from the Gouverneur to the Minister of colonies, "Des emplois dans la police municipale de Saigon sont réservés à M.M. Jacques et Bouchot," Saigon, April 16, 1883.

jobs for them. The Director of the Interior then notified the Minister of the Navy and Colonies of the decision, who oversaw their transport to the colony. Those hired in this fashion were given entry-level positions. Jacques from Reims' first detail as a Saigon policeman was as a cemetery guard.<sup>31</sup> Other applicants were open to working for whichever service was hiring. Writing from Algeria, where he was stationed in 1889, Joseph Brussel applied to work in Indochina. While his first choice was the police, he expressed interest in working for the customs department or another colonial service.<sup>32</sup>

Historians Patrice Morlat, Gilles de Gantès, William B. Cohen, and others have explored some of the compelling reasons Frenchmen chose to emigrate to Indochina.<sup>33</sup> Colonial service offered the possibility of exceptional social and economic advancement for young Frenchmen willing to gamble on a colonial career. Those who would not otherwise qualify for functionary jobs in France due to limited education or social connections could find similar jobs in colonial administration. And while some colonial services required degrees, in engineering, medicine, veterinary medicine, forestry, law, or just a *baccalauréat* (high school degree), the police had no minimum educational requirement at any level of the organization prior to 1917.

Frenchmen joined the police of their own initiative, usually in their mid-20s following either conscripted or voluntary military service in the navy or colonial army. Most were soldiers, but those whose applications listed non-military professions included farmers, millers, metalworkers, bookkeepers, masons, and others. Antoine Lentali, hired from Ajaccio, Corsica as a Saigon police agent (in the PAJ) in 1901, had worked as a baker before applying to the

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<sup>31</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/1, Police Administrative, Indo-chine, Cochinchine, Jacques, Jules, Christophe.

<sup>32</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IA.9/212(9). He had completed 36 months of military service, 13 of which had been in Annam.

<sup>33</sup> William B. Cohen, "The Lure of Empire: Why Frenchmen Entered the Colonial Service," *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, 1, Colonialism and Decolonization (Jan., 1969): 103-116; William B. Cohen, *Rulers of Empire, the colonial service in Africa* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971); Gilles de Gantès, "Administrer une colonie à la française;" Gilles de Gantès, "Migration to Indochina: Proof of the Popularity of Colonial Empire?" in *Promoting the colonial idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France*, eds. Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 15-28; Patrice Morlat, ed., *Les Grands Commis*.

police.<sup>34</sup> His brother Charles Lentali (also born in Ajaccio, Corsica) worked as an "archiviste aux chemin vicinaux," or a record keeper for rural roads in Corsica for two and a half years before joining the Saigon *police municipale*.<sup>35</sup> Louis Auguste Duval, who joined the PAJ in 1901, was born in Marans and had worked as an ironworker before joining the military.<sup>36</sup> Marcel Kérébel from Brest (Finistère), hired by the Saigon police in 1922, was working as a house painter in Brest when he applied.<sup>37</sup> The 1932 Saigon inspector exam—a rich source of biographical information on a single group of police applicants—included among thirty-five applicants a mechanic, a technician, a musician, and a farmer from Corsica. Many of the remainder had been unsuccessful in colonial commerce.<sup>38</sup>

Applicants were often unemployed or about to be unemployed at the time of their applications. Those who mention a reason for applying usually cite urgent circumstance of poverty or hunger, needing a job to "*faire face à la vie*," or cope with life's necessities. Georges Constatine Bertin, born in 1864 in Gand (Belgium) served fifteen years in the military before retiring and seeking civilian employment.<sup>39</sup> He was listed as unemployed prior to joining the PAJ as an entry-level agent in Saigon in 1902 at the age of 38. Felix Meppi, born in Ajaccio, Corsica

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<sup>34</sup> CAOM, GGI 35217, Personnel Dossier de M. Lentali, Antoine. Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Lecoer, October 20, 1917.

<sup>35</sup> CAOM, GGI 30870, Personnel, Lentali, Charles, Bulletin Individuel de Notes, October 8, 1905.

<sup>36</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1862/1, Ministère des Colonies, Indochine Police, M. Duval, Louis Auguste; CAOM, GGI 3823, Dossier: Police Administrative Cochinchine, Promotion du 14 juillet 1907, Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Duval, 1907. Signed: Commissaire Central Belland, Saigon, May 17, 1907.

<sup>37</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/19, Ministère des Colonies, Police en Indochine, Kérébel, Marcel, Jean; "Demande de renseignements, bulletin individuel. Quimper, January 13, 1922, signed Le Préfet." Contains biographical data on Kérébel.

<sup>38</sup> TFLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/259, "Dossiers des Candidats au concours pour l'emploi d'inspecteur stagiaire de la Police de Sûreté (Session de Septembre 1931)," addressed to the Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, January 13, 1932.

<sup>39</sup> CAOM, GGI 3823, "Dossier: Police Administrative Cochinchine, Promotion du 14 juillet 1907," Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Bertin, Georges Constantin, 1907. Commissaire Central Belland, Saigon, May 17, 1907.

in 1874, served in the *infanterie de marine* from 1893 to 1897.<sup>40</sup> He was also listed as unemployed when hired in 1902 as a temporary agent in the Saigon PAJ.

The need to support a family, sometimes desperately, was a recurring theme in applications. For example, in July 1938, the Saigon-Cholon police hired René Thebault—who was also unemployed—at the urging of former GGI Albert Sarraut. Born in Paris in 1909, Thebault lived in Veneux-les-Sablons (Seine-et-Marne) at the time of his application.<sup>41</sup> While in Indochina, he had worked as a "modest *colon*," or planter, and married a *métis* woman with whom he had three children. His business venture had failed and he was currently unemployed and needed income to support his family. As a favor to Sarraut, Governor Pages hired Thebault as a *journalier* or "day" agent in 1938 at a salary of six piastres per day, pending his performance at the next exam for the rank of *sous-brigadier*.<sup>42</sup>

Veterans included men drafted at the age of twenty-one and those who had elected to enlist, often for five-year contracts. Universal conscription in France was only introduced in 1905, whereas prior to this date conscription laws left room for exemptions favoring the middle and upper classes. Officers with longer military careers could be appointed directly to the top rank of *commissaire* but most everyone started at the bottom of the hierarchy and most men hired as entry-level police agents in Vietnam had been either soldiers or low ranking NCOs. In a situation comparable to the French police in Paris at this time, almost no one had any training in police or law prior to joining the service.

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<sup>40</sup> CAOM, GGI 3823, "Dossier: Police Administrative Cochinchine, Promotion du 14 juillet 1907," Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Meppi, Félix, 1907. Signed: Commissaire Central Belland, Saigon, May 17, 1907.

<sup>41</sup> He had served in the 9eme Régiment in Epernay and re-enlisted for 3 years in the l'Artillerie Coloniale en Indochine where he obtained the rank of brigadier.

<sup>42</sup> TTLT II, Phủ Thống Đốc Nam Kỳ, 1C 5-62, Sở Cảnh sát ông Thébault, cảnh sát viên vùng Sài Gòn, Chợ Lớn năm 1938.

The case of Jean Baptiste Tassel illustrates how someone in the military went about joining the colonial police. Tassel was born in Caouennec (Côtes du Nord) in 1883. After receiving his certificate of *études primaires*, at the age of 12 he went to Paris where he worked as a boy for a poultry merchant (*garçon marchand de volailles*). In 1904, at the age of 15, he joined the navy with a five-year contract.<sup>43</sup> In 1905, he became a "*torpilleur breveté*" and in 1908 was promoted to quartermaster. In 1908, the *Esturgeon*, an early French submarine, brought him to Vietnam. While in Saigon, he sent a letter asking to join the Saigon police to avoid mandatory repatriation at the end of his contract.<sup>44</sup> He was 26 years old. Governor Bonhoure responded favorably and Tassel joined at the entry-level rank of agent of the 3rd class.<sup>45</sup> Commissaire Belland initially judged him a young agent able "only to carry out street policing" and posted him to the harbor.<sup>46</sup> Subsequent reviews turned positive and Commissaire Lecoœur wrote that Tassel had a taste for the profession. In 1911, during administrative leave Tassel married a 21-year-old Frenchwoman from his hometown and she returned with him to the colony. He was among the very few who earned a certificate (1st degree) in Vietnamese in 1911.<sup>47</sup> When war broke out in 1914, Tassel re-enlisted and returned to France.<sup>48</sup> He contracted an unspecified disease while stationed at the front from which he never recovered. He left the colony for the last

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<sup>43</sup> CAOM, GGI 3829, "Police administrative (Cochinchine), Dossier Tassel, agent de 3e classe, 1908;" CAOM, GGI 30869, Personnel, Dossier Individuel, Tassel (Jean-Baptiste), Caisse de Retraite des Services Civils Locaux de l'Indochine.

<sup>44</sup> CAOM, GGI 30869, Personnel, Dossier Individuel, Tassel (Jean-Baptiste), Caisse de Retraite des Services Civils Locaux de l'Indochine. Letter from Tassel to the Goucoch, "Au sujet d'une demande d'emploi d'agent de la police judiciaire administrative [sic]." Saigon, January 4, 1909 [this was his second application]. Letter from Belland to Goucoch, "Classe dans le dossier des demandes d'emploi dans la police" Saigon, November 9, 1908.

<sup>45</sup> CAOM, GGI 3829, Police administrative (Cochinchine), Dossier Tassel, agent de 3e classe, 1908; GGI 3247, Police Administrative, Dossier Tassel, agent de 3e class, 1908. Goucoch Bonhoure to GGI Hanoi, Saigon, December 4, 1908.

<sup>46</sup> CAOM, GGI 30869, Personnel, Dossier Individuel, Tassel (Jean-Baptiste), "Bulletin individuel de Notes," Belland, Saigon, November 10, 1909.

<sup>47</sup> CAOM, GGI 30869, Dossier Individuel, Tassel: Lecoœur, Saigon, November 10, 1911. Extrait du Livret de famille de Monsieur Jean, Baptise, Tassel, Mariage. Délivré February 26, 1911, (this copy stamped May 22, 1914).

<sup>48</sup> CAOM, GGI 30869, Dossier Individuel, Tassel, "Etat Signalétique et des Services" and a certificat of service signed in Toul by the Chef de Escadron, May 1916.

time in 1919 on a convalescence leave. He died in France in 1922 of an illness ruled the consequence of serving in the Great War. He was 39.<sup>49</sup>

Locally recruited military veterans like Tassel become the most heavily represented demographic in the police ranks. The first wave of veterans consisted mainly of *officiers de marine*, while *officiers d'infanterie de marine* followed.<sup>50</sup> Grégoire Simard, for instance, was born in 1846 in un Baux (Bouches du Rhône). At the age of 21, he was conscripted to serve in the *4e régiment d'infanterie de marine* as a soldier in 1867, where he served until 1873. On July 6, 1871, the military put him on leave so he could join the Cholon police (PAJ) as an agent of the 2nd class, although he was not formally discharged until 1873.<sup>51</sup> He rose in the ranks to become a high-ranking *commissaire* before retiring in France in 1900.

The shared features of military and police life—hierarchy, uniforms, and discipline—led administrators to encourage this trend.<sup>52</sup> In 1912, the *commissaire central* in Hanoi wrote that all police recruits should be former soldiers because "only those have completed their military service are qualified to be employed in an active service where physical vigor and discipline are absolutely necessary." At the same time, he asked to limit the retirement age of veterans because soldiers are "already fatigued by a long *séjour* in the colony" and "are inapt to serve 25 years in the active service" without becoming "old and worthless."<sup>53</sup> The *commissaire* opposed hiring candidates who were 28 or older because they had a "checkered" work history and "only solicit a

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<sup>49</sup> CAOM, GGI 30869, Dossier Individuel, Tassel, Caisse de Retraite des Services Civils Locaux de l'Indochine. Letter from Le Président du Conseil d'Administration de la caisse de Retraite des services civils locaux de l'Indochine, à M. le Gouverneur général de l'Indochine. Hanoi, May 26, 1923.

<sup>50</sup> De Gantès, "Administrer une colonie," 29.

<sup>51</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/583/8, Grégoire Esprit Simard personnel file. "Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1888."

<sup>52</sup> As explored in chapter 4, there were recurring efforts in Saigon and Hanoi to militarize the Vietnamese cadre as well to make the Vietnamese agents more uniform and disciplined and to "take them in hand."

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

job in the police because they cannot find anything elsewhere."<sup>54</sup> The trend became to strengthen the military characteristics of the police, particularly individual discipline and respect for hierarchy, which indicates that the leadership continually viewed these qualities as lacking.

The situation was similar in the metropole. As Malcolm Anderson writes for France's police, "almost all uniformed police...were recruited among ex-regular soldiers."<sup>55</sup> Another factor propelling the trend to employ veterans in colonial services at this time, as de Gantès argues, were the reduced opportunities for military careers after the establishment of the Third Republic for whom "the army was not a priority."<sup>56</sup> Paul Sager writes "by 1911, approximately one-half of French employees were veterans."<sup>57</sup> All of these trends were strongest in the police, as military laws in France allocated a certain percentage of police jobs to veterans as a way of incentivizing military service prior to 1905. France passed laws in 1872, 1889, and 1905 offering a limited number of police jobs to soldiers who served at least five years.<sup>58</sup> These laws further hindered more rigorous police recruitment in both France and the colonies because the police services had to fill 4/5ths of vacant positions indiscriminately with former soldiers. Only the remaining 1/5th could be subject to more rigorous screening.

According to French police historians René Lévy and Jean-Marc Berlière, "Throughout the nineteenth century, almost all of the recruits were soldiers, at best sous-officiers [NCOs], without profession or having forgotten [their profession] after many years of service."<sup>59</sup> Candidates were attracted to the police, they write, mainly for the retirement benefits after 25

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<sup>54</sup> TTLT I, RST 34200, "Au sujet de la réorganisation des polices municipales de Hanoi et Haiphong 1912-1913," Le Commissaire Central de Police au Tonkin à Monsieur l'Administrateur Maire de la Ville de Hanoi, Hanoi, September 12, 1912.

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, *In Thrall to Political Change*, 185.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina," 148.

<sup>58</sup> Jean-Marc Berlière and René Lévy, *Histoire des polices en France de l'Ancien Régime à nos jours* (Paris: Nouveau Monde éditions, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 410.



years of service (which took into account military service) and because police work was "less hard" than factory or farm work. In terms of quality, police recruitment in metropolitan France was a "permanent problem" because of a lack of candidates, "because the profession did not attract multitudes," it was "little respected," and "it hardly paid at all." Little could be required of police recruits therefore beyond age and height restrictions, a health screening, and personal references vouching for their morality.<sup>60</sup> Lévy and Berlière conclude that the police had a "total absence of professional training."<sup>61</sup> The trends they described were exacerbated in the colony where the recruitment pool was much smaller.

Officers in the military could be appointed directly to the top positions. Lévy and Berlière estimate that half of the *commissaires* in France were former NCOs. Adolphe Louis Tourillon, for instance, was born in 1839 in Paris and joined the military as an *engagé volontaire* in 1861 at the age of 22. He served in the *5e dragons* (a cavalry unit) for two years.<sup>62</sup> From 1865 to 1872, he served as a *maréchal des logis* in the gendarmerie. Simultaneously, he served in the *1er régiment de spahis* in Algeria from 1866 to 1872. He arrived in Indochina in 1874, and was formally discharged from military service. He joined the police at the rank of *commissaire* in October 1874. Tourillon remained *central commissaire* for sixteen years, including during a brief detachment to head the Cambodian police in 1889.<sup>63</sup> He committed suicide in his Saigon home in 1890, which his colleagues attributed to his long-suffering from deteriorating health. He was 51 years old.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/298/6 Police Administrative, Indo-Chine, Tourillon, Adolphe, Louis. Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1889. Signed by the secrétaire général.

<sup>63</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/298/6 Police Administrative, Indo-Chine, Tourillon, Adolphe, Louis. Letter from Tourillon to the Minister de la Marine et des Colonies. Paris, September 27, 1885.

<sup>64</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/298/6 Police Administrative, Indo-Chine, Tourillon, Adolphe, Louis. Letter from the doctor, Saigon, October 24, 1890; Gouverneur général de l'Indochine Piquet to Sous-Secrétaire d'état des Colonies, "Avis des décès de M. Tourillon, Commissaire Central," Saigon, November 9, 1890.

Among the *commissaires*, Saigon's Marius Noel Micheli was an exception to the rule, as he had been exempt from military service due to a health problem. He served as a *brigadier* in the Cholon police for more than six years before making the rank of *commissaire* of the 2nd class in 1895.<sup>65</sup> Micheli retired in 1908 at the rank of *commissaire* of the 1st class.

The military connection persisted after World War I. Of the thirty-five applicants for positions as police inspectors in Saigon in 1932, only two did not have a military background listed in their files.<sup>66</sup> Among those who had served was Rene Marie Lallonder from Tregarvan (Finistère), the son of a farmer. Born in 1906, he joined the military in Brest in 1926 where he earned the medal *Belge de 2eme classe*. He also served in the 11th RIC (*régiment d'infanterie coloniale*) as a corporal. In 1931, he applied to join the colonial police at the entry-level rank of *inspecteur*. One of his rivals for the position was 24-year-old Achille Acquaviva who applied for a job as police inspector after serving two years in the 11th RIC in Saigon. He was born in 1908 in Corte (Corsica) and joined the RIC in 1929 as a soldier of the 2nd class.<sup>67</sup>

Military and working class origins speak to modest socio-economic backgrounds, and indeed many future police agents came to the colony in the hopes of economic and social advancement. As described below, high expectations often went unfulfilled. Emphasizing that many policemen were veterans of the initial conquest is also, to an extent, important to understanding colonial violence. The colonial police had overly militarized characteristics going back to its conquest origins, which were reinforced by the continual appointments of veterans.

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<sup>65</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB24/221, "Police, personnel, divers, 1895-1904." Biographical data on the 5 commissaires in 1897 can be found in: Commissaire Central Belland, "Service de la Police administrative et Judiciaire, Propositions pour le classement des Commissaires de police dans les grades prévues par le décret su 29 Juillet 1896 promulgué en Cochinchine le 26 Février 1897," Année 1897, Saigon, March 13, 1897; CAOM, GGI 3827, Police administrative et judiciaire Cochinchine, Dossier Micheli, commissaire de police 1<sup>re</sup> classe, 1909. Note pour le Directeur du Cabinet et du Personnel au Gouverneur général Hanoi, April 2, 1909.

<sup>66</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/259, "Dossiers des Candidats au concours pour l'emploi d'inspecteur stagiaire de la Police de Sûreté (Session de Septembre 1931)" addressed to the Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, January 13, 1932.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

The blurring between police and military—much remarked upon in other colonies as well—was a result of incomplete pacification and a lack of police consent among the majority.<sup>68</sup> Peter Zinoman highlights the wartime origins of colonial prisons to explain, in part, brutal practices.<sup>69</sup> Pre-colonial prison and discipline culture, combined with the guard's experience of conquest, resulted in the framing of prisoners as enemies rather than civilians who could be rehabilitated. Mary Callahan makes a similar argument for a pervasive military culture in colonial Burma and Patricia Lorcin for soldiers' understandings of race in colonial Algeria.<sup>70</sup> In these cases, negative stereotypes about various colonized groups were imprinted by the experience with, and memory of, war in ways that lingered even after the fighting had ended.

While militarized in some respects, Vietnam's police also remained "civil" in other ways. The police did not conscript its agents, for instance, and did not give them military equipment, at least prior to the late 1920s. Starting in 1910, the police in Hanoi and Haiphong were equipped with swords and a limited number of Webley pistols (a nine-round, automatic reloading pistol), and not a rifle, like the *garde indigène* (a police-military hybrid in the provinces).<sup>71</sup> Policemen in Hanoi were not, sources suggest, formally trained in how to use the pistols.<sup>72</sup> Police militarization alone also provides an incomplete explanation for patterns of violence.<sup>73</sup> Some of the most ill-disciplined European agents were those without military backgrounds and efforts to recruit veterans were a deliberate response to lack of discipline in the police ranks. Police

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<sup>68</sup> Emmanuel Blanchard, Quentin Deluermoz, and Joël Glasman, "La Professionnalisation policière en situation coloniale: détour conceptuel et explorations hétérographiques," *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés* 15, 2 (2011): 33-53.

<sup>69</sup> Peter Zinoman, *Colonial Bastille: A history of imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>70</sup> Mary Callahan, *Making Enemies: War And State Building in Burma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995).

<sup>71</sup> "L'armement de la police municipale," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, March 10, 1910; "L'armement de la Police," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, August 8, 1912.

<sup>72</sup> "L'armement de la Police," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, August 8, 1912.

<sup>73</sup> For more on the military/conquest legacy see: Blanchard, Deluermoz, and Glasman, "La Professionnalisation policière."

violence stemmed as well from institutional practices and cultural norms that transcended individual backgrounds.

### **Education and Local Languages**

Prior to 1917, there was no minimum education requirement for the police at any level of the organization. The average recruit had attended primary school, although almost no one in the police prior to 1917 had obtained a *baccalauréat*, the degree required by many other colonial services. Among the recruits with the most formal education from the pre-World War I period was Henri Bourdenet.<sup>74</sup> Born in 1882 in Guyans-Vennes (Doubs), Bourdenet earned his certificate of primary studies at a communal school. His family sent him to a Catholic boarding school in faraway Russy until the age of 18, which meant that his education was above average.<sup>75</sup> He spent one year working for a local newspaper before enlisting in the *8e régiment d'infanterie coloniale* (RIC) for a five-year contract starting in 1902. In 1904, at the age of 22, Bourdenet arrived in Vietnam. Facing the end of his contract and an impending mandatory repatriation to France, he wrote the Saigon mayor in 1907 soliciting employment in the police. The mayor forwarded the application to commissaire Lecoeur, who favored his recruitment. In considering his application, Lecoeur wrote that Bourdenet was a tall man who seemed to have a good constitution. In November 1907, at the age of 25, Bourdenet joined the Saigon municipal police as an agent of the 4th class.

Many recruits never acquired local language skills. Angelino Leca, for instance, was born in 1884 in Arbori, Corsica where he joined the *23e batallion de chasseurs Alpains* in 1905.<sup>76</sup> He

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<sup>74</sup> CAOM, GGI 30762, Mairie de Saigon, Secrétariat Général, Personnel, Bordereau des Pièces Contenues dans le dossier de M. Bourdenet, Henri.

<sup>75</sup> CAOM, GGI 30762, Dossier Personnel Bourdenet; Bourdenet to Saigon Mayor Duranton, Saigon May 16, 1907 soliciting employment; letter from Commissaire Lecoeur to Commissaire Central Belland, Saigon, May 22, 1907, recommending the hiring of Bourdenet.

<sup>76</sup> CAOM, GGI 30785, Dossier personnel, M. Leca, Ange Jean. Avis de décès concernant M. Leco Angelino, Agent de 1ere classe de la Police Urbaine. Cholon, September 2, 1918.

was released from military service the next year in 1906. In 1910, at the age of 26, he joined the municipal police in Cholon as a temporary agent. He completed only primary instruction and spoke no foreign languages. The subject of illiteracy comes up often enough to suggest that not all police agents could read and write French. In 1887, Cochinchina's Director of the Interior Noel Pardon lamented before the Colonial Council that many of Saigon's policemen were ignorant, undisciplined, and "incapable of writing a report."<sup>77</sup> At around the same time, commissaire Tourillon described Saigon police agent Jacques from Reims as "*peu lettré*," or not very literate.<sup>78</sup> In his 1889 review, after five and a half years in the police, Tourillon wrote that Jacques was "a very bad agent that should be gotten rid of as soon as possible."<sup>79</sup> Jacques was fired in 1890.

Antoine Lentali had a long career in the Saigon PAJ police, even though he allegedly did not meet the standard for education or discipline. Born in 1869 in Ajaccio, Corsica, Antoine served a few months in the military before being discharged early. He worked as a baker before immigrating to Vietnam in 1901, likely in connection to his younger brother Charles Lentali, who worked for the municipal police.<sup>80</sup> He was hired by the PAJ in 1901 at the age of 32 as a temporary agent. Neither brother learned Vietnamese, although their files report that they spoke Italian. Antoine's superiors described him in 1904 as being "a bit bad-tempered and violent."<sup>81</sup> In a 1918 review, his *commissaire* wrote that he was "almost illiterate" but had "rather good

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<sup>77</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB24/233(1), "Conseil Colonial, Session ordinaire 1886-1887, séance du 1er Février 1887. Projet de réorganisation de la police. Rapport."

<sup>78</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/1. Police administrative, Indo chine, Cochinchine, Jacques, Jules, Christophe. Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Marine et Colonies. No date, but from either 1888 or 1889. (He was fired in 1890 and the file mentions his 1888 appointment).

<sup>79</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/1, Jacques. Bulletin Individuel de Notes. Commissaire Central Tourillon. Direction du Service Local, Colonie de Cochinchine, Saigon, September 30, 1889.

<sup>80</sup> CAOM, GGI 35217, Personnel, Dossier de M. Lentali, Antoine. Bulletin Individuel de Notes, signed by Lecoer October 20, 1917; Colonie de Cochinchine, Service de la Polices Urbaines, feuille de renseignements concernant M. Lentali (Antoine), Saigon, March 1, 1923.

<sup>81</sup> CAOM, GGI 35217, Personnel, Dossier de M. Lentali, Antoine. Bulletin Individuel de Notes, signed by Belland, October 15, 1904.

professional knowledge."<sup>82</sup> In 1920, another commissaire wrote that Antoine was unintelligent, illiterate, ill disciplined, and needed to be retired "as soon as possible." He was also implicated in extortion in 1917. The mayor wrote again in 1920 that he "is a server whom we must get rid of as soon as possible."<sup>83</sup> Antoine Lentali retired shortly thereafter.

Commissaire Brault, in Hanoi, came under fire in 1908 for corruption which included an instance of promoting policeman Durand to agent of the 2nd class in 1904 despite his being "illiterate and incapable" in exchange for the forgiveness of a 250 piastres debt.<sup>84</sup> Historian de Gantès, in his work on functionaries in colonial Vietnam, mentions a Corsican customs agent who only knew how to read and write French "a little."<sup>85</sup> A 1913 Hanoi and Haiphong police law, meanwhile, had to specify that candidates "must provide proof that they know how to read and write correctly."<sup>86</sup>

While the police's education level improved after the 1917 reforms, only three of the thirty-five applicants for the job of Saigon inspector in 1932 indicated degrees. Camille Jugant from Réunion had a *brevet élémentaire* from the *Académie de Paris*; Ho Van Cam dit Henri from Can Tho province, a *métis* applicant, had earned a *diplôme d'études complémentaires franco-indigènes* in Cochinchine, and a *brevet de l'enseignement supérieur* in 1917; and Marie Joseph Francisque had earned a *brevet de capacité correspondant au baccalauréat de l'enseignement*

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<sup>82</sup> CAOM, GGI 35217, Dossier de M. Lentali. Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1917, 1920 and 1921.

<sup>83</sup> CAOM, GGI 35217, Dossier de M. Lentali. Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1920.

<sup>84</sup> CAOM, GGI 30726, Police Urbaine, Valette, Louis. Personnel dossier. "Monsieur Grilhanlt des Fontaines Procureur de la République près le Tribunal de 1ere Instance de Hanoi à Monsieur le Procureur Général, Chef de Service Judiciaire en Indo-Chine, Hanoi, August 4, 1908. For more on this corruption case see also: CAOM, GGI 3872, Police administrative (Tonkin) A.s. [au sujet] du service de la police du Tonkin et des faits reprochés à M.M. Brault et Valette. 250 piastres = 575 francs in 1904. See Annex I.

<sup>85</sup> De Gantès, "Administrer une colonie," 48.

<sup>86</sup> "Arrêté portant réorganisation du personnel de la Police municipale des villes de Hanoi et de Haiphong," Albert Sarraut, Hanoi, le 17 janvier 1913, *Journal Officiel de l'Indochine Française*, January 23, 1913, p. 113-118. Found in CAOM, Sarraut archive privée, 9PA5/1.

*secondaire de la métropole*.<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately, the file does not indicate which candidates were offered jobs in the police.

While basic literacy was necessary for agents to read the laws they had to enforce, take statements, and write police reports, formal education was not necessarily a prerequisite for effective police work. Of greater importance was the capacity and willingness to become proficient in a local language, which very few did. Very few French policemen spoke Vietnamese or Chinese fluently, especially prior to the 1920s. There was simply not enough willing candidates and a lack of real incentive for those already in the police. De Gantès estimates, perhaps generously, that 10% to 30% of French functionaries in Indochina spoke Vietnamese in 1911.<sup>88</sup> There was moreover, as he also points out, the problem of what language competency meant. For the police, it is clear that even men who had satisfied the language requirement on paper struggled to communicate in the course of their work. Written knowledge, emphasized in exams, was of little use when trying to interrogate a suspect. Many feared making mistakes and therefore did not try. As a result, most French policemen relied on Vietnamese agents to communicate with non-French speakers. As argued in chapters 4 and 5, language competency (or the lack thereof) in the European cadre ended up being enormously important for power dynamics in the police.

The 1921 Cholon policing handbook recommended, but did not require, the study of Vietnamese: "The European agent who does not understand the native and cannot make himself understood, will always be, for the execution of his service, presented with numerous difficulties. Upon entering the police service he must seek to learn the annamite [Vietnamese] language." The handbook listed the possible rewards as personal satisfaction and faster advancement in the

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<sup>87</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/259, "Dossiers des Candidats au concours pour l'emploi d'inspecteur stagiaire de la Police de Sûreté (Session de Septembre 1931)," to the Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, January 13, 1932.

<sup>88</sup> De Gantès, "Coloniaux, gouverneurs et ministres," 90.

ranks.<sup>89</sup> There was no mechanism in place to ensure that agents became bilingual, and this could only be encouraged by promotions and raises. In Saigon in 1906, for instance, passing the Vietnamese exam would result in a 200 piastre (560 franc) bonus.<sup>90</sup>

As Morlat writes of colonial servants more generally, "It was difficult to learn the language of the country while devoting themselves to heavy administrative tasks."<sup>91</sup> *Colons* and administrators were sympathetic and hesitant to enforce drastic measures. A March 1910 letter to the editor published in *L'Avenir du Tonkin* responded skeptically to a project by the GGI to compel functionaries to learn Indochinese languages.<sup>92</sup> The letter agreed in principle that employing bilingual Frenchmen was a worthy goal, but questioned the practicality of the law: "it will be foolhardy indeed to think that all functionaries will arrive at a deep knowledge of oriental languages" because "intellectual faculties vary according to the individual."<sup>93</sup> If the administration did not want to punish otherwise good functionaries, they would need to lower the competency standard required by the new law, which would defeat the original purpose. It would also eliminate the monetary incentive (bonuses) for those who really did become proficient. The article warned, "everyone will have a rudimentary of Annamite, Cambodian, of Laotian, but the majority will not be able to perform effectively in any of these languages."<sup>94</sup> The fact remained that few French policemen became truly bilingual prior to the 1920s.

There were notable exceptions. Louis Auguste Duval was a rising star in the police who otherwise had an average background. In his annual reviews, his superiors praised his affinity for the profession and his knowledge of Vietnamese, which allowed him to advance quickly in the

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<sup>89</sup> A. Mouchonière, *Guide des agents de police de la ville de Cholon* (Saigon: impr. de l'Union Nguen-Van-Cua 1921), 14.

<sup>90</sup> Pierre Jeantet, "Examens," *L'Opinion*, July 9, 1906.

<sup>91</sup> Morlat, *Les Grands Commis*, 12.

<sup>92</sup> "Les fonctionnaires et les langues orientales," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, March 13-14, 1910, 2.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*



hierarchy. Duval was born in 1874 in Marans, on France's western coast.<sup>95</sup> He does not appear to have attended school beyond *instruction primaire*. In 1894, at the age of 20, he served his two years of military service (*incorporé*) in the artillery, and in 1897 he joined the 13<sup>th</sup> *régiment d'artillerie* in Bizerte, Tunisia where he reached the rank of brigadier. In 1900, he enlisted in the 38th *régiment d'artillerie* to fight in the Chinese campaign, which brought him to Vietnam. In 1901, Duval left the military and entered the PAJ. In 1907, Commissaire Belland wrote that "Duval is an excellent servant. Intelligent, hardworking, honest, and conscientious." In 1918, Duval became *commissaire* of the 2nd class in Cholon, and by 1929 had reached the rank of *commissaire principal* of the 1st class in the *polices urbaines*, one of its highest posts. His career was cut short in 1929 when he was killed in Saigon by a hit-and-run driver while riding home on his bicycle. He was 55 years old.<sup>96</sup>

Few French policemen however gained fluency in Vietnamese, as evidenced by Duval's earlier lament in a 1923 report that his European agents in Cholon could not be used effectively without Vietnamese agents to serve as interpreters. His French agents "could not make themselves understood by the natives and, for fear of being ridiculed, they passed by the most flagrant violations without the slightest remark."<sup>97</sup> Duval therefore wrote that he made sure that Europeans in his service were always accompanied by at least one Vietnamese agent to serve as an interpreter.

For those in the higher ranks, the level of language competency was mixed. Grégoire Simard's file indicated in later years that he spoke Vietnamese, although it does not specified

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<sup>95</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1862/1, Ministère des Colonies, Indochine Police, M. Duval, Louis Auguste. Caisse de Retraite des Services Civiles Locaux. Saigon, March 11, 1914.

<sup>96</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1862/1, Ministère des Colonies, Indochine Police, M. Duval, Louis Auguste, Mr. Paul Porcin, Commissaire to le Commissaire Central de Police, Saigon, March 25, 1929. Certificat de cause de décès, March 24, 1929.

<sup>97</sup> TTLT I, Fonds de la Maire de Hanoi, 002459, "Réorganisation du service de la police urbaine de la ville de Cholon, 1923," Pages 20-36. Commissaire Central de Police de la Ville de Cholon Duval à Monsieur le Chef de la Sûreté, Saigon. Cholon, August 3, 1923.

how well.<sup>98</sup> Simard's superior, Commissaire Tourillon was praised in 1889 (the year before his death) for speaking Vietnamese "sufficiently."<sup>99</sup> Auguste Belland, Saigon's *commissaire central* until 1910, on the other hand, does not appear to ever have studied the language. Commissaire Alexis-Louis Etiévant (born 1872 in Bourg, Ain), who joined the Saigon PAJ in 1893 as an agent of the 3rd class and retired at the high rank of *commissaire spécial hors classe* in 1922, also managed to have a long successful career without ever learning Vietnamese.<sup>100</sup>

As part of an effort to raise the general educational level of the police service, a 1913 law governing the PM in Hanoi and Haiphong introduced exams for promotions at two points in the hierarchy: from agent to sous-brigadier and from secrétaire to commissaire.<sup>101</sup> The 1913 law, like Sarraut's subsequent reforms, technically required spoken knowledge of Vietnamese as a prerequisite for advancement, but there were loopholes. Exams were graded on a 20-point system, in which at least 10 points were needed to be considered for the position.<sup>102</sup> Candidates would also have a 15-minute conversation with a native Vietnamese speaker that was worth only 2 points, meaning they could fail the conversation portion and still pass the exam. The *commissaire* test was similar but more specialized and they also had to translate a letter in *quốc ngữ* (Romanized Vietnamese script). There was a grace period for new hires, however, and the

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<sup>98</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/583/8, Simard personnel file. Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1888.

<sup>99</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/298/6 Police Administrative, Indo-Chine, Tourillon, Adolphe, Louis. Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1889. Signed: secrétaire général.

<sup>100</sup> CAOM, GGI 30746, Police de l'Indochine, Dossier Individuel, Etiévant (Alexis Louis). The language field in his 1923 annual review—the last in his file—specified "none." Personnel de la Sûreté, Bulletin individuel de Notes, Année 1923; CAOM, EE/II/1682/18. Police Judiciaire, Etiévant, Louis, Alexis.

<sup>101</sup> TTLT I, RST 34200, "Au sujet de la réorganisation des polices municipales de Hanoi et Haiphong 1912-1913 " Le Commissaire Central de Police au Tonkin à Monsieur l'Administrateur Maire de la Ville de Hanoi, Hanoi, September 12, 1912.

<sup>102</sup> "Arrêté portant réorganisation du personnel de la Police municipale des villes de Hanoi et de Haiphong," Albert Sarraut, Hanoi, January 17, 1913, *Journal Officiel de l'Indochine Française*, January 23, 1913, p. 113-118. Found in CAOM, Sarraut archive privée, 9PA5/1.

time to learn Vietnamese was left to the discretion of the RST. Importantly, agents over 40 in 1913, or those who did not aspire to promotion, were exempt.<sup>103</sup>

How much did language competency improve over time? Even though the 1917 reforms cracked down on Vietnamese fluency in the upper ranks, and the Sûreté personnel developed a reputation for employing only the truly bilingual in leadership positions, anecdotal evidence reveals a discrepancy between policy and practice. In 1930, Governor Krautheimer wrote the GGI in favor of promoting two candidates to the *commissaire spécial de la Sûreté* position in Saigon. They did not qualify because they had never earned a certificate of Vietnamese proficiency.<sup>104</sup> Despite this, he felt that they were qualified for the position. Lanlo, one of the two candidates, had been in the police for eight and a half years and had reached the rank of *secrétaire auxiliaire*. He had already worked as *commissaire spécial de la sûreté adjoint* to the "entire satisfaction of his superiors." Roumanet, the other candidate, had been in the police for eight years and was working as *secrétaire auxiliaire*. Whether or not they were promoted is not indicated in the file, but this shows clearly the practice of employing informally or temporarily lower ranking policemen to fill higher ranking vacancies, even though they did not have the language skills. It also reveals that two police secretaries, a high-ranking position in itself, were not even minimally bilingual in 1930.

Part of the problem was that anyone truly bilingual could seek more remunerative employment in the administration, or in the private sector. Cochinchina Governor Maspero wrote in 1919 that the colony needed to hire as many qualified applicants as possible from among the latest exam pool for the Sûreté service many would be lost to alternative employment if not hired

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/167, Letter from Le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine to Gouverneur général de l'Indochine (Direction de la Police et de la Sûreté Générale, Direction du Personnel) Hanoi. Saigon, November 15, 1930.

immediately. "It is feared...that recruitment will remain difficult for some time, the young people with the necessary qualifications will throw themselves more and more into cultivation and industrial professions or private enterprise."<sup>105</sup> *L'Avenir du Tonkin* complained in 1903 that too many Hanoi police recruits were quick to leave the moment they found employment in "local commerce or in civilian life [*dans la vie civile*]." In 1910, Saigon's commissaire Lecoœur echoed this complaint when he wrote that Frenchmen recruited *en situ* in Saigon were often men who could not find work elsewhere, and "he does not hide [this fact], moreover, and lets it be known, before being hired, that as soon as he finds something else, he will leave."<sup>106</sup> The police continually struggled to fill its ranks and could scarcely afford to hold French agents to a high educational threshold.

### **Local vs. Metropolitan Recruitment**

In 1868, Saigon's municipal government voted to recruit eight agents from France because "it would be almost impossible to recruit in the city a corps of capable *agents*."<sup>107</sup> Yet in the following decades, many agents ended up being recruited locally. Indeed, of the three possible sources of French recruits—France, Indochina, and other colonies—the police tended to favor those already in the colony. Frenchmen in Vietnam had already been exposed to colonial life and had some familiarity with "the county and its customs." It was also more affordable because the colonial budget avoided paying travel costs to the colony. There were other concerns as well. In 1889, Saigon's commissaire Tourillon wrote of the inefficiency of metropolitan recruitment: "It seems to be impractical to recruit personnel in France because it happens

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<sup>105</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/112, "Pièces diverses relatives au personnel de police 1919-1929," Le Gouverneur p.i. [par intérim] de la Cochinchine [Maspero] à Monsieur le Gouverneur général de l'Indochine à Hanoi. Saigon, February 17, 1919.

<sup>106</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222. "Fusion des polices;" Rapport du Commissaire Central p.i. [par intérim] Lecoœur au Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine sur les réformes à apporter aux divers services de police chargés d'assurer l'ordre et la sécurité publique," Saigon, November 1910.

<sup>107</sup> André Baudrit, *Contribution à l'histoire de Saigon: extraits des registres de délibérations de la Ville de Saigon (Indochine Française) 1867-1916, Deuxième Partie* (Saigon: Impr. J. Testelin, 1936), 63.

frequently that those who were sent orders land to find their places taken, and that becomes an embarrassment."<sup>108</sup> There were pressures from *colons* to recruit among their community, again favoring local recruitment.<sup>109</sup> The drawback was that the local population was small and *commissaires* could not afford to be very selective.

Marcel Kérébel joined the Saigon police in 1922 and his short career is suggestive of the potential downsides of hiring directly from the metropole. Kérébel had recently been discharged from the navy and was working as a house painter in his hometown of Brest when he applied to the police in Saigon in 1921 at the age of 22.<sup>110</sup> He finished only his primary education before he joined the *marine* in 1914 at the age of 15 for a five-year enlistment. He served in World War I, reaching the naval rank of *quartier-maître du 2ème dépôt des équipages de la flotte* in Brest. In February 1919, while working for the navy, he travelled to the colonies for the first time. After being placed on reserve, he returned to Brest. In December 1921, Kérébel applied to the Indochina urban police and he was offered a job in March 1922 at the entry-level rank of *sous-brigadier* in training and took up his position in Saigon shortly thereafter.<sup>111</sup> His annual salary was set at 4,000 francs plus 7/10th this salary (a colonial supplement of 2,800 francs) for a total annual salary of 6,800 francs in 1922.<sup>112</sup>

After the opening of the Suez Canal, the sea voyage from France to Indochina took around four to five weeks. In addition to the myriad formalities connected to securing a position

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<sup>108</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IB25/135(1) Commissaire de Police Tourillon "Police de Saigon: projet de réorganisation du service" Saigon, April 13, 1880; "Rapport au Conseil Colonial, Police. Historique, Situation, Besoins," Le commissaire de police, chef du service Tourillon, Saigon, August 12, 1881.

<sup>109</sup> De Gantès, "Administrer une colonie," 48.

<sup>110</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/19 Ministère des Colonies, Police en Indochine, Kérébel, Marcel, Jean ; "Demande de renseignements," bulletin individuel. Quimper, January 13, 1922, signed by Le Préfet. Contains biographical data on Kérébel.

<sup>111</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/19 Ministère des Colonies, Police en Indochine, Kérébel, Marcel, Jean ; Letter from Kérébel to the Minister of Colonies, Brest, March 17, 1922.

<sup>112</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/19 Police en Indochine, Kérébel, Marcel, Jean; Order to take his post, sent by the Direction du Personnel et de la Comptabilité 2eme bureau, signed by the GGI, March 14, 1922.

and moving to the colony, the delay meant that agents like Kérébel, hired in the metropole, would be slow in arriving to fill a vacancy. Kérébel finally arrived on April 23, 1922, after first applying in February 1921, or almost fourteen months later.<sup>113</sup> Another deterrent to hiring from the metropole were the large upfront costs for transport, as the colonial budget bore the burden of transport fees for the candidate and any family. When Jules Christophe Jacques, for example, travelled from Reims, France to Saigon in 1883 to take up a post as municipal police agent, he brought his wife and three children with him at the government's expense.<sup>114</sup> In 1888, the cost of transport for Simard—another Saigon policeman—his wife, and his two children from Toulon to Saigon in 1888 was 404.24 francs (which was in 1888 roughly 106 piastres), a significant portion of his salary. Simard on this occasion had to pay out of pocket, then petition for reimbursement.<sup>115</sup> This included the price of baggage (15 francs) the price of rations (113.90 francs) and the price of passage for two adults and two children (364.34 francs). Before his 1922 departure, Kérébel from Brest was additionally paid two months' salary in advance, an indemnity "*de départ colonial*," and reimbursed for the cost of the trip from Brest to Marseille where his ship departed for Saigon.

Kérébel however proved to be a poor investment. He was fired on December 16, 1922 after just nine months for shooting two Vietnamese civilians without cause.<sup>116</sup> He was sentenced to ten months in prison and subject to a 200 francs fine.<sup>117</sup> He remained in the colony, and in 1925 wrote to Governor Cognacq that he was "without resources" and asked to be reintegrated

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<sup>113</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/19 Ministère des Colonies, Police en Indochine, Kérébel, Marcel, Jean ; Letter from Kérébel to the Minister of Colonies, Brest, March 17, 1922.

<sup>114</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/1. Police Administrative, Indo chine, Cochinchine, Jacques, Jules, Christophe. Letter from Epouse Jacques Jules to the Ministre de la Marine, Reims, September 5, 1883.

<sup>115</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/583/8, Grégoire Esprit Simard personnel file, police administrative, Indo-Chine; Letter from Goucoch Filippini, to Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, "Au sujet d'une demande formulé par M. Simard, Commissaire de Police." Saigon, September 5, 1887.

<sup>116</sup> CAOM, GGI 30777, Service du Personnel, Police Urbaine, Dossier de M. Kérébel, Marcel.

<sup>117</sup> "Coups de revolver dans la nuit," *L'Opinion*, December 19, 1922.

into the police or to find "any other employment."<sup>118</sup> His request was denied. While atypical, Kérébel's case illustrates some of the obstacles to recruiting blind from the metropole.

**"Permit the agents to live decently:" Debt, pensions, and poverty in the police**

A major attraction to colonial service was the pay, as administrative jobs in Vietnam offered a base salary around double their metropolitan counterparts. In Paris the lowest ranked *gardien de la paix* (the equivalent of colonial Vietnam's agent of the 3rd class) would earn 1,500 francs per year in 1900. His colonial equivalent would receive an extra 1,500 francs as a "colonial supplement" for a total of 3,000 francs annual salary in Vietnam.

Inflated colonial salaries were however reduced by a quirk of Indochina's colonial economy: while European salaries were calculated in the French currency of francs, individual policemen received their monthly pay in the local Indochinese currency of piastres.<sup>119</sup> As discussed below, the volatile piastre-franc exchange rate reduced take-home earnings.<sup>120</sup> Another incentive to join the colonial service was the benefits. Europeans in the colonial service received administrative leave in France at a time when such benefits were not available in the metropole. For every five to six years of service, employees received three months of vacation, plus two months for travel time to and from France, in addition to the cost of passage for the employee and his family. They also received sick leave.

The entry-level position for a French recruit in the colonial police was at the rank of agent of the 3rd class, but could also be agent of the 2nd or 4th class depending on the city and year. Agents of the 3rd class could then be promoted to agents of the 2nd class, then to agents of the 1st class, then to *sous-brigadier* and so on.

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<sup>118</sup> CAOM, GGI 30777, Letter from Kérébel to Gouverneur of Cochinchine Cognacq, Saigon, March 22, 1925.

<sup>119</sup> For more on the history of the piastre see: Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954*, trans. Ly Lan Dill-Klein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 137-138.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

In 1893, the Saigon PAJ annual salaries were for Europeans:

Commissaire (central) of the 1st class, 11,820 francs per year  
 Commissaire of the 1st class, 7,880 francs  
 Commissaire of the 2nd class, 5,910 francs  
 Brigadier européens, 4,925 francs  
 Sous-brigadier, 4,432.50 francs  
 Agent of the 1st class, 3,940 francs  
 Agent of the 2nd class, 3,447.50 francs  
 Agent of the 3rd class, 3,955 francs<sup>121</sup>

After an 1896 law reorganizing the PAJ, which was still in effect through 1917, the European annual salaries were as follows:

Commissaire (central) of the 1st class, 13,000 francs per year  
 Commissaire of the 1st class, 9,000 francs  
 Commissaire of the 2nd class, 8,000 francs  
 Commissaire of the 3rd class, 7,000 francs  
 Secrétaire of the 1st class 6,000 francs  
 Secrétaire of the 2nd class, 5,000 francs  
 Brigadier, head of the Sûreté, 6,000 francs  
 Brigadier, 5,000 francs  
 Sous-Brigadier, 4,500 francs  
 Agent of the 1st class, 4,000 francs  
 Agent of the 2nd class, 3,500 francs  
 Agent of the 3rd class, 3,000 francs  
 Temporary agent, 50–120 piastres per month<sup>122</sup>

The exchange rate between piastre and franc averaged around 2.5 francs per piastre in the period 1900-1910, so these salaries ranged, in local currency, from 5,200 piastres per year to 1,200 piastres per year at the low end.<sup>123</sup> By comparison, in 1900 the highest paid *indigène* policeman

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<sup>121</sup> *Procès-Verbaux, Conseil Colonial*, Séance du 17 Janvier, 1893, "Etat comparatif du budget de 1892 et des prévisions pour 1893," (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1893), 114. The salaries for Vietnamese police, ranged from Agents asiatiques de 4e classe: 11.82 piastres/month (567.36 francs/year), to Brigadier asiatiques de 1re classe: 29.55 piastres/month (1,416.49 francs/year), to agent auxiliaire: 40 piastres/month (1,920 francs/year).

<sup>122</sup> CAOM, GGI 3823, "Dossier: Police Administrative Cochinchine, Promotion du 14 juillet 1907;" "Situation numérique du personnel européen de la police administrative et judiciaire," Saigon, July 19, 1907, Le Chef de Cabinet, P. Pasquier. See also: CAOM, GGI 7779. Projet de réorganisation de la police de Sûreté générale en Indochine (Mission de Gautret), 1905-06.

<sup>123</sup> André Touzet, *Le régime monétaire indochinois* (Paris: Sirey, 1939), 216. See Annex I for piastre-franc exchange rate.



in Saigon made 450 piastres per year, which was very low but at the same time not much less than the lowest paid temporary French agent (600 piastres per year).

Recruits could potentially enjoy some middle class privileges of colonial life, including vacation and leisure time. As de Gantès writes in his work on colonial functionaries, metropolitans from otherwise modest families could hope to achieve a "bourgeois lifestyle" in the colony.<sup>124</sup> Many Frenchmen could afford a maid or a cook, although police often lived in barracks or at the police stations. But although colonial service offered opportunities for exceptional social advancement, and colonial policemen earned double the salary of their metropolitan counterparts, Frenchmen in the lower ranks were not especially well-to-do. Neither did most become wealthy through their work in the police. More than a few in the lower ranks went into debt, lived paycheck to paycheck, and fought a tightfisted colonial ministry to receive pensions after retirement. Some struggled to support their children and extended families. In this regard, their backgrounds are comparable to those of metropolitan policemen in France under the Third Republic.<sup>125</sup>

The police in metropolitan France, on which the colonial salaries were based, were not known for generous salaries.<sup>126</sup> While in France on leave, colonial policemen also only received about half of their usual salaries as colonial supplements were only paid while in the colony. Low pay was furthermore affected by the peculiar colonial currency of Indochina. As Sager writes: "The franc-piastre relationship is *the* key fact necessary for thinking about the value of the wages paid to French state employees in Indochina. All fluctuations in this rate affected them, mostly negatively."<sup>127</sup> The volatile exchange rate also ate into the Europeans' earnings and

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<sup>124</sup> De Gantès, "Administrer une colonie," 47-48.

<sup>125</sup> Berlière and Lévy, *Histoire des polices en France*, 409-410.

<sup>126</sup> Anderson, *In Thrall to Political Change*, 89; Berlière and Lévy, *Histoire des polices en France*, 410.

<sup>127</sup> Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina," 202-203.

savings.<sup>128</sup> Daniel Hémerly and Pierre Brocheux write that "Every decrease in the value of the piastre—the dominant tendency except during the interlude of 1915-26—favored the export sectors and hurt the expenditures of the administration, as well as the incomes of civil servants, whose salaries were fixed in francs but paid in piastres."<sup>129</sup>

At the same time, French agents arrived with expectations about higher living standards in the colony. As Michael Vann writes of colonial Hanoi: "By structuring the urban system to create, maintain, and defend their material privileges, the French created a bourgeois fantasy land of racial domination and an aristocratic lifestyle unavailable in the home country."<sup>130</sup> He writes of the importance of race in this equation: "Rather than a tool of upward social mobility, whiteness in the colonies promoted racial cohesion among the white elite" and "whiteness created a white racial aristocracy." Race was enormously important in dictating access to certain kinds of privilege, but significant class disparities among Frenchmen meant that the "bourgeois fantasy land" was not equally available to everyone.

In 1911, Saigon's Commissaire Lecoer touched on this problem when he complained that often "poorly informed" Frenchmen recruited from the metropole would expect to have a "rather elevated position" in the "native environment." Nonetheless,

When these new agents find themselves, arrived from France, obliged to wear a uniform lacking prestige...assigned to street service, side by side with native agents dressed like them and carrying the same rank, enlisted with Indian agents of clear inferiority, they realize their mistake and they then have but one fixed idea: leave the police by any means possible.<sup>131</sup>

The gap between colonial lifestyle expectations and the reality lamented by Lecoer appears to have been a broader phenomenon. In his work on violence in southern Rhodesia in the early

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<sup>128</sup> Sager; the native cadre's wages were much lower but were paid in piastres.

<sup>129</sup> Brocheux and Hémerly, *Indochina*, 139.

<sup>130</sup> Vann, "White City," abstract.

<sup>131</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IB35/212. "Personnel- correspondance et arrêtés du personnel police administrative 1910-12."

twentieth century, Jock McCulloch observes a disparity between "the expectations that white males brought with them to the colony" and material realities. "Settlers were anxious to advance their social and economic status," and support their families, but "[a]ll too often their ambitions were frustrated."<sup>132</sup> For colonial India, David Arnold also found that not only were policemen not wealthy, "in attempting to maintain a recognizably European life-style, many a sergeant and inspector became hopelessly indebted."<sup>133</sup> In his work on state employment in Indochina, Sager writes about similar disappointment: "Those who came to Indochina expecting to make a lot of money were called victims of 'the colonial mirage.'"<sup>134</sup>

One indicator of this is debt. As Arnold found in India, more than a few of Indochina's French policemen in the lower and mid-level ranks owed money to local business and moneylenders. The many outstanding debts referenced in the personnel files, including to local restaurants and cafés, suggest that policemen were either not paid enough to live a comfortable colonial lifestyle, or were trying to live beyond their means. It also meant that many did not have savings. More than a few died leaving their debt to relatives. There were also many who engaged in commerce and corruption on the side, both in violation of policy.

Saigon police agent Yves Jean Coatanéa accrued a large amount of debt at restaurants, cafés, and stores and left his wife and child with few resources upon his death.<sup>135</sup> In 1914, Commissaire Poillot reported that Coatanéa owed at least 430 piastres (in 1914, roughly 1,027 francs) spread among a dozen lenders including restaurants, cafés, retail stores, moneylenders, and individuals. Poillot worried that Coatanéa's inability to settle these debts risked causing

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<sup>132</sup>Jock McCulloch, "Empire and Violence, 1900-1939," in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 228. See also: Jock McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902-1935* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

<sup>133</sup> David Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras, 1859-1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 72.

<sup>134</sup> Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina," 209-210.

<sup>135</sup> CAOM, GGI 35518, Police de l'Indochina, Dossier de M. Coatanéa, Yves, Jean.

trouble for the police. When Coatanéa died at the age of 39, his wife repeatedly appealed to validate his pension.<sup>136</sup> She wrote in 1928 and 1929 that she was left without resources and supported herself and their seven-year-old child with only "modest employment" making 110 piastres a month working as a *surveillant* in a girl's school (*Petit Lycée de Dalat*).<sup>137</sup> The colonial administration eventually approved a single pension payout of 191.24 francs then an additional 2,208 francs in June 1929.<sup>138</sup>

Other policemen were living paycheck to paycheck, as evidenced by requests for advances in pay. While on leave in France, Duval appealed for a one-month advance on his salary in 1909 to pay for housing in Marseille for himself, his wife, and his two children.<sup>139</sup> At the time he earned 5,000 francs per year (reduced to 2,500 while in France). While many policemen remained bachelors, starting in the 1880s married policemen usually brought their wives and children with them to the colony, which further stretched incomes.

Technically barred from private enterprise, colonial policemen found ways to supplement their income. The law governing municipal employment specified "it is forbidden for all employees or agents of the municipality to engage in industrial or commercial operations in the colony" unless approved by the mayor.<sup>140</sup> In 1901, Indian police interpreter Saverimouttou

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid. This coorespondence between Coatanéa and the pension office is in the Dossier de M. Coatanéa, including: letter from Madame Veuve Coatanéa to Monsieur le Président, Dalat April 15, 1929; letter from Madame Veuve Coatanéa to Monsieur le Président, Dalat, January 16, 1929; Madame Veuve Coatanéa to Monsieur le Président, Dalat, December 19, 1928 (letter stamped received by the "caisse de retraite européens"); letter from Madame Veuve Coatanéa to Monsieur le Président du Conseil d'Administration de la Caisse Locale des retraits à Hanoi, Saigon, April 6, 1928.

<sup>137</sup> CAOM, GGI 35518, Letter from Madame Veuve Coatanéa to Monsieur le Président, Dalat January 16, 1929

<sup>138</sup> CAOM, GGI 35518, Caisses Locales de Retraites de l'Indochine, Hanoi (Tonkin), Bordereau, Versement de 191.24 francs effectué... Dalat, June 10, 1929. De retraite des services civils coloniaux et locaux, COATANEA, Yves Jean, Commissaire de Police de 3<sup>e</sup> class, June 29, 1929, Signed: Butel.

<sup>139</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1862/1, Ministère des Colonies, Indochine Police, M. Duval, Louis Auguste, Letter from Duval to le chef de service colonial, Marseille. N.d. but received by the bureau of personnel by February 5, 1909.

<sup>140</sup> "Il est interdit à tous les employés ou agents de la municipalité de se livrer à des opérations industrielles ou commerciales dans la colonie." In "Arrêté portant réorganisation du personnel de la Police municipale des villes de Hanoi et de Haiphong," Albert Sarraut, Hanoi, le 17 janvier 1913, *Journal Officiel de l'Indochine Française*, January 23, 1913, p. 113-118. Found in CAOM, Sarraut archive privée, 9PA5/1.

Ignacetti asked permission to leave the police to try his hand in business for the reason that his annual salary, 300 piastres, "in no way assures me a good future."<sup>141</sup> In his letter addressed to the colony's governor he formally requested an administrative leave without pay, after which he would return to the police if his business venture was not successful. Commissaire Belland approved his request a few days later.<sup>142</sup>

In their letters to the administration policemen cited their inability to support their families, which as McCulloch writes for Rhodesia was a chief masculine aspiration. As breadwinners, poor white policemen not only strove to achieve a modicum of colonial lifestyle for themselves, but to provide well for wives and children, or allow them to marry if they had not already. In 1905, agent Antoine Lentali asked permission from the Saigon mayor to purchase a bakery on Charner Street. His current salary as a police agent was, he wrote, "insufficient... to support my family of 5 children, and my elderly mother-in-law, under whose watch I leave my two young daughters." He promised to put the bakery in his wife's name.<sup>143</sup> This is no indication if this was approved, but it does fit with other complaints about insufficient salaries. Commissaire André Lecoœur, born 1865 in St. Thomas de Cosnac, Charente-Inférieure, had to be reminded in 1921 by the GGI that commercial activities were prohibited for functionaries after a French clothing supplier filed a complaint against Lecoœur's wife for failing to pay for a large quantity of retail merchandise.<sup>144</sup>

In 1906, *Le Courrier d'Haiphong* printed a story on the discrepancy between the Hanoi police's housing stipends and the high cost of housing in the city. The city's French police

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<sup>141</sup> 300 piastres = 750 francs in 1901.

<sup>142</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IB23/142 "Police Administrative et Judiciaire de Saigon, personnel, 1901," "Letter from Saverimoutou Ignacetti to Lieutenant Gouverneur à Saigon, Saigon, April 13, 1901.

<sup>143</sup> CAOM, GGI 35217, Personnel, Dossier de M. Lentali, Antoine. Letter from agent de 3e classe Lentali, Antoine de la Police Municipale to the Maire de la Ville de Saigon, Saigon, July 19, 1905.

<sup>144</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/3630/4, Ministère des Colonies Police, Lecoœur, André, Pierre, Edouard. Le Gouverneur général de l'Indochine Robin to the Ministère des Colonies, Paris, April 10, 1921.

*agents*—those in the lower ranks—were forced to live far from the city center, or pay rent out of their own paychecks. The monthly stipend was only 16 piastres for a single man and 24 for a married policeman (44.8 francs and 67.2 francs respectively), and in Hanoi "it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find comfortable lodging at that price."<sup>145</sup> The agents were therefore "scattered a bit everywhere" which made it harder for them to communicate with their superiors. The newspaper called on the Hanoi police to follow the lead of Saigon and build a police garrison near the central headquarters. This did not mean that those who had free housing lived large. On another occasion, as a new acting chief of post, brigadier Jules Ployer of the Saigon urban police was supposed to move into the second district's *commissariat* in 1917, but refused on the grounds that the building had been condemned.<sup>146</sup> Ployer was sanctioned for insubordination, as his superior clarified that while the building had been condemned, it had not been ruled uninhabitable. Another brigadier was found to take up the position.

In 1912, the Haiphong municipal council had to pass a special law raising the annual salary for its aging French police agents because "for lack of instruction" these agents would never advance to the next rank. Ever since the 1907 police reorganization, the service's old (*vieux*) police agents had been stuck at the agent of the 1st class salary of 4,000 francs per year, which the Haiphong council voted to raise exceptionally to 4,500 in 1912.<sup>147</sup> Commissaire Kersselaers in Hanoi recommended in a 1912 police reform proposal to raise the salaries of agents of the 1st class by 500 francs who were "too little instructed to pass to the grade of sous-

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<sup>145</sup> "Police municipale," *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, January 31, 1906.

<sup>146</sup> CAOM, GGI 35517, Punitons retirés du dossier Ployer (police) par application de la loi d'amnistie du 3 Janvier 1925; Note from the Saigon Mayor to PLOYER, brigadier de la police urbaine, November 26, 1917; Letter from Goucoch to the Saigon Mayor, November 16, 1917, " a.s. de la mesure disciplinaire à prendre contre le sous-brigadier PLOYER"; Letter from the Commissaire Central to the Saigon Mayor, November 6, 1917; Letter from Ployer to the Secrétaire général, October 25, 1917; Letter from Commissaire Bonhomme to Commissaire Central de Police, Saigon Lecoeur, October 2, 1917.

<sup>147</sup> "La Police municipale," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, May 16, 1912.

brigadier."<sup>148</sup> He wrote that his new proposed "minimum starting salaries" would "permit the agents to live decently, despite the continual rise in living costs in Tonkin."<sup>149</sup>

Poverty in the police did not reflect well on the administration or the French image, and age limits were created with retirement and pensions in mind: police would ideally retire at 55 so should have accumulated sufficient pension rights by that age. Louis Dourèze, who joined the Saigon municipal police in April 1893 as an agent of the 4th class, was forcibly retired in 1919 because of his age.<sup>150</sup> Governor Maspero wrote in January 1919 that Dourèze, a *brigadier chef* of the 2nd class, was "Worn out morally and physically" and that "this agent is today incapable of completing his service. Dourèze's retirement will allow for his replacement with a young and active agent whose salary will be less onerous for the budget."<sup>151</sup> Dourèze had worked in the police long enough to qualify for a pension, but the police struggled through the 1920s with aging men who could not be forcibly retired without making them destitute. Pension rights were only introduced for the municipal polices after 1905.<sup>152</sup>

Also working against European personnel was wage stagnation: base salaries in the police remained unchanged from 1896 to 1917 in Saigon (they were moderately raised in the north, although the cost of living was higher in the south). Promotions remained the only way to receive a pay raise, as salaries remained fixed by rank. Disciplinary action often specifically punished misdeeds by delaying promotions, and thus raises. On the same token, colonial

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<sup>148</sup> TTLT I, RST 34200, "Au sujet de la réorganisation des polices municipales de Hanoi et Haiphong 1912-1913," Le Commissaire Central de Police au Tonkin à Monsieur l'Administrateur Maire de la Ville de Hanoi, Hanoi, September 12, 1912.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> CAOM, GGI 30765, Personnel, Bordereau des Pièces Contenues dans Le Dossier de M. Dourèze, Louis [he has a second name but it is illegible]

<sup>151</sup> CAOM, GGI 30765, Personnel Dossier de M. Dourèze: Letter from Le Gouverneur p.i. [par intérim] de la Cochinchine à Monsieur le Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, Hanoi, "Proposition de mise d'office à la retraite de M. DOUREZE, Brigadier Chef de 2<sup>e</sup> classe de la Police Urbaine." Saigon, January 25, 1919.

<sup>152</sup> CAOM, GGI, 7779. Projet de réorganisation de la police de Sûreté générale en Indochine (Mission de M. Gautret), 1905-06. This report states that none of the municipal polices have pensions at this time.

policemen were aware of where they stood vis-à-vis their colleagues. Official newspapers published all government employees' names and salaries, so these details were public knowledge.

Most revealingly, police salaries on the lower end were well under the estimated "strict minimum necessary for life" wages calculated by an official 1923 cost of living report.<sup>153</sup> In the report, an adviser to GGI Sarraut gauged the cost of living before the war for Frenchman to be, in piastres, 170 a month for a single man and 305 for a man with a wife and three children. This went up to 245 single and 465 with three children after the war. The starting agent salary remained 3,000 francs per year in Saigon from 1896 to 1917. In 1916, this would have been roughly 1,017 piastres per year, or 85 piastres per month, well below Sarraut's estimate for the "strict minimum necessary for life" for even single Europeans in Indochina (170 piastres per month). The new entry-level salary after 1917 was set at 4,000 francs per year both for the municipal police (as an agent of the 3rd class) and the Sûreté (as an entry-level *inspecteur stagiaire*).

It is worth stressing that 3,000 francs per year, the salary for agents of the 3rd class from 1896 to 1917, was not the lowest police salary in the European cadre. Cash strapped colonial police services avoided paying the full expense of white recruits by employing a large number of temporary French agents. Temporary agents were cheaper to employ, received no benefits, and could be easily fired. In 1907, Saigon's PAJ for instance employed 81 Europeans of which 21 were temporary agents.<sup>154</sup> Temporary agents in Saigon in 1907 earned between 600 and 1,440

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<sup>153</sup> Archives Départementales de l'Aude (ADA), Carcassonne, Sous-Série 12J, Fonds Albert Sarraut, 12J295. "Le Gouverneur general A. Sarraut et le personnel indochinois 1917-1918." [23-page report addressed to Sarraut, author's signature illegible, n.d.].

<sup>154</sup> CAOM, GGI 3823, "Dossier: Police Administrative Cochinchine, Promotion du 14 juillet 1907;" Le Chef de Cabinet, P. Pasquier, "Situation numérique du personnel européen de la police administrative et judiciaire," Saigon, July 19, 1907.



piastres per year, or about 1,650-3,960 francs per year according to the 1907 exchange rate.<sup>155</sup>

There was also not apparently an upper limit to how long someone could be employed in this capacity. In 1913, Pakiry Maston had been a temporary agent in the Phnom Penh municipal police for three years, which ended only when he was investigated for corruption and moved to the Immigration Service.<sup>156</sup> Starting around 1900, both Saigon and Hanoi introduced trial or training periods for future agents ranging from a few months to a year or more. Agents in training (*agents stagiaires*) also had little job security and could be let go at any time. They had the same rights as temporary agents, which is to say very few, although they could expect to be promoted to full agent or inspector after their trial period expired.

Pension files provide a glimpse into the sometimes desperate post-retirement living standards for those who returned to France. Jean Noël Allouche (born in Treignac, Corrèze in 1866) retired at the middle rank of brigadier of the 3rd class in 1921 while on leave in France. His colonial salary in 1920 was 5,500 francs annually, reduced to 2,750 during his leave in France because of the loss of his colonial supplement. His pension was fixed at 2,755 francs annually in March 1921, a modest salary for a retiree supporting a family. He was 54 years old.<sup>157</sup> Jean Pierre L'Hôte received a similarly small pension. Born 1871 in Serronville (de Meurthe et Moselle), L'Hôte likely joined the colonial administration in early 1900s. He retired at the middle police rank of *inspecteur* of the 1st class in Tonkin in 1921 with a 3,522 francs

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<sup>155</sup> CAOM, GGI 3823, "Dossier: Police Administrative Cochinchine, Promotion du 14 juillet 1907 " For exchange rate, see annex I.

<sup>156</sup> CAOM, GGI 35520, "Blâme Pakiry, Inspecteur Police, Amnistie", Arrêté Phnom-Penh, March 27, 1916, signed BAUDOIN. His name in the file is Mastan Pakiry dit TON which suggests that he might have been *Métis*. In any case he was employed in the European hierarchy. Letter from Julien de VILLENEUVE, Administrateur des Services Civils, sous-chef de Cabinet du Résident Supérieur au Cambodge, to the Résident Supérieur, May 14, 1913; Letter from Commissaire Central Peyrolon, to l'administrateur résident maire, Ph. Penh, "Au sujet de l'agent temporaire Pakiry," Phnom-Penh, April 11, 1913. Letter from Commissaire Central Peyrolon, to l'administrateur résident-maire de Phnom Penh, "Au sujet de l'agent Pakiry," Phnom-Penh, April 28, 1913.

<sup>157</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1679/15, Jean Noël Allouche, Indochine, Police Municipale, Agent de 1<sup>e</sup> cl. de la police municipale d'Hanoi, 1921. Newspaper clipping in file: "Arrêté du Gouverneur général de l'Indochine du 18 avril 1924."

pension.<sup>158</sup> Comby, another police agent, was born 1877 in Labastide-Pradines (Aveyron) and joined the Indochina police in 1901 as an agent of the 3rd class. He retired in 1922 at the rank of *inspecteur principal* with a pension of 3,981 francs annually.<sup>159</sup>

In 1925, the GGI retired Corsican policeman Pierre Paul Nicolai due to his age and poor health.<sup>160</sup> It took the administration almost two years to start paying out his pension, during which time he wrote, with increasing urgency, that he was desperate: he had no savings, the local stores would no longer extend him credit, and he claimed he was on the verge of having to beg for food for his family. Nicolai (born 1875) had a long career in the Haiphong municipal police. GGI Robin decided to retire Nicolai because, whether due to age or poor health, he was no longer fit to fulfill his tasks at the police service, "however light they might be."<sup>161</sup> Haiphong mayor Krautheimer had included Nicolai on a list of "non-valeurs" in the police who needed to be let go. While on sick leave, Nicolai received notice of his retirement, which started April 1925. He appealed for his pension from Corsica, sending letter after letter. In 1926, Nicolai wrote to the Minister of Colonies describing "my sad situation for the past 17 months that I am retired and I am obligated to live on 324 fr per month [an advance on his pension]... my family and I find ourselves in painful destitution (*une misère pénible*) and shop keepers won't extend me any more credit..." Despite "30 years of service in a bad climate" the administration "will let me die of hunger." Robin later approved his pension at a rate of 8,000 francs annually, but still by

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<sup>158</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1679/9, Indo Chine Police, Dossier of L'Hôte, Jean-Pierre, 1921. Telegram from GGI Long, to Colonies, Paris, Saigon, March 24, 1922.

<sup>159</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/15, Personnel file, Comby, Louis, Marie, Simeon, newspaper clipping in file, Retraites—Pensions, GGI, Journal Officiel de 30 Octobre, 1923.

<sup>160</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1677/17, Indo Chine Police municipal, Haiphong, Dossier of Nicolai, Pierre, Paul, 1925; Letter from Le Chef du Service Colonial de Marseille, to the Minister of Colonies, Paris, Marseille, October 13, 1926; Letter from Outrey, to GGI, Mon Cher Député et Ami, Hanoi, October 27, 1925; Letter from Paul Nicolai, brigadier de police urbaine Indochinois en instance de retraite, Piedicorte, Digaggio, Corse, June 24, 1926; Letter from Nicolai to the Directeur du Personnel et de la Comptabilité, Paris, Piedicorte, Digaggio, January 7, 1926.

<sup>161</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1677/17, Indo Chine Police municipal, Haiphong, Dossier of Nicolai, Pierre, Paul, 1925. Letter from the GGI to Minister of Colonies, Paris "A.S. [au sujet] de M. NICOLAI Brigadier de la Police Urbaine." Hanoi, January 19, 1925; Letter from Krautheimer, Administrateur-Maire to RST, Hanoi, "Objet: Retraite police urbaine," Haiphong, June 19, 1924.

October 1926 (the last document in his file), the local Corsican office refused to pay Nicolai pending authorization from the colonial ministry.

Emile Chanteloube was another police retiree who pled poverty in his letters to the administration. Chanteloube, born 1875 in Espaly-st-Maral, Hte. Loire, joined the Saigon municipal police in 1900 as an agent of the 4th class. While on leave in 1921, like Nicolai, he was compelled to retire in 1922 at the age of 46. In June 1922, Chanteloube wrote from Langeac to the Minister of Colonies with concerns about his pension, calculated at only 2,054 francs. He wrote in his appeal that with such an income "It is naturally impossible to live and support a family."<sup>162</sup> Like Nicolai, his ill health prevented him from finding a new line of work. In fall 1922 the Colonial Council re-calculated his pension to be 5,000 francs per year, which went into effect in 1923.<sup>163</sup> Two other appeals for aid in his file suggest that Chanteloube was not well off. Earlier, in 1917, his wife applied to the Marseille colonial office for a "*paiement d'une delegation*" of 220 francs to support herself and her three children. While it was not approved, the administrator reviewing the request expressed sympathy for her difficult situation.<sup>164</sup> In 1925, Chanteloube also asked for the administration to pay for medical treatment (*eaux thermales*) and transport which he could not afford on his pension alone. He had contracted malaria in Saigon and continued to suffer from the illness. His request was rejected on the grounds that such costs were not covered.<sup>165</sup> By 1931, the next entry in his file, he had died.

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<sup>162</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/13. Chanteloube, E. A. M., Né 2 Mars 1875; Letter from Emile Chanteloube, Brigadier retraite de la police de l'Indochine, Saigon, to Ministre des Colonies, Paris. Langeac, June 1922.

<sup>163</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/13. Chanteloube, Letter from the Gouverneur général de l'Indochine to Ministère des Colonies, Paris, Saigon, January 6, 1923.

<sup>164</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/13. Chanteloube, Letter from Chef de Service Colonial, Le S/Directeur au Ministre des Colonies, Marseille, May 25, 1917.

<sup>165</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/13. Chanteloube, Letter from Emile Chanteloube to Minister of the Colonies in Paris, from Langeac, Haute Loire, June 5, 1925; Service de Santé, Certificat de Visite, fait à Nimes, June 4, 1925; Reply from Minister of colonies, n.d.

In yet another of many such examples, Saigon *inspecteur* of the 1st class, Marie Joseph Gaston Lemoine (born March 31, 1883 in Oncques, Loir et Cher) retired due to serious illness in 1923 at the age of 40.<sup>166</sup> He returned to France with his wife, entirely broke and having to sell his gun to "subsist." He had to support his brother's widow, after the former's death in World War I, their children and a younger sister.<sup>167</sup> After Cochinchina deputy Ernest Outrey wrote a letter on Lemoine's behalf, in 1923 the government approved his yearly pension at 2,337 francs. Whether these policemen were ever truly destitute is hard to judge, given the context of their petitions, but suffice it to say neither were they especially well-off. They had little savings, accumulated debt, and the state proved spendthrift with their pensions. At the same time, their modest situations were made all the more apparent by their much wealthier superiors in the administration, as well as affluent colonial subjects, in particular Chinese businessmen.

### **The Police Leadership**

Some policemen were relatively rich, and there was a considerable gap in pay and benefits between those who remained agents and those who advanced in the hierarchy. Commissaires in general occupied a place of higher social standing.<sup>168</sup> Lecoer and Poillot were members of Saigon's Indochinese Studies Society (*société des études indo-chinoise*) in 1912. As a plantation owner, Commissaire Etiévant was a voting member of Cochinchina's Chamber of Agriculture that same year. This class stratification within the ranks can help explain why the police as a whole is often treated as a prestigious cohort, even if well-to-do policemen remained the minority.

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<sup>166</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/22. Indochine Police, Lemoine, Marie, Joseph, Gaston. Letter from Lemoine to the Ministre of Colonies, Paris, April 7, 1923.

<sup>167</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/22. Indochine Police, Lemoine, Marie, Joseph, Gaston. Letter from Cochinchine, Deputy Ernest Outrey to "Mon cher directeur et amie" likely the Director of Personnel, October 30, 1920.

<sup>168</sup> CAOM, EE/II/1682/18. Police Judiciaire, Etiévant, Louis, Alexis. Letter from Etiévant to the Chef du service colonial à Marseille, March 6, 1923.

At the time of his death at the age of sixty, for instance, police *secrétaire hors classe* Paul Guériment was living a comfortable life. He had his own apartment with electricity, a servant, investments, and a savings account. When 60-year-old Guériment (born in La Chapelle en Vercors, de Drôme) died from leprosy in 1924 in a Saigon hospital, he left behind no heirs in the colony. The government liquidated his assets, auctioning off the belongings found in his home, settled his debts, and cashed out his accounts, providing a glimpse of the finances of a high-ranking policeman in 1924. His belongings included a teak desk, a table and chairs, an upholstered chair, an alarm clock, a dresser, a trunk, silverware, a wooden bed, a hat rack, clothes, a razor, and many smaller items. The total value of the sale of all his belongings was 90 piastres, or about 9 francs in 1925.<sup>169</sup> More impressively, the state sold his 11 "Indochinese bonds" and withdrew 371.90 piastres from his savings account. In the end, his estate was left with 2,378.22 piastres, or about 28,000 francs in 1925 that was sent to a niece in France.<sup>170</sup>

Along with higher salaries, those in the upper ranks enjoyed housing stipends and other perks. At the top end, the Saigon central commissaire's job benefits amounted to more than 50% of his salary: in addition to his base pay of 12,000 francs per year he was entitled to extra benefits which totaled about 6,100 francs in 1895. The state paid for discretionary office expenses (300 piastres) his lodging (858 piastres for a rented house), his carriage (360 piastres), and provided him supplemental pay for his work with the magistrate in Saigon (444 piastres). Commissaires usually did not have to pay for housing because they either lived at the *commissariats* or received a housing stipend. For instance, in 1914, when he became

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<sup>169</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/21, Police, Guériment, Certificat de Cause de Décès, Hôpital Principal de Saigon, Docteur Besse, Saigon, December 30, 1924; Succession, Guériment, Paul Henri, secrétaire hors classe de la police urbaine, Procès-verbal de vente, January 1925.

<sup>170</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/21, Police, Guériment, letter from the GGI to the Minister of Colonies, "Envoi en France du solde disponible de la succession de GUIRIMENT, Paul-Henri," Hanoi, May 25, 1925. The exchange rate cited in this document was 1 piastre: 10.60 francs; Letter from the GGI to the Minister of Colonies, "Envoi en France du solde disponible de la succession de GUIRIMENT, Paul-Henri," Hanoi, April 13, 1925.

commissaire of the 2nd class in Hanoi, Grémeaux moved into the second floor of the new commissariat in the first district on rue Jules Ferry.<sup>171</sup> When Saigon's Commissaire Etiévant threatened to resign in protest over how poorly he was treated in 1913, part of his outrage stemmed from the fact that he had to find and pay for his own lodging while the other commissaires did not.<sup>172</sup> In 1935 Haiphong, European policemen were further provided with a budget for clothing, a bicycle, shoes and hats, an additional family stipend, and a substantial "zone" bonus for working in the city. Commissaires and *chefs de post* received additional indemnities.<sup>173</sup>

There were opportunities for colonial remuneration beyond salaries. In 1886, Commissaire Tourillon was awarded a plot of land in Saigon from the Colonial Council.<sup>174</sup> Although promotions were the only way to receive a raise, as salaries remained fixed by rank, there were some exceptions. Hanoi Commissaire Brault was hired from the colonial infantry and became commissaire of the 1st class in 1904.<sup>175</sup> He was promoted to *commissaire central* in 1907. Brault's salary was augmented by 1,000 francs starting 1904 by a special law.<sup>176</sup> Higher paychecks did not mean less corruption however. All three commissaire centrals including Brault were implicated in corruption scandals in the period 1900-1910 (chapter 2).

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<sup>171</sup> "Le nouveau commissariat du 1er arrondissement," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, April 9, 1914; See also CAOM, FM, EE/II/2488/15, Personnel dossier of Grémeaux, Louis Jean Baptist, Indochine, police urbaine, 1931.

<sup>172</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222, "Fusion des polices," Commissaire de police Etiévant (Louis Alexia): Commissariats de police de la Sûreté des Délégations judiciaires de la Rade et de la Police fluviale] à Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine Saigon, 2 Octobre 1913.

<sup>173</sup> Ville de Haiphong, *Budget supplémentaire pour l'exercice 1731. Budget municipal. Compte des pensions et budget du Mont-de-piété*, (Haiphong: Impr. de l'Extrême-Orient), 1931.

<sup>174</sup> Procès-Verbaux, Conseil Colonial, Séance du December 29, 1886, "Concession gratuite du loi n. 88, section A, 3e feuille de Saigon, demandée par M. Tourillon" (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1887), 81.

<sup>175</sup> CAOM, GGI 3856, Police administrative Tonkin, "Avancement accordé pour services exceptionnels au Commissaire de police Brault, 1908," "Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1907, Hanoi November 19, 1907, signed the Commissaire Central p.i."; CAOM, FM, EE/II/378/3, Dossier Personnel of Brault, Gabriel, Anatole, Police.

<sup>176</sup> CAOM, GGI 3856, Police administrative Tonkin, "Avancement accordé pour services exceptionnels au Commissaire de police Brault, 1908."

The best-known success story in the police was Auguste Belland. After reaching the rank of infantry sergeant (*adjudant d'infanterie*) and served 15 years in the military, he entered the colonial administration in Cochinchina at the age of 36 at the rank of commissaire in 1892. He was promoted to central commissaire in 1895, a position he held until his death in Saigon in 1910. In an exceptional case of personal aggrandizement, not just for the police but for colonial Frenchmen, Belland is better known for his role as a pioneer in the cultivation of *heava* trees. He established in 1900 one of Vietnam's first successful rubber plantations at his Go Vap plantation in Gia Dinh province just outside of Saigon. Commissaire Alexis Louis Etiévant, Belland's subordinate, also invested in rubber plantations.<sup>177</sup> He nonetheless claimed to have ended up broke after his bank the *Banque industrielle de Chine* collapsed leaving him only his pension, set at 7,881 francs. He retired in the colony where he was "known for 30 years" because he found himself with "rather limited resources."<sup>178</sup>

## Conclusion

The gulf in social standing between high- and low-ranking white policemen in the colony is important to understanding why race and whiteness became the means through which poorer European police agents claimed, or attempted to claim, colonial privilege. Class disparities also indicate that the bourgeois lifestyle was not available to everyone, although expectations were still present. Many French agents in the colony in the end had more in common—in terms of socio-economic status—with their non-European colleagues and subordinates than with the French colonial administrative or commercial classes. Rather than obviate the importance of race, social proximity between white police recruits and their non-European colleagues magnified it. As explored in the next chapter, some white agents abused their position, and they

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<sup>177</sup> For Belland and Etiévant's rubber plantation holdings: Louis Cros, *Indochine française pour tous*. [Comment aller, que faire en Indochine.] (Clichy Seine: Impr. Paul Dupont, 1931), 54.

<sup>178</sup> CAOM, GGI 30.746, Dossier Individuel, Etiévant.

did so following the logic of colonial order. At the same time, the relatively trivial nature of their abuses suggests the police's low social standing in the colonial hierarchy. Casual violence and petty corruption can then be understood in part as a byproduct of this racial friction stemming from class difference, in addition to the French *colons'* preoccupation with racial prestige above all else as the foundation of colonial order.



## Chapter 2: Discipline, Prestige, and "Whiteness" in the European Cadre

Louis Boonen joined the Haiphong municipal police as an agent of the 3rd class in late 1909 or early 1910, around the age of 34. Boonen proved to be an ill-disciplined agent from the start, drawing complaints from superiors and civilians. According to multiple accusations between 1911 and 1914 (the dates covered in his file), he was late for his shifts, left early, refused to cover a shift for a sick colleague, was dishonest, disrespectful, and both mocked and refused to salute his superiors. Boonen treated native police agents like personal servants (*domestiques*) and enlisted them to run his errands (*faire ses commissions*). Once in 1914, Boonen rode his bicycle across town to the police station just to order a Vietnamese agent to buy him tobacco.<sup>1</sup> He also involved the police in several embarrassing incidences.

One such instance took place in July 1911, when Pac Thong, the second in command (*sous-chef*) of the Chinese Congregation of Canton in Haiphong, filed a complaint on behalf of his congregation against Boonen for treating their pagoda like a café.<sup>2</sup> For the past year, every time he was assigned to patrol the Chinese quarter, Boonen would stop by the pagoda and order the staff to bring him champagne. He would not accept beer. He treated the staff, per the

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<sup>1</sup> CAOM GGI 35522, "Dossier 'Sanction disciplinaires' retiré du dossier de M. Boonen agent des Polices Urbaines par application de la loi d'amnistie. Blâmes;" Letter from the Commissaire Central de Police au Tonkin to the Haiphong Mayor, Hanoi, March 19, 1914; Letter from the Commissaire de Police in Haiphong to the Commissaire Central de Police in Hanoi, "Demande de punition contre l'agent Boonen," Haiphong, March 17, 1914; Letter from the Commissaire de Police adjoint to the Commissariat de Police Chef de service in Haiphong, "Objet: Menaces proferés par l'agent Boonene à l'adressé de l'agent Denoual," Haiphong March 7, 1914; "Feuille d'interrogatoire", Commissariat de police, procès-verbal, signed Commissaire Rechard, March 7, 1914; Letter from Denoual (Jean) agent de 1ere classe de la police municipale to the Commissaire de police, Haiphong, March 5, 1914. Letter from the RST to the Haiphong Mayor, "A.S. de l'agent Boonen," Hanoi, October 19, 1911; Rapport de l'agent Boonen en réponse au Rapports de sous-brigadier Bœuf, Haiphong, August 27, 1911; Letter from sous-brigadier de Police Bœuf à Commissaire de police de la ville de Haiphong, Haiphong August 26, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> CAOM GGI 35522, "Dossier 'Sanction disciplinaires' retiré du dossier de M. Boonen agent des Polices Urbaines par application de la loi d'amnistie. Blâmes." Letter from Commissaire Plagne to the Haiphong Mayor, "A.s. de agent Boonen," Haiphong, August 16, 1911; Letter from Boonen to the Haiphong commissaire, Haiphong, August 16, 1911; "Feuille d'interrogatoire " Commissariat de police, procès-verbal, signed Commissaire Plagne, August 12, 1911; Letter from Commissaire Plagne to the Haiphong Mayor, "Au sujet de l'agent Boonen," Haiphong July 27, 1911; Letter from l'agent Boonen to the Haiphong commissaire, Haiphong, July 27, 1911.

complaint, like "boys" or servants.<sup>3</sup> Agent Cristinani confirmed the accusation, but had not, he claimed, wanted to tattle on his colleague. Boonen, meanwhile, insisted that he had been invited to the pagoda. In August, he confronted Pac Thong and tried unsuccessfully to intimidate him into withdrawing the complaint.

When rebuked by Commissaire Plagne, Boonen, outraged, replied that he was seeking legal counsel.<sup>4</sup> He was formally sanctioned for this incident, and transferred to the Haiphong dock service, which involved inspecting ships and documenting the arrival of Chinese immigrants. At the docks, Boonen did as little work as possible, delegating jobs to Vietnamese agents and letting his colleagues cover for him. The last straw for his new *commissaire* came in 1914 when, in the presence of eight Vietnamese agents at the docks, Boonen taunted and made death threats against his French superior, 1st class agent Jean Denoual.<sup>5</sup> Sanctioned again, Boonen remained unrepentant.<sup>6</sup> He was again transferred, but remained in the police until he retired in 1924.<sup>7</sup> He reached only the middling rank of brigadier of the 3rd class.<sup>8</sup>

In disciplinary cases like Boonen's, the overriding desire to "protect prestige"—both of the uniform (the police) and of the European (whiteness)—ended up being the primary guiding

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<sup>3</sup> CAOM GGI 35522, "Dossier 'Sanction disciplinaires' retiré du dossier de M. Boonen agent des Polices Urbaines par application de la loi d'amnistie. Blâmes;" Letter from the Chef de la Congrégation de Canton, to the Commissaire de Police, Haiphong, Haiphong July 27, 1911.

<sup>4</sup> CAOM, GGI 35522, "Dossier M. Boonen, Blâmes;" Letter from Commissaire Plagne to the Haiphong Mayor, "A.s. de agent Boonen," Haiphong, August 16, 1911.

<sup>5</sup> CAOM, GGI 35522, "Dossier M. Boonen, Blâmes;" Letter from the Commissaire Central de Police au Tonkin to the Haiphong Mayor, Hanoi, March 19, 1914; Letter from the Commissaire de Police in Haiphong to the Commissaire Central de Police in Hanoi, "Demande de punition contre l'agent Boonen," Haiphong, March 17, 1914; Letter from the Commissaire de Police adjoint to the Commissarie de Police Chef de service in Haiphong, "Objet: Menaces proférés par l'agent Boonen à l'adressé de l'agent Denoual," Haiphong, March 7, 1914; "Feuille d'interrogatoire", Commissariat de police, procès-verbal, signed Commissaire Rechart, March 7, 1914; Letter from Denoual (Jean) to the Commissaire de police, Haiphong, March 5, 1914.

<sup>6</sup> CAOM, GGI 35522, ""Dossier M. Boonen, Blâmes;" Letter from agent de 3eme classe Boonen to commissaire de Police, Haiphong, Haiphong, March 23, 1914.

<sup>7</sup> CAOM, GGI 35522, "Dossier M. Boonen, Blâmes;" Decision to remove Boonen from the dock service, signed by the Haiphong Mayor, March 27, 1914.

<sup>8</sup> Boonen was the brother-in-law of a commissaire, which undoubtedly helped him keep his job, but these kinds of offenses are so common among European agents that there was also something more going on than just nepotism. The municipal police had many agents like Boonen.

rational behind how the leadership dealt with (or did not deal with) white agents. French *colons* in Vietnam were intensely concerned with behavior that damaged the image of the French, and in the eyes of the *commissaire* weighing his fate in 1911, Boonen's most serious crime was not against the Chinese pagoda, but against the dignity of the police itself. As commissaire Hague wrote, Boonen's behavior had "done well to diminish the French police in the eyes of the Asians."<sup>9</sup> He thus needed to be disciplined, however lightly. The second incident which led to his transfer from the dock service notably involved Boonen threatening his French superior in front of Vietnamese agents. Boonen had failed to respect both the police hierarchy and white prestige in his own comportment and in his treatment of other Europeans.

The same logic of protecting French image at all costs also prevented the police from sanctioning all but the very worst white offenders. This reluctance to damage prestige by charging white policemen for crimes perpetuated a culture of impunity and ill discipline, which concerned the administration, many of whom were more educated and belonged to a more bourgeois colonial class. The many agents like Boonen in the police meanwhile took full advantage of their place in the colonial order to extract small privileges, but at the same time, their superiors feared that such uncouth actions undermined the police's—and the colonial state's—claims to prestige and authority. The demands of racial hierarchy thus counter-intuitively imposed restrictions both on police behavior and how the police could discipline and be disciplined. By exploring this problem in more detail, this chapter contributes to efforts to pin down the nebulous concept of "prestige" by parsing out the different kinds of prestiges, plural, at stake in police confrontations.

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<sup>9</sup> CAOM, GGI 35522, "Dossier 'Sanction disciplinaires' retiré du dossier de M. Boonen agent des Polices Urbaines par application de la loi d'amnistie. Blâmes;" Letter from Commissaire Plagne to the Haiphong Mayor, "A.s. de agent Boonen," Haiphong, August 16, 1911.

Building on the police profile begun in chapter 1, this chapter also looks more closely at the causes of understaffing in the European police ranks, including turnover due to the loss of agents to other career paths, illness, and violence. Understaffing hurt the police service in terms of discipline—understaffed police forces in fact fought to keep even the most mediocre agents—but at the same time created openings for Frenchmen who were not from mainland France to work in the police. As discussed in chapter 3, French Indians, *métis*, and naturalized Vietnamese joined the European cadre in large numbers, further complicating its racial and social ordering and creating conflict within the ranks.

### **The Police in the Colonial Press**

Police work was not prestigious in either France or Vietnam, which contributed to difficulties recruiting prior to the 1920s. As Malcolm Anderson writes for the metropole, the image in French popular culture of the police was "predominately negative" prior to mid-twentieth century and "the public standing of the police...during the Third and Fourth republics was low."<sup>10</sup> Fictional and semi-fictional representations portrayed the police in France as "intrusive, omnipresent, manipulative, repressive, [and] incompetent" and the French police in the colony received similar treatment.<sup>11</sup>

If French *colons* in Saigon, Cholon, Haiphong, and Hanoi wrote about the police in local newspapers, it was usually to express anger and annoyance over its shortcomings. They protested police meddling in their personal affairs and for "overindulgence of natives."<sup>12</sup> There were many

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<sup>10</sup> Malcolm Anderson, *In Thrall to Political Change: Police and Gendarmerie in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> In just two of many, many examples, in June 6, 1906 *Le Courrier d'Haiphong* wrote of "The inexplicable indulgence" of the police towards shady houses in the city (gambling and prostitution) and complained in another article of the police's unwillingness to enforce noise violation laws in the face of an arguing Vietnamese couple. "Moins de Bruit," *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, May 15, 1906. "Occulte Protection," *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, June 6, 1906.

complaints about the police's perceived inactivity and passivity. An 1884 letter published by the *Le Saigonnais* newspaper complained of their ineffectiveness:

What do the police do? Three or four agents hang around Catinat street. One had a stool in front of the Department of the Interior's hall; he does not move from this spot, and it is always the same person. Another sips coffee at a stall next to the town hall, another seems to be living with [vivre d'une vie commune] an Indian moneychanger who has deigned to grant him a chair. Their routine is only equal to their impassivity; they hide when they should show themselves.<sup>13</sup>

If the police were blamed for inaction, neither did *colons* appreciate receiving police attention. In 1899, a resident by the name of E. Chouan wrote in Saigon's *L'Opinion* that "We resent the other role [*rôle tout à fait à côté*] that the Saigon police plays. We are not enemies of public order, not conspirators against the security of the colony..." He demanded that the police stop eavesdropping and making "secret files." If not, Saigon agents he warned might "come across a less tolerant fellow who will tickle [*chatouille*] their kidneys with the point of his shoe."<sup>14</sup> Another angry European complained in 1906 in *Le Courrier d'Haiphong* that the police was more concerned with ensuring building codes than catching criminals. The offended Frenchman had been ordered to remove a structure in his yard because he did not have a building permit. He wrote, sarcastically, that the "poor police!" were "so overburdened, in our beautiful city of Hanoi, that I wonder sometimes how they find the time to arrest, every 4 or 5 months, a criminal or two!" He finished in faux dramatic fashion: "Citizens! Your police watch over you! Sleep peacefully!"<sup>15</sup>

Teasing or poking fun at the police were staples of the press. The Hanoi based *L'Avenir du Tonkin* asked in 1904, "Were our police taking a siesta?" in an article complaining that at 1 p.m. on Paul Bert street there were no policemen (French or Vietnamese) to be found. In their

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<sup>13</sup> Letter from a reader to *Le Saigonnais*, April 14, 1884. Cited in Meyer: Charles Meyer, *Les Français en Indochine, 1860-1914* (Paris: Hachette, 1996), 75.

<sup>14</sup> E. Chouan, "Ces Messieurs de la Police," *L'Opinion*, March 21, 1899.

<sup>15</sup> "La police veille!" *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, October 23, 1906, 2.

absence this main boulevard was ridden with "scoundrels," "coolies," and "who knows what" who were causing trouble and harassing the rickshaw drivers.<sup>16</sup> *Le Courrier d'Haiphong* reported a tongue-in-cheek story in 1906 in which a European police agent, assisted by an *indigène* agent, "apprehended" a "chicken of good size" in the street. The chicken's owner tried in vain to claim the bird, which was diverted to the *commissariat* where it "undoubtedly received the capital punishment." The reporter continued: "We congratulate the agent... for the vigor he has shown in these circumstances."<sup>17</sup>

In another article from December 16, 1906, *Le Courrier d'Haiphong* wrote about a tactless police agent who barged into a French home, uninvited, to investigate a report of a missing daughter of a Vietnamese servant. Not only has she been found three days before, the servant had already alerted the police service, a fact of which the agent was clueless. The newspaper wrote: "the police give us a good example of its shamelessness and its carelessness."<sup>18</sup> In a letter published by *L'Opinion* in October 1913, Saigon's Municipal Counselor Moyaux meanwhile wrote of the need for general reform: "I will not surprise anyone in affirming that our police have a certain number of agents whose moral and physical aptitude are far from meeting the demands of their service. It is time that the Saigonese population realizes its rights and demands greater security than that which it currently has."<sup>19</sup>

There were articles that celebrated the capture of criminals or praising effective or brave policemen, as Anderson notes was true for metropolitan policemen as well.<sup>20</sup> On balance, however, the portrayal of Indochina's municipal polices in French sources was a negative one,

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<sup>16</sup> "Dans La Rue, Nos agents de police font-ils la sieste?" *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, January 12, 1904; see also: "Où était-il?" *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, April 12, 1907.

<sup>17</sup> "La Police Veille," *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, Dec. 8, 1906.

<sup>18</sup> "Vive la Police!" *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, Dec. 16, 1906.

<sup>19</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222, "Fusion des polices," Newspaper clipping: E. Moyaux, *L'Opinion*, October 22, 1913.

<sup>20</sup> "Arrestation Mouvementée," *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, December 28, 1906.

which likely did not aid recruitment. The leadership also went on record as dissatisfied with the quality of their personnel.<sup>21</sup> At the center of this problem was the question of low status associated with police work. In a letter to *L'Opinion* in 1913, Saigon Municipal Counselor Moyaux wrote of this stigma when he stated that "Every young man who enters into the police believes himself dishonored [déhonoré] if he wears the uniform and carries out street policing."<sup>22</sup> Haiphong Mayor Eckert, meanwhile, wrote in 1927 that employing white policemen in the "low prestige" job of street policing was inadvisable and therefore recommended replacing them with indigenous recruits.

### **Understaffing**

Due to the limited supply of French recruits in the colony, the police could not afford to be overly selective when hiring, or too quick to dismiss badly behaving agents. In 1907, the author of an article in *L'Asie Française* was not far off the mark when he attributed the police's unreliability to the low salaries of French municipal police. Low pay, he wrote, limited the state to recruit only among the poor and jobless and "agents of the second class earn such derisory salaries that it is materially impossible to remain honest if they want to lodge, dress, and feed themselves."<sup>23</sup> The article went on to ask, given the low wages, "Is it surprising that we are reduced to entrusting the guarding of the inhabitants and the managing of the native cadre to individuals recruited without [background] checks among the ever growing mass of vagabonds

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<sup>21</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB32/212(4), "Projet de création des stations de police," 1911, Le Président de la Commission Municipale de la Ville de Saigon à Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Saigon, January 17, 1912; Le Commissaire Central à Monsieur Le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Saigon, November 26 1911; Le Commissaire Central à Monsieur Le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Saigon, November, 26 1911. Also: TTLT IIB.56/222, "Fusion des polices" Le Gouverneur p.i. de la Cochinchine à Monsieur le Gouverneur général de l'Indochine HANOI; Saigon, May 22, 1912.

<sup>22</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IIB.56/222, "Fusion des polices" Newspaper clipping: E. Moyaux, *L'Opinion*, October 22, 1913.

<sup>23</sup> "La Justice en Indochine," Bulletin du Comité, *L'Asie Française*, April 1907, 127-128.

in Saigon and Hanoi?"<sup>24</sup> If the unemployed had few options other than the police, the police often had few other options because of the low pay, low prestige, and hard work associated with the police. Cochinchina's Director of the Interior Noel Pardon was also not alone in lamenting, as he did in 1887, that "The police, it should be said, become the refuge of all those who have been unable to go elsewhere."<sup>25</sup> *Commissaires* in both Hanoi and Saigon frequently remarked upon their inability to attract qualified men.<sup>26</sup>

The police leadership attributed shortcomings to a lack of education or training. Prior to the 1917 reforms, agents did not receive any formal training after being hired. Cochinchina Governor Gourbeil was one of many who found in 1913 that those in the police were "full of goodwill and routine knowledge of their profession but of a level of education generally insufficient."<sup>27</sup> In 1910, Commissaire Lecoer attributed general ignorance and indifference among his police personnel to the absence of any professional instruction.<sup>28</sup> Following a harsh critique of his French agents, he wrote:

Is this really the fault of the agent? No, clearly. When he came to the police, we dressed him as an agent of the city; we provided him with a saber and a revolver, and thus dressed and equipped, we put him on the street, without telling him what he needs to do or how to do it. He was provided with a small booklet entitled "Guide for Police agents" by Belland and from which, certainly, if he opened it, he would draw useful lessons. But does he open it? No one is sure. No one makes the recommendation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB24/233(1), "Conseil Colonial, Session ordinaire 1886-1887, séance du 1er Février 1887. Projet de réorganisation de la police. Rapport."

<sup>26</sup> TTLT I, RST 034190, "Organisation du personnel de la police municipale de la ville de Hanoi (1899)." Rapport à Monsieur le Gouverneur général, Hanoi, May 24, 1899. TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222. "Fusion des polices;" Rapport du Commissaire Central p.i. [par intérim] Lecoer au Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine sur les réformes à apporter aux divers services de police chargés d'assurer l'ordre et la sécurité publique," Saigon, November 1910.

<sup>27</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222, "Fusion des polices." Commission report.

<sup>28</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222, "Fusion des polices;" Rapport du Commissaire Central p.i. Lecoer to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine sur les réformes à apporter aux divers services de police chargés d'assurer l'ordre et la sécurité publique," Saigon, November 1910.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



Around the same time, Chesne, Saigon's Inspector of Civil Services, wrote that: "one cannot expect of the municipal police, apart from very rare exceptions, the services that the head of the municipality is, however, entitled to expect from this personnel." Chesne went on to write that "This situation can be principally attributed to the professional inaptitude of a great number of agents and a sort of apathy among the police as a whole."<sup>30</sup>

As William Cohen has shown for Africa and Indochina, challenges with colonial recruitment characterized France's experience more broadly because "the colonial vocation was generally not popular in France."<sup>31</sup> Cohen is perhaps a little harsh when he calls recruits in the African administration "rejects of society" but neither were they especially well qualified for colonial service.<sup>32</sup> Until 1889, France did not have a central mechanism through which to recruit and train the empire's future governors and governor-generals until 1889 when the *École Coloniale* was established, originally for Cambodians coming to study in France.<sup>33</sup> It was funded on such a small scale that it provided less than 10% of colonial recruits prior to World War I.<sup>34</sup> After 1918, this school became a prerequisite for colonial service at the highest levels. Entrants had to have at least a *baccalauréat* (high school) degree. Only a handful of the police leadership starting in the 1920s were alumni.

Mass recruitment in the Indochina administration during the major expansion of the colonial state at turn of the century led to the hiring of a large number of employees without much in the way of screening.<sup>35</sup> The number of French functionaries nearly doubled between

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<sup>30</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IIB.56/222, "Fusion des polices;" Président de la Commission Municipale Chesne, "Fusion des polices" n.d. but in same file with Lecoœur's 1910 critique.

<sup>31</sup> William B. Cohen, *Rulers of Empire, the Colonial Service in Africa* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971), 15 (latter quote) and 23 (former quote); See also: William B. Cohen, "The Lure of Empire: Why Frenchmen Entered the Colonial Service," *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, 1, Colonialism and Decolonization (Jan., 1969): 103-116.

<sup>32</sup> Cohen, *Rulers of Empire*, 15. He does stress that Indochina attracted more recruits than the African colonies.

<sup>33</sup> Cohen, "The Lure of Empire," 103-116.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> De Gantès, "Administrer une colonie," 37.

1897 (2,860) and 1911 (5,683) in large part due to Paul Doumer's administrative restructuring.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, there were 12,200 indigenous employees of the colonial government in 1914.<sup>37</sup> France's colonial administration was notoriously oversized and underpaid. Brocheux and Hémerly cite Deputy Albert Metin who estimated on the eve of WWI that an enormous 25% of the Indochina colonial budget went just to paying the European staff.<sup>38</sup> Yet individual paychecks were undersized. French functionaries were paid less than their British counterparts and occupied more of the administration's subaltern posts.

The police was among the colonial services that faced enormous challenges recruiting. Underemployment is evidenced by near constant vacancies in the European cadre. Phnom Penh's annual police budget in 1905 had to factor in to its expenditures that fact that 1/10th of the European cadre was vacant for that year.<sup>39</sup> Saigon's Administrative and Judicial Police budget from 1903 similarly subtracted 1/10th of its total expenditures for vacancies (*incomplets*) in the European ranks, and in 1908 that number had gone up to 1/8th for the Saigon PAJ, meaning 1 out of every 8 positions was vacant that year.<sup>40</sup> This was typical for this period, for all of the cities. The introduction of competitive exams around World War I, meanwhile, meant to raise the professional standard of the police service seem to have hampered recruitment by raising the bar to entry and forcing potential applicants to wait for the next exam cycle.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 22. Functionaries also made up a large portion of the colonial expat population: in 1913 3,840 of the 14,000 Frenchmen living in Indochina worked under the Governor General of Indochina.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Brocheux and Hémerly, *Indochina*, 82.

<sup>39</sup> CAOM, GGI 7779. Projet de réorganisation de le police de Sûreté générale en Indochine (Mission de M. Gautret), 1905-06; "Chapitre VII-Police, Police Administrative et Judiciaire-Gendarmerie," Budget for 1906. I infer that this is for Phnom Penh because the other cities are also in the file and also it cites a 1903 law organizing the police in Cambodia.

<sup>40</sup> Procès-Verbaux, Conseil Colonial, Séance du 28 Juillet, 1903, "Chapitre III- Police administrative et judiciaire," (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1903), 56; CAOM, GGI 30869, Personnel, Dossier Individuel, Tassel (Jean-Baptiste), Caisse de Retraite des Services Civils Locaux de l'Indochine; Le Chef du 1e Bureau. "Situation Numérique du personnel européen de la Police administrative et judiciaire, Decret du 29 juillet 1896," December 14, 1908. [This happens to be in Tassel's file].

There was ample internal police correspondence seeking to address the problem of vacancies and understaffing. In 1908, the Resident Superior of Tonkin (RST) wrote the GGI with concern the Hanoi PAJ only employed 23 French agents instead of the 29 provided for in the budget.<sup>41</sup> He asked "for the urgent need of the service" for the police to appoint new candidates from the military.<sup>42</sup> Regarding Hanoi's municipal police, in 1906, Commissaire Kersselaer wrote that while the number of European agents was fixed at 75, only 41 were actually available for street duty: 3 spots remained vacant, 16 policemen were detached to other services, and 5 were on administrative leave. An additional 10 were unavailable because they were officers (*gradés*), performing office duty or employed in leadership positions. This left only 41 Europeans to police the streets. And since no European could be expected to work more than eight hours a day, he wrote, this reduced the number of French agents, at any given time (assuming they were deployed evenly at all times of day) to around 12 agents for the entire city of Hanoi. The municipal budget however could not afford more European personnel, so he recommended looking to *indigène* agents, preferably former soldiers, to make up the difference.<sup>43</sup>

Again, in 1912, the *commissaire central* of Tonkin wrote that: "The number of European agents is woefully inadequate." Between "those returned to France, the sick, [and] the detached [to other services], the work force is, at all times ridiculously low in the streets."<sup>44</sup> In 1930, Mayor Tholance raised an almost identical complaint.<sup>45</sup> Hanoi's budget in 1930 allowed for 52

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<sup>41</sup> CAOM, GGI 3842, "Police administrative et judiciaire Tonkin, Dossier Mout et Cuneo, agents de 3e classe, 1908," Le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin, Gouverneur de 2ere classe des Colonies, Officier de la Légion d'Honneur, à Monsieur le Gouverneur général de l'Indochine Hanoi, June 16, 1908.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> TTLT I, RST 034196, "Au sujet du nombre des agents de police indigène a Hanoi 1905-1906 "; Le Commissaire Central p.i. au Tonkin Kersselaer à Monsieur le Procureur de la République à Hanoi, Hanoi, February 2, 1906.

<sup>44</sup> TTLT I, RST 34200" Au sujet de la réorganisation des polices municipales de Hanoi et Haiphong 1912-1913. "Le Commissaire Central de Police au Tonkin à Monsieur l'Administrateur Maire de la Ville de Hanoi, Hanoi, September 12, 1912.

<sup>45</sup> TTLT I, RST 81618, "Organisation du service de police et sûreté 1924-36;" "Extrait du p.v. de la séance ordinaire du 29 Août 1930, a.s. du renforcement du personnel européen de la police urbaine." Hanoi, September 6, 1930.

European policemen, he stated, but 9 were on leave or otherwise unavailable, and 4 were detached to other municipal services. The remaining 39 were "totally insufficient" for a city with "138,480 inhabitants" and "120 kilometers of streets and boulevards."<sup>46</sup> He called on the RST to appeal to the GGI for the necessary funds to employ more French policemen.

Significantly fewer European policemen were available for work at any given time moreover than the raw personnel numbers would suggest. In the south, Governor Maspero wrote to the GGI in 1919 with an urgent appeal to hire more than the budget's allotted number of European policemen because only 7 of the police's 35 Europeans were available for active duty in Saigon:

among this number of 35...are included 5 special *commissaires* (of which one is in the process of leaving [for *congé* in France]); 8 inspectors are still in France; one inspector is suffering from a disease contracted during the war whom the health service is about to repatriate. There are only therefore 20 inspectors in services: 3 are employed as secretaries to the special *commissaires*; 7 others are assigned to the sedentary service. The active service is only provided by 10 Europeans. Still one must consider the illnesses that reduce permanently these numbers by 3 units.<sup>47</sup>

Maspero had also promised to detach three Europeans to patrol the border between Cambodia and Cochinchina and to take charge of the river police (*police fluviale*, discussed in chapter 6), following an agreement with the Résident Supérieur in Cambodia.<sup>48</sup> He also needed Europeans to oversee native brigades, he wrote, created in response to the thousands of Vietnamese soldiers and workers returning from France after the war (considered a major security concern) and a rise in banditry following a bad harvest. Like Kersselaer in Hanoi, Maspero recommended turning to cheaper and more readily available Vietnamese recruits, but he still needed Europeans to oversee

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/112, Pièces divers relatives au personnel de police 1919-1929, Le Gouverneur p.i. de la Cochinchine [Maspero] à Monsieur le Gouverneur général de l'Indochine à Hanoi. Saigon February 17, 1919.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

them: "I approved the creation of 2 native mobile brigades of which we can only expect practical results if they are placed under the immediate direction of a European."<sup>49</sup>

Underemployment is indicated anecdotally by complaints of the absence of policemen on the streets. In a front-page story from 1903, *L'Avenir du Tonkin* wrote that Hanoi's municipal police needed "to double, at least, the number of Europeans and quadruple the number of natives."<sup>50</sup> The same paper wrote in 1905 that the police lacked sufficient personnel and means to police Hanoi. Although sympathetic, it concluded that Hanoi's police was "an incomplete and defective organization."<sup>51</sup> Similar articles appear in the Saigon and Haiphong press.<sup>52</sup>

Efforts to improve the overall quality of the service had the effect of making recruitment more difficult, and were therefore either unenforceable or counterproductive. In 1910, candidates in Saigon had to demonstrate through professional recommendations and "a certificate of professional aptitude" their qualification as a police agent. The drawback of the city's lengthy application process, however, according to commissaire Lecoeur in April 1911, was the excessive delay between the submission of an application and hiring of a candidate, during which time the candidate looked elsewhere for employment.<sup>53</sup>

Neither do complaints about understaffing end with the 1917 police reforms. In 1927, Governor Blanchard de la Brosse (formerly of the Sûreté) wrote the GGI appealing for an increase in both European and native personnel.<sup>54</sup> With the help of Commissaire Arnoux and a

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Victor Le Lan, "Police Municipale," *L'Avenir du Tonkin* December 9, 1903, 1.

<sup>51</sup> *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, January 20, 1905, 2.

<sup>52</sup> "Chronique Locale," *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, October 19, 1906.

<sup>53</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB35/212, Personnel— correspondance et arrêtés du personnel police administrative 1910-12; Le Commissaire Central Lecoeur à Monsieur le Lieutenant-gouverneur de la Cochinchine, "a.s. des candidats éventuels à l'emploi de Commissaire de police," Saigon, December 26, 1910; Le Commissaire Central Lecoeur à Monsieur le Lieutenant-gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, April 28, 1911.

<sup>54</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/112, Pièces divers relatives au personnel de police 1919-1929, Le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine [B. de la Brosse], Officier de la Légion d'Honneur, à Monsieur le Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, Hanoi, Saigon, July 20, 1927.

commission established to study the problem, they concluded that "it is absolutely impossible to ensure adequate policing of the city and the colony with the existing number of agents, regardless of the distribution of personnel..."<sup>55</sup> The same commission estimated that 30% of the force was "almost completely" *inutilisable* or useless. To remedy this, there needed to be simultaneously a purge and the hiring of selectively screened agents. De la Brosse requested for the Cochinchina police an additional 24 Europeans and 45 native agents.

In 1929, Cochinchina's top-ranking *Chef de Service* Nadaud wrote that while the Cochinchina police (including both the *Sûreté* and the municipal polices) had a budget for 350 Vietnamese agents and 122 European agents, it actually only employed 260 Vietnamese and 95 Europeans at the time of the report.<sup>56</sup> Of the 95 Frenchmen, moreover, 20 were on leave. The following year, in 1930, Saigon's Commissaire Brunet wrote his superior about the lack of available European secretaries in his district. He could not use any of his 6 *secrétaires* because, he explained, secrétaire Bourveau was covering for the *commissaire* of the 2nd district, Fischbach had been ordered by the prosecutor not to be involved in any court proceedings, Viguiet was "really sick" and on leave, Larquey was in France on leave, Lafaille was on detachment to the third district, which left him with only Ceccaldi, "whom" the commissaire wrote cryptically, "I think one can no longer count on." He therefore requested the appointment of six new secretaries for his service.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, in the north, Haiphong Mayor L. F. Eckert wrote the RST in 1927 that while his police employed 25 Europeans and 87 Vietnamese agents, only 10 European agents and 43

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB25/121(2). Conseil Colonial Livre Vert 1926-1927, "Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service de Sûreté pour l'établissement du Livre-Vert de 1926-1927," L'administrateur Chef du Service de la Sûreté, June 10, 1927. This document looks like a draft.

<sup>57</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/254, Le Commissaire Central de Police BRUNET à Monsieur Le Chef Local des Services de Police Saigon, September 24, 1930.

Vietnamese agents were available for street service due to vacancies, administrative leave in France, "etc." Eckert asked for the total numbers to be raised to 33 or 34 Europeans and 117 native agents to meet the policing demands of Haiphong.<sup>58</sup> Just three days later, a report sent to the RST wrote that Hanoi's municipal police employed only 44 European officers and agents, half of which were detached to other services, including the tax service, the hygiene service and the "*service des moeurs*" which regulated prostitution, leaving only 23 French policemen to watch over "more than 100 KM of streets." One agent was working for the colonial prosecutor and another for the veterinary disease service (*service des epizooties*). The Hanoi municipal police also employed 239 native agents in 1927, a result of an earlier decision to rely on more these agents for budgetary reasons (chapter 4).

Around the same time, Arnoux, the head of the Tonkin Sûreté, argued that the police's numbers were grossly insufficient, noting that although the cities' population had almost doubled since the pre-war period, the personnel numbers remained more or less unchanged. The Sûreté in Tonkin reported that they employed 33 Europeans and 117 Vietnamese policemen, for a total of 77 Europeans and 336 *indigènes* for all of Hanoi in 1927.<sup>59</sup> The city of Hanoi had just over 100,000 residents in 1927. Haiphong had 106,000, according to Arnoux's estimates.

As these complaints make clear, a significant portion of French policemen were absent from their posts at any given time due to illnesses, administrative leave, or detachment to other services. Administrative leave alone was considerable. Emile Chanteloube from Espaly-st-Maral (Hte. Loire) joined the Saigon municipal police in November 1900 as an agent of the 4th class. He retired in 1921. During 21 years of service, Chanteloube was on leave for a total of 4 years, 2

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<sup>58</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine de Hanoi et Haiphong de la Sûreté du Tonkin 1926-29." Monsieur L. F. Eckert, Administrateur-Maire à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin Hanoi, "Objet: Réorganisation de la police urbaine," Haiphong, September 13, 1927.

<sup>59</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine de Hanoi et Haiphong de la Sûreté du Tonkin 1926-29." Chef du Service de la Sûreté du Tonkin Arnoux to RST, Hanoi, December 9, 1927.

months, or more than 20% of his career.<sup>60</sup> Neither was his case atypical. At any given time, policemen would be on leave, and their subordinates would have to cover for them. Secrétaires became temporary commissaires, commissaires became temporary commissaire centrals, and so on, a practice that circumvented qualification and education requirements.

A major consequence of vacancies and Europeans on leave is that the ratio of French employees to *indigène* agents was much higher in practice than the raw personnel data would suggest. The ratio was potentially as high as 10:1 if the Hanoi municipal police *indigène* cadre was fully staffed (there were, according to the above report, only 23 French policemen available for street duty and 239 Vietnamese agents in the municipal police). What is evidenced here is the larger trend to fall back on *indigène* police agents to pick up the slack in the colonial service. This simple fact had implications for power dynamics as the French ended up relying on *indigène* agents to carry out street work. Theoretically, intermediaries worked under constant European supervision. In practice, however, the limited numbers of available French policemen made this arrangement impossible to sustain 24/7. Then there were European policemen, like Boonan, who made a habit of delegating responsibilities to native cadre agents, which in turn gave them more room to assert their authority as policemen vis-à-vis civilians. The lack of bilingual French police also went a long way towards empowering *indigène* agents who functioned simultaneously as interpreters and assistant police agents.

### **Leaving the Police**

Frenchmen also chose to leave the police service, which may speak to the undesirability or difficulty of the job. Former soldier Frederic Bernard Giely for example joined the municipal

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<sup>60</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/13, Personnel file, "Chanteloube, E. A. M., Ne 2 Mars 1875." "Liquidation du Compte d'Assistance de M.Chanteloube, Emile, Antoine, Medard, Brigadier de 2eme classe de la police urbaine de l'Indochine. Saigon, September 26, 1922.



police in 1889, only to resign in 1890.<sup>61</sup> Saigon police agent of the 2nd class, Rene Torr , quit the police in March 1909.<sup>62</sup> His rank indicates that he had not been in the police very long. Agent Ployer, hired in 1902, applied to transfer to the immigration service in 1903 but remained in the police.<sup>63</sup> In 1901, agent of the 2nd class Hellin abandoned his post in the Saigon police simply by refusing to return to the colony. He "disappeared" while on an 11-month leave back in France when he failed to board the ship scheduled to return him to Saigon.<sup>64</sup> It came out later that Hellin had sent a letter of resignation to the mayor of his hometown stating, "for reasons of health, he decided to leave his employment in the colonies." But the mayor did not deem the letter a formal declaration of resignation.<sup>65</sup> Based on his rank and duration of leave he had probably served in the colonial police for 5 or 6 years before quitting.

In 1899, the Hanoi *commissaire* wrote that too many Europeans left shortly after joining, to the detriment of both the service and the budget. "A certain number of these agents only enter the municipal police while waiting for better [jobs] and give their notice as soon as they have found employment that seems to them less tedious [*penible*] or more beneficial."<sup>66</sup> Discharged soldiers joined the police to extend their time in the colony, then returned to France "on the municipal budget, without having preformed appreciable service for the city." The *commissaire* therefore recommended hiring entry-level French agents on an 18-month trial basis at a salary of 8 francs per day, and without costly benefits—namely repatriation and retirement. A 1904

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<sup>61</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/19, Police municipale Indochine, Tonkin, Gi ly, Fr d ric Bernard personnel file.

<sup>62</sup> CAOM, GGI 3832, Police administrative et judiciaire Cochinchine, Dossier, Torre, agent de la police administrative. 1909.

<sup>63</sup> CAOM, GGI 35517, "Punitions retir s du dossier Ployer (police) par application de la loi d'amnistie du 3 Janvier 1925." Letter from Ployer to the Saigon Mayor, November 21, 1903.

<sup>64</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/20, Minist re des colonies, Hellin, 1924. Le Commissaire principal de 1<sup>re</sup> classe de Troupes Coloniales, Lallier du Coudray, Chef du Service Colonial, to le Ministre des Colonies, "Objet: situation de M. Hellin, agent de police   Saigon," Marseille, October 21, 1901; Letter from Le Commissaire principal de 1<sup>re</sup> classe de Troupes Coloniales, Lallier du Coudray, Chef du Service Colonial, to le Ministre des Colonies, "Au sujet de la situation de M. Hellin, agent de police   Saigon," Marseille, November 23, 1901.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> TTLT I, RST 034190, "Organisation du personnel de la police municipale de la ville de Hanoi (1899)." Rapport   Monsieur le Gouverneur g n ral, Hanoi, May 24, 1899.

Tonkin police law allowed for the employment, specifically to fill in the gaps in the European police, of *agents journaliers* or temporary "day agents" who earned between 3.50-8 piastres per day. In 1907, 21 of Saigon's PAJ 81 European policemen were temporary agents.<sup>67</sup>

Agent of the 2nd class Francois Robert Esclafer requested to be released from his duties in 1918 after 8 years in the Saigon police. He had "completely lost interest" in police work and the governor agreed to let him go. Esclafer was born 1882 in Les Eyzies de Tayac (Dordogne). He had worked as a miller (*minotier*) and there was no military service in his record. He joined the Saigon police as an agent of the 4th class in 1910. In 1914, in his annual review, his superior listed his capacity as mediocre and his manner of service as "leaving much to be desired." He did not speak any foreign languages. Esclafer had been reproached for "a good number of incidences of negligence" and had failed to study the regulations he was in charge of enforcing.<sup>68</sup> In October 1914, he was hit with disciplinary action for neglecting his duties as the city inspector of rickshaws and automobiles.<sup>69</sup> Esclafer did not deny the charges. His opportunity for promotion (and a raise) was consequently delayed. He was refused leave in January 1918, and ever since he "no longer served in a satisfactory fashion" and frequently took unauthorized absences. In June 1918, he asked to be let go. The governor accepted his resignation writing that Esclafer "no long renders, for some time, any effective service."<sup>70</sup>

Agents left the police as soon as better employment became available. After serving in the navy, Thomas Tanguy from Finistère arrived in the colony in 1886 in search of

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<sup>67</sup> CAOM, GGI 3823, "Dossier: Police Administrative Cochinchine, Promotion du 14 juillet 1907"; Le Chef de Cabinet, P. Pasquier "Situation numérique du personnel européen de la police administrative et judiciaire," Saigon, July 19, 1907.

<sup>68</sup> CAOM, GGI 30767, Mairie de Saigon—Secrétariat Général, Personnel, Bordereau des pièces contenues dans le dossier de M. Esclafer (Francois, Robert). Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Esclafer, François, September 4, 1914.

<sup>69</sup> CAOM, GGI 30767, Personnel, dossier de M. Esclafer (François, Robert). Arrêté signed Saigon le 15 Octobre 1914 by Le Maire E. Cuniac; Rapport de l'agent Lescot du service de la sûreté à Saigon, Saigon, October 12, 1914. Includes testimony from rickshaw drivers.

<sup>70</sup> CAOM, GGI 30767, Personnel, dossier de M. Esclafer (François, Robert). Letter from Goucoch to GGI Saigon, "Demission de son emploi offerts par M. Esclafer, Agent de 2e classe de la Police Urbaine." July 19, 1918.

employment.<sup>71</sup> He joined the Cholon police as an agent but left less than a year later in 1887 to work for the public works service (in the capacity of a *surveillant*) and later as a lighthouse guard in Baria. He was then promoted within the lighthouse service to posts in Annam and Cochinchina. After a series of intervening jobs, and a long illness, he rejoined the police (this time in the PAJ) as an agent of the 3rd class in Saigon in 1903. In 1904, Tanguy appealed for a pension in a lengthy plea about the "precarious state of my situation after 17 years of good and loyal service" and cited (as many did) the challenges he faced supporting his family.<sup>72</sup>

The case of Martin Ferreri is revealing because although he was widely recognized to be a poor to mediocre agent, his superiors were desperate to keep him in 1916.<sup>73</sup> Ferreri was born in 1888 in Ajaccio, Corsica. He served in the *7e régiment d'artillerie* from 1910 to 1912 and was discharged at the rank of *canonnier servant*. He arrived in the colony in March 1914 at the age of twenty-six. He applied to join the Cholon municipal police while in Saigon, and in April 1914 started as an agent of the 3rd class. He received average reviews and was described by his superiors as a "passable" if "irreverent" agent.<sup>74</sup> In January 1915 he was disciplined for having "insulted and threatened a sick person at the hospital" while seeking treatment there. The hospital director had had to intervene and requested that Ferreri be sanctioned.<sup>75</sup> In 1916, the GGI moved him to the Immigration Service, although Ferreri continued to work in the police until 1918 because of wartime personnel shortages.

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<sup>71</sup> CAOM, GGI 3818, Police Administrative Cochinchine, "Situation de M. Tanguy agent de 3<sup>e</sup> classe de police de Cochinchine, 1904;" Letter from Tanguy to le Ministre plénipotentiaire Député de la Cochinchine de passage, Saigon, August 31, 1904.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> CAOM, GGI 30766, Ville de Cholon, Dossier personnel M. Ferreri, Martin, agent de 3e classe.

<sup>74</sup> CAOM, GGI 30766, Dossier personnel M. Ferreri; "Personnel de la Police urbaine de Cholon, Bulletin Individuel de Notes," 1917. Signed: the Commissaire central de Cholon and the Président de la Commission municipale, Cholon, December 4, 1917.

<sup>75</sup> CAOM, GGI 30766, Dossier personnel M. Ferreri; Decision to sanction Ferreri for "insulting and threatening a sick person," signed by Le Président de la Commission municipale, Cholon, January 14, 1915; Ferreri to the Président de la Commission municipale, Cholon, January 13, 1915; Docteur Baille de Langibaudiere, Directeur de l'hôpital Drouhet to Le Président de la Commission Municipale de la Ville de Cholon, January 9, 1915.

The Cholon mayor and the *commissaire* both wrote in 1918 asking to keep Ferreri for the reason that the European numbers in the Cholon police were very low.<sup>76</sup> Of his 24 European employees in 1917, the Cholon mayor wrote, only twelve were available for street duty, of which two were new to the service. At least two were *métis* or naturalized Vietnamese, Ngo Van Duc and La Van Manh. Meanwhile, three were attached to the bicycle brigade. The rest worked at fixed posts around the city. The mayor wrote that "the European police of Cholon are non-existent."<sup>77</sup> Their objections were overruled and Ferreri was transferred in 1918.

In another revealing instance that speaks to both ongoing municipal police understaffing and the low prestige of this work, in 1934 in Saigon, fourteen employees from the agriculture service (*conducteurs des travaux d'agriculture*) were, to their great surprise, transferred to the municipal police. This was an unwelcome move that they fiercely resisted even though their salary and benefits remained the same. When this branch of the agricultural service was closed, the police was—the GGI insisted—the only service with any openings. Following outrage on the part of the "accidental policemen" who had no interest in police work, and pressure from colonial unions, all but three were quickly transferred to other services.<sup>78</sup>

### **Death and Disease**

Another deterrent was that police work was physically demanding and exposed agents to a variety of dangers. Entry-level agents would spend most of their shifts working outside in the tropical heat on active duty, usually on guard duty or as street policemen. Although the longest

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<sup>76</sup> CAOM, GGI 30766, Dossier personnel M. Ferreri. Gouverneur (Cabinet) "Réponse à votre note n. 2625 du 9 juillet courant," July 12, 1917.

<sup>77</sup> CAOM, GGI 30766, Dossier personnel M. Ferreri. Letter from Président de la Commission Municipale de Cholon to Gouverneur (Cabinet) "Reponse a votre note n. 2625 du 9 juillet courant," July 12, 1917. Includes a list of current employees and their assignments. See also: Note Postale from Gouverneur Cochinchine to Président de la Commission Municipale de Cholon, "A.S. d'une requête de M. FERRERI, Agent de Police," Saigon, July 9, 1917; Note Postale from Gouverneur Cochinchine to Président de la Commission Municipale, Cholon, Saigon, January 12, 1917.

<sup>78</sup> *Du service de l'agriculture à celui de la police. Les ingénieurs d'agriculture coloniale policiers en Indo-Chine* (Saigon: Impr. de J. Viet). N.d, but likely around 1934. Monograph available at the BNF in Paris.

shift for a European was only five hours, they worked both day and night and were typically assigned six and a quarter hours total service per day. Vietnamese agents, by contrast, were required to work eight hours per day.

For an example, in 1917 Nguyen Khac Minh—a *métis* man with French citizenship—took a provisional position in the Cholon police at a salary rate of 100 piastres per month. He joined the active service, which meant he would either be on foot patrol or part of the bicycle unit.<sup>79</sup> While Minh did not work especially long hours, they were irregular and included both day and nightshifts. His work schedule followed a three-day rotation. On day 1, he worked from 6:30-9:30 in the morning, and then again from 8:00-12:00 in the evening. The second day, he worked in the afternoon from 4:00 to 6:30, and again from midnight to 5:00 a.m. the following day. After getting off duty at 5:00 a.m. on day 3, he would have until the next morning to rest and recover, when he had to report for work at 6:30 a.m., starting the cycle over again. On day 1 he worked 7 hours, on day 2 he worked 2 ½ hours, and on day 3 he worked 5 hours, for a total of 14 ½ hours every 3 days. Minh did not get weekends or holidays off.

Potential recruits were deterred by the remoteness of the post and the tropics' reputation for death. As de Gantès writes, only after the 1890s did Cochinchina start to be seen as less of a "deathbed" or *mouroir*.<sup>80</sup> And this association of the colony with disease was not solely a product of the French imagination. Illnesses forced early retirement and resulted in agents missing work for days or months at a time. (While this is undoubtedly the case for the native cadre as well there is unfortunately less information available). Cohen writes that illness was a real problem in the colonies: "Retired colonial officials died seventeen years earlier than their contemporaries

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<sup>79</sup> TTLT II Goucoch IB24/1823, "Mutations générales du personnel européen des divers services locaux;" Contrat d'engagement entre le Gouverneur p.i. de la Cochinchine Rivet, représentant l'Administration locale de la Cochinchine, d'une part, Et NGUYEN-KHAC-MINH, naturalisé français d'autre part. November 1, 1917.

<sup>80</sup> De Gantès, "Administrer une colonie," 47.

who had occupied metropolitan posts."<sup>81</sup> Morlat describes how the French administration tried sending inexperienced functionaries to gain experience *in situ*, but diseases too often "took them away before they could reach important positions."<sup>82</sup> Premature death and career ending illnesses were a regular theme in the police personnel files. The service only employed a few dozen Europeans per city so had to have been affected by the sick leave and loss of many. For this reason, good health was considered vital to police work, and evaluations took into consideration not just performance but health and physical fitness.

Agent Louis Francois Victor Lanes, for instance, from Reims (Marne), died in Haiphong in 1907. He had been diagnosed with malaria but the proximate cause of death was ruled "*méningite encéphalite spécifique*." If he was only at the rank of agent, he had likely not been in the colony very long.<sup>83</sup> Paul Gueriment, *secrétaire hors classes* in the Saigon municipal police, died in 1924, and his death was ruled to be a "direct consequence" of his service, which exposed him to leprosy, "a disease endemic to the colony."<sup>84</sup> Armant Lacombe died in 1935 of complications related to malaria while on the ship returning to France for reasons of poor health.<sup>85</sup> Commissaire Belland died suddenly of an acute intestinal disease in Saigon in 1910. Phnom Penh Sûreté inspecteur Bernard Puyo, born 1889 in Vieilla Canton de Luz (Htes Pyrenees), was diagnosed with malaria in 1927, and in 1930 with chronic enterocolitis, among other ailments. In February, his doctors wrote that due to his deteriorating health Puyo needed to

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<sup>81</sup> Cohen, "The Lure of Empire," 23.

<sup>82</sup> Morlat, *Les Grands Commis*, 12.

<sup>83</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/464/2, Indo Chine Police, M. Lanes, Louis, Victor, François, 1907. Letter from GGI to Minister of colonies, "Avis de décès de M. Lanes," Saigon, January 14, 1908.

<sup>84</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/21, Police, Gueriment [Personnel File], Certificat de Cause de Décès, Hôpital Principal de Saigon, Docteur Besse, Saigon, December 30, 1924.

<sup>85</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/2511/1, Ministère des Colonies, Lacombe, Armant, Joseph, Maruis; Messageries Maritimes, September 15, 1935.

return to France with "extreme urgency." He died hours after his boat landed in Marseille in 1939. He was 50 years old.<sup>86</sup>

Henri Jude, from Réunion, died in 1919 of "intestinal hemorrhage" shortly after joining the Sûreté in Cholon as a temporary agent.<sup>87</sup> Agent of the 3rd class, Charles Francisque died in Saigon in 1919 at the age of 49 and the coroner deemed his death due to diabetic gangrene "worsened by service."<sup>88</sup> Emmanuel Lami, agent of the Saigon police, died in 1919 of the flu (*pneumonie grippale*) at the age of 43.<sup>89</sup> He left behind a wife and five children. Commissaire Charles Lentali (born 1871 in Ajaccio, Corsica) died in 1924 in Saigon following a long illness. His death certificate attributed his death to complications stemming from malaria and amoebic infection, "diseases endemic to the colony and which he was exposed to because of the obligations of his service."<sup>90</sup> Lentali's remains were repatriated to Corsica for burial. His widow returned to Ajaccio with their two children.<sup>91</sup>

Saigon agent François Viguiet left due to poor health and moved back to Montrejeau (Haute-Garonne) in 1907.<sup>92</sup> Alexandre François Bertoni, born in Calvi, Corsica in 1880, joined the Saigon police in 1904 at the age of 24.<sup>93</sup> That same year his *commissaire* wrote that he was a

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<sup>86</sup> CAOM, FM EE/II/4837/9, "Police de l'Indochine, Pujo, Bernard," Certificat Médicale, Hôpital Mixte de Phnom-Penh, May 2, 1939; Letter from Le Médecin Lt. Colonel TAMALET Médecin-Chef de l'Hôpital Mre d'Instruction Michel-Levy, to Chef de Service Colonial, Marseille, May 23, 1939.

<sup>87</sup> CAOM, GGI 30779, Police de Sûreté, dossier de M. JUDE, Agent temporaire de la Police de Sûreté en Cochinchine, Décédé le 17 Julliet 1919.

<sup>88</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/174/9, Indochina, Police, Charles Francisque Personnel file; Hôpital de Saigon, Certificat de cause de décès, signed by Dr. Roton, Jean, Saigon, November 13, 1919.

<sup>89</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/343/1, Lami, Emmanuel Agassami, letter from the Commissaire Central to the mayor of Saigon, July 11, 1919.

<sup>90</sup> CAOM GGI 50436 and EE/II/1682/17, Lentali's personnel file, "Certificat de causes de Décès", Saigon April 10, 1924; GGI to Ministère des Colonies, "A.s. du deces de M. Lentali (Charles)", Hanoi, May 3, 1924. CAOM GGI 50436, "Cimetière, Transfert des restes mortels, Lentali." For more on this police agent, see: CAOM, GGI 30870, Personnel, Lentali, Charles.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> CAOM, GGI 3834, "Police administrative (Cochinchine) Dossier Viguiet, Agent de police, réintégration, 1910."

<sup>93</sup> CAOM, GGI 30764, Mairie de Saigon, Secretariat General, Personnel, Bordereau des pièces continues dans le dossier de M. Bertoni, Alexandre François; Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Commissaire Lecoœur, Saigon, October, 1904.

young agent with promise, but suffered from "delicate health," and was "currently in the hospital."<sup>94</sup> In 1915, agent of the 4th class Mouttapa contracted cholera and had to be hospitalized, after which Lecoœur recommended that he be given the 29 days leave he requested in a letter. Mouttapa had been in the police since 1899 and had not taken any leave since 1912. The governor agreed but reduced the time to 15 days.<sup>95</sup> Both Commissaire Simard and his wife Rose Claire Chabaud became very ill, and Simard was diagnosed with malaria. They lost their oldest child, born in Saigon in 1882, when he was 18 months old.<sup>96</sup>

Longtime commissaire Tourillon committed suicide in Saigon in 1890 following a long illness.<sup>97</sup> Tourillon had earlier described, in 1880, the suffering he and his fellow Europeans endured as a result of police work, blaming the insalubrious tropical climate:

In Cochinchina the climate is debilitating and dangerous for the European, he should not go out under the hot sun during the day because he is liable to suffer from sunstroke which would prevail on him in minutes. The humidity of the nights is almost as dangerous....it gives him fevers which are difficult to cure and ruin his health forever. However, it is necessary that the police are vigilant both day and night and at all times to ensure the security of the inhabitants.<sup>98</sup>

Those who survived their illnesses were absent from the police service for long stretches. Vincent Albertini lost eighteen kilograms following illness in the colony and went home on leave. Born 1876 in Corte, Corsica he joined the administration in 1900. He became an agent of the 2nd class in the municipal police in 1905 but left in 1907, at the age of 31. In 1906, the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> CAOM, GGI 30728, Personnel file, dossier de Mouttapa, Ayassamy; Commissaire Central Lecoœur to the Saigon Mayor, "Objet: Demande de permission présentée par l'agent de 4e classe Mouttapa." July 6, 1915.

<sup>96</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/583/8, Grégoire Esprit Simard personnel file, police administrative, Indo-Chine, Letter from Madame Simard to the minister [of colonies] Remy, December 28, 1893; "Livret de Famille" Département des B. d. Rhône, Arrondissement d'Arles, Baux. Année 1874.

<sup>97</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/298/6 Police Administrative, Indo-Chine, Tourillon, Adolphe, Louis. Letter from the doctor, Saigon, October 24, 1890; Gouverneur général de l'Indochine Piquet to Sous-Secrétaire d'état des Colonies, "Avis des décès de M. Tourillon, Commissaire Central," Saigon, November 9, 1890.

<sup>98</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IB25/135(1), Commissaire de Police Tourillon "Police de Saigon: projet de réorganisation du service" Saigon, April 13, 1880; "Rapport au Conseil Coloniale, Police. Historique, Situation, Besoins," Le commissaire de police, chef du service Tourillon, Saigon, August 12, 1881.



doctor wrote that Albertini was stricken with "considerable troubles *dyspeptiques*." In 1890, Jean Baptiste Genèse left the Cochinchina police, where he had been employed as a PAJ agent of the 2nd class after only 16 months due to illness.<sup>99</sup> At the end of his 1890 convalescence in France he requested the termination of his contract with the police because he was still too ill to return to work. He was diagnosed with endemic tropical anemia.

As seen in chapter 1, policemen in poor health who "rendered little service" could be forced to retire, even if they needed to keep working to earn a living. Ernest Lucotte was forced to retire in 1922.<sup>100</sup> Born in Aignay le Duc (Côte d'Or) in 1877, he joined the Saigon police in 1898. He reached the rank of brigadier of the 2nd class in 1918, returned to France on leave in 1919. Although he requested to return to Vietnam in 1920 to retake his post, his request was denied due to poor health. He retired in 1922 at the age of 45.<sup>101</sup>

### **The Hazards of Police Work**

The police were responsible for responding to health and safety emergencies that exposed them to other dangers. Sous-brigadier Simon Paul Frédénucchi lost an eye while trying to remove a pack of dogs from the police barracks when the stick he was using to keep the dogs away from him broke.<sup>102</sup> Frédénucchi was born in 1876 in Calvi, Corsica and joined the police as an *agent temporaire* in 1906. In 1907 he asked to be retired for reasons of injury that made it impossible for him to continue working. While his *commissaire* agreed that he had been injured, it was not clear if it had occurred while carrying out an order.<sup>103</sup> Frédénucchi's request was denied.

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<sup>99</sup> CAOM, FM EE/II/1682/24, Genèse, Dossier de Congé, la police en Cochinchine. Letter from Piquet, Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, to M. le sous-secrétaire d'état des colonies, Saigon April 30, 1890.

<sup>100</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1682/21, Indochine Police, Lucotte, Ernest, Auguste. Note for the director of personnel, from the Medecin Inspecteur General.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> CAOM, GGI 30774 Personnel file "Simon Paul Frédénucchi," Letter from Le Commissaire de Police to Monsieur le Maire de la ville Cholon, Cholon, December 12, 1910. Although this letter dates from 1910, the incident in question occurred on August 8, 1907.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

In 1912, *L'Avenir du Tonkin* wrote about a European agent who, while working alone at night, surprised thieves robbing a house. While attempting to intervene, he was hit hard on the head with a lead pipe and had to be taken to the hospital. He had managed to shoot one of the men, but they escaped. In 1913, Vietnamese PAJ agent Pham Van Chan died from wounds he received "under ordered service during the recent attack committed by Philippin Amada Santos." The GGI awarded him a medal of honor (*en argent de Ire classe*) and Rivet and Lecoer presented it to the agent in a Saigon hospital before he died.<sup>104</sup>

As representatives of the colonial state and agents of political repression, policemen were also main targets of anti-colonial violence. The more the police became involved in repression, the more they were targeted in the 1930s and during and after World War II. French Inspector François Legrand was killed after being shot in the back in 1931 during a police operation attempting to stop a communist demonstration. There are meanwhile many examples of Vietnamese agents meeting untimely ends in the 1930s. Naturalized French inspector, Maurice Maitam, was assassinated by the Vietminh in 1945. In 1951—five years into the war—the Indochina police inaugurated a monument at a Saigon cemetery "in the memory of our comrades who died in service."<sup>105</sup> Prior to World War II, however, policemen were much more likely to have been casualties of disease than violence.

### **Discipline and Prestige: "An administration worthy and deserving of public consideration"**

If the leadership regularly took note of the health of their French agents, they were similarly concerned with moral character. Concern for discipline was widespread in internal correspondence, as were the plentiful instances of bad behavior. In 1915, French agent Coatanéa was reprimanded for causing a scene and making death threats in a restaurant against Truong

<sup>104</sup> *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, January 8, 1913.

<sup>105</sup> TTLT II, Thủ hiến Nam Việt, 2604D 30-272, Hồ sơ về lễ khánh thành đài kỷ niệm công chức và cán bộ cảnh sát chế vì công vụ năm 1951.

Van Phung, a Vietnamese man who turned out to be a secretary at the Cholon town hall.<sup>106</sup> Both were having dinner at separate tables in a Chinese restaurant in Cholon when Coatanéa suddenly stood up and demanded to see the papers (*carte d'impôt*) of Phung, sitting the next table over. Phung asked Coatanéa—not in uniform—who he was, and after learning he was a police agent Phung reportedly responded: "show me your card and I will present mine."<sup>107</sup> Exasperated, Coatanéa went on a tirade in the restaurant against Phung and Vietnamese people in general, yelling (in French) "I don't care if you are secretary to the Cholon mayor or [governor] Roume." He threatened to arrest Phung and then turned his attack to the rest of the room: "annamites, French subjects, you are all pigs, spies, if it were up to me I would do you all in [*zigouiller*]." He further threatened to put Phung up against a wall and "shoot him in the head."<sup>108</sup> Phung filed a complaint, and although Coatanéa denied the incident, three additional witnesses including the restaurant owner attested to Coatanéa's erratic and unprovoked behavior.

Coatanéa's commissaire wrote after reading the report that his agent had very likely been drunk. Coatanéa received a "severe reprimand recorded in his dossier" for his outburst. He already had reprimands from September and October 1914. The police could not demote him any farther however as he was already at the lowest rank, and firing him, his *commissaire* wrote, "seems maybe a little severe for the circumstances."<sup>109</sup> On another occasion, Coatanéa tried to

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<sup>106</sup> CAOM, GGI 35518, Police de l'Indochine, Dossier de M. Coatanéa, Yves, Jean ; Letter Albert TRICON, Procureur de la République près le Tribunal de 1re Instance de Saigon, to Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Saigon June 24, 1915; Procès-verbal, Constatant une enquête dans les agissements de l'agent Coattanéa [sic]" Commissariat de Police de la Sûreté. Signed: Etievant, Louis-Alexis, Commissaire; Letter from Truong van Phung, Secrétaire à la Mairie de Cholon, to the Procureur de la République, Saigon, Cholon, June 7, 1915.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> CAOM, GGI 35518, "Dossier de M. Coatanéa;" letter from le Chef de la Section du Personnel to the Governor, July 1, 1915.

pick a fight with a European named Roussel.<sup>110</sup> In 1914, Commissaire Poillot requested that Coatanéa be transferred for the sake of "the honor of my service."<sup>111</sup> Coatanéa nonetheless remained in the police until his death in 1927, at which point he had reached the rank of *commissaire* of the 3rd class.

Agents like Coatanéa worried the police leadership because of the idea that careless, undignified actions reflected poorly on the police's image. French agents showed up to work drunk, played hooky, slept on the job, got into fights, were willfully insubordinate, wore sloppy uniforms, and were quick to use violence with both the public and with each other. In one of many such examples, in 1910 Commissaire Lecoeur complained that his French agents were "totally ignorant" about the "outward signs of respect with regard to their superiors [*chefs*] and to authorities" and badly needed instruction in how to treat the public as well.<sup>112</sup> A Tonkin *commissaire* wrote in 1908 of the need to punish a European agent because of the larger discipline problem: "if we want to have a police truly dignified of that name and that cannot give rise to criticism [we must] show no mercy towards these agents who by their misbehavior or their bad manner of serving discredit an administration worthy and deserving of public consideration."<sup>113</sup>

The way the administration handled disciplinary cases illustrates that the idea of prestige (or dignity, respect, honor) is key to understanding the broader underlying causes of abuse in the police. The same logic of prestige that brought cases like Coatanéa's to the attention of French

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<sup>110</sup> CAOM, GGI 35518, "Dossier de M. Coatanéa;" Letter from Commissaire de police Poillot to Commissaire Central de police Saigon, "Demande de déplacement en raison de sa conduite, de l'agent Coatanéa. Cholon, September 19, 1914; Statement from agent Ferréri, Extrait du Rapport, September 12, 1914.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222. "Fusion des polices;" Rapport du Commissaire Central p.i. Lecoeur to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine sur les réformes à apporter aux divers services de police chargés d'assurer l'ordre et la sécurité publique," Saigon, November 1910.

<sup>113</sup> CAOM, GGI 3850, "Dossier Ferriol," Letter from Commissaire central in Tonkin to the RST, Hanoi, September 4, 1908.

superiors (because he threatened "the honor of my service") also prevented most white agents from experiencing real ramifications. At the same time, violence can be interpreted as a crude attempt to restore authority in response to a breakdown in both police prestige and racial hierarchy. Coatanéa lashed out when his authority was questioned, when Phung turned the question around and asked to see his identification. Expectations of respect and deference in the police were compounded by the colonial hierarchy; it is much more difficult to imagine Coatanéa spontaneously demanding to see the papers of a Frenchman eating dinner the next table over. In questioning him, Phung challenged not just Coatanéa as a policeman but as a white Frenchman. As is clear in the many cases explored below, French policemen exploited their low positions of relative power vis-à-vis non-Europeans, and especially non-European women, and that they did so according to the colonial order of things. At the same time, lashing out, as Coatanéa did, speaks to an underlying insecurity in their authority.

Agents faced reprimands, but rarely serious consequences. The levels of discipline available to a policeman's superiors were, in ascending order of severity, 1) reprimand (*blâme*); 2) loss of leave from 1 to 5 days, 3) official warning, 4) official warning recorded in personnel file, 5) demotion in class for at least 6 months, 6) annulment or demotion in rank, and 7) termination.<sup>114</sup> Agents also sometimes lost a few days pay. Employment laws protecting Europeans made it difficult to dismiss poor or mediocre agents and mayors and *commissaires* had to seek approval from the governor (in Cochinchina) or the RST (in Tonkin). A committee then had to be convened to review the case. Except in truly egregious instances of corruption or violence, the committees usually reduced the penalty to suspension, demotion, or a warning. Firings were rare.

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<sup>114</sup> "Arrêté portant réorganisation du personnel de la Police municipale des villes de Hanoi et de Haiphong," Albert Sarraut, Hanoi, le 17 janvier 1913, *Journal Officiel de l'Indochine Française*, January 23, 1913, p. 113-118. Found in CAOM, Sarraut archive privée, 9PA5/1.

One striking aspect about police abuses is their pettiness. French agent Boonen, as discussed in the introduction, used his position to demand champagne at the Chinese pagoda in Haiphong (for which he was eventually punished). At around the same time in Cholon, in 1910 agent of the 3rd class Brun used his police status to extort chickens and ducks from Chinese women to give to his Vietnamese girlfriend to help set her up as a poultry farmer.<sup>115</sup> By the time he was disciplined, Brun had acquired around thirty ducks and chickens with the help of his Vietnamese agents. Brun threatened Huynh thi Lac and Huynh thi Thong with an investigation if they did not "donate" the birds. When they refused, Brun fined one of the women one piastre for letting her flock enter the street. Brun then arranged to buy four ducks from the women for 2.40 piastres and sent agent Nguyen Van Soi to fetch them. Soi insisted that they would not take his money and Brun later claimed the ducks had been a gift.

As part of the investigation, police *secrétaire* Duval visited the girlfriend of Brun, where he found the chickens that Brun then claimed to have purchased at the market. The *commissaire* sided with his French agent, but the mayor overruled him and gave Brun a "*blâme simple*." Brun was forced to pay the 2.40 piastres for the four ducks.<sup>116</sup> At the time, his monthly salary as an agent of the 3rd class was only about 109 piastres per month, so thirty ducks would have been a major purchase. Stories like these do not fit with the idea of colony as "bourgeois fantasy land," at least for policemen. Individuals like Brun exerted small claims to privilege within the framework of racial hierarchy, but the nature of their abuses suggests the police's low social standing in the colonial hierarchy.

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<sup>115</sup> CAOM, GGI 35515, Brun, agent de 3e classe. Puntion. Dossier retiré par application de la loi d'amnistie; Decision signed by Le Maire de Cholon Drouhet, Cholon, October 4, 1910; Letter from Commissaire de police to Maire de la ville, Cholon, Cholon, September 3, 1910; Procès-verbaux including witness statements, signed by Commissaire Maroseill, October 1, 1910; Complaint to the city of Cholon [in the file in both Vietnamese and French translated from the original] from Huynh thu Lac and Huynh thi Thong, Cholon, September 29, 1910.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

Saigon agent André Marcel Boucly was disciplined for stealing a seized gun, an empty ink well, as well as bicycle parts at the station and other items "of little value."<sup>117</sup> His superior Belland wrote privately that "it is regrettable to see such lack of scruples in a police agent." Boucly was born in 1879 in Paris and served in the military from 1901 to 1907. He joined the municipal police in 1907, at the age of 28.<sup>118</sup> In April 1910, he was caught stealing from the police, and in December he was again under examination, this time for his involvement in (and likely instigation of) a bar fight.<sup>119</sup> Boucly had caused a scene at the *café de la terrasse* that ended only with the intervention of police from another district. Having drinks during his shift at 2:30 a.m. with his friend Carpentier (a worker at the *usine des eaux*) and others, Boucly ended up hitting Louvrier (a musician) over the head with a bottle. All were very drunk at this point. The police agent on duty nearby, Breton, arrived at the bar but was unable to restore order. He had to solicit help from police inspecteur Leonardi who successfully intervened but was also injured by Boucly. Calm was re-established around 3:40 a.m.

His superiors wrote that Boucly was prone to drunkenness and regrettable actions. The Cochinchina governor wrote that he was had a "bit of a violent character" but nonetheless showed "initiative and intelligence." Despite the delay in promotion due to disciplinary actions, he was promoted and in 1919, he became a *secrétaire* of the 3rd class. In August 1921, his *commissaire* wrote that he was "Intelligent...possessing real professional qualities, unfortunately

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<sup>117</sup> CAOM, GGI C 35521, Personnel des services civils de l'Indochine, Enquêtes-sanctions disciplinaires du Dossier de M. Boucly; Commissaire Central Belland to the Saigon Mayor, March 29, 1910 "a.s. [au sujet] de l'agent de 3e classe Boucly;" Commissaire Paganel to Commissaire Central Belland, Saigon, March 28, 1910; Boucly, André, Marcel, to the Commissaire de Police du 3eme arrondissement, Saigon, March 28, 1910.

<sup>118</sup> CAOM, GGI C 35521, Dossier de M. Boucly; Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Saigon, signed le Commissaire Central, the mayor, and the governor p.i. de la Cochinchine, August 15, 1921; Dossier personnel de M. Boucly, secrétaire de la police addressed from the GGI to the Gouverneur Cochinchine, Hanoi, July 25, 1921; Letter to the Mayor of Saigon, Décembre 21, 1910.

<sup>119</sup> CAOM, GGI C 35521, Dossier de M. Boucly; Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1921. Letter from Commissaire Central p.i. Lecoœur to le Maire de la Ville de Saigon, "A.s. d'une faute grave commise par l'agent BOUCLY," December, 12, 1910.

marred by a deplorable mentality. Undisciplined and with bad faith concerning his superiors; provocateur and rough [*grossier*] with his subordinates; malicious [*malveillant*] towards the public."<sup>120</sup> He had been sentenced earlier that summer by the Saigon court for attacking a Vietnamese seaman (*matelot*) Vo Van Thai, "willfully and without lawful reason" during an investigation, for which he was charged in criminal court.<sup>121</sup> He was sentenced to a 100-franc fine, which was immediately suspended. Also in 1921, he attempted the *commissaire* exam but failed the Vietnamese language test.<sup>122</sup> The police suggested posting him to Phnom Penh "where the personnel of police *secrétaires* in numerically insufficient."<sup>123</sup>

As Boucly's file suggest, not all ill discipline took the form of calculated personnel advancement. There was a real sense of posturing and entitlement in these cases. More than a few agents disobeyed and disrespected their superiors and acted unprofessionally in public. In 1909, Cholon's agent of the 3rd class Simon Paul Frédenucci and agent of the 2nd class Flose were suspended for four days for fighting each other.<sup>124</sup> Henri Bourdenet of the Saigon police was sanctioned (*blamé*) in 1911 for hitting fellow police agent Dabes-Poutrou (a subordinate described by Commissaire Lecoeur as an alcoholic in the report) in a personal dispute. Bourdenet maintained that he did not regret teaching Dabes-Poutrou a "lesson."<sup>125</sup> In 1926, Sûreté inspecteur Worthington was disciplined for threatening his commissaire, apparently over a question of salary, the offending threat being: "He who would cut my bread, there will be six

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<sup>120</sup> CAOM, GGI C 35521, Dossier de M. Boucly; Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1921.

<sup>121</sup> CAOM, GGI C 35521, Dossier de M. Boucly; "Du 11 Juin 1921, Arrêt de Police Correctionnelle, Ministère Public contre BOUCLEY (André-Marcel), expédition pour M. le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine.

<sup>122</sup> CAOM, GGI C 35521, Dossier de M. Boucly; Note from Le Chef du Service des Affaires Politiques Hanoi, July 6, 1921

<sup>123</sup> CAOM, GGI C 35521, Dossier de M. Boucly; Note from Le Chef du Service des Affaires Politiques Hanoi, July 10, 1921, to Chef du Service du Personnel au Gouverneur général.

<sup>124</sup> CAOM, GGI C 30774 Personnel file Simon Paul Frédenucci. Decision signed by the Mayor of Cholon, April 1, 1909.

<sup>125</sup> CAOM, GGI 30762, Personel Dossier Bourdenet, Letter from Bourdenet to Commissaire Leceour, January 2, 1911.



bullets for him."<sup>126</sup> Worthington was also brought before a review board for negligence at his post at the docks where he failed to show up for his shift and left an indigenous agent alone to carry out the boarding operations for a departing vessel.<sup>127</sup>

Police personnel files include many of these kinds of incidents, which concerned the leadership primarily because of their threat to police image. Antoine Bouffier, for instance, joined the Saigon police as an agent of the 4th class in January 1911, six months after his liberation from the military. In 1912, Bouffier was sanctioned because his offenses were no longer "tolerable" and "harm the prestige of the police."<sup>128</sup> He was disciplined (*blâme avec inscription*) for reasons not given in his file, and again in May 1912 for poor service, including showing up to the station drunk, and also for an incident in which he called in sick but instead went drinking with his friends. Once, while Bouffier was off duty, sous-brigadier Maroselli was approached by a rickshaw driver asking for help. A drunken European had passed out in his rickshaw and had been there for several hours and he needed his rickshaw back. At that moment, agent Bouffier happened to pass by and his superior ordered him to escort the man to the police station for help. Bouffier refused.<sup>129</sup> In his review of the insubordination charge, Lecoecur wrote of a broader problem with the European personnel: "certain of our police agents have an unfortunate tendency to lose interest in their service."<sup>130</sup> He inflicted Bouffier with delayed

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<sup>126</sup> "Celui qui coupera mon pain, il y a encore six balles pour lui."

<sup>127</sup> TTLT II Goucoch, IIB57/255(7), "Conseil de Discipline- Worthington, Inspecteur de Sûreté 1926," Arrêté: Le Gouverneur général p.i. de l'Indochine, Le Commandeur de la Legion d'Honneur, Hanoi, November 23, 1926.

<sup>128</sup> CAOM, GGI 35523, "Enquêtes-Sanctions Disciplinaires du Dossier de M. Bouffier, Antoine Marie, Agent de 2e classe de la Police urbaine." Letter from Chef du 2e Bureau Burquet to the Saigon Mayor, Saigon, May 28, 1912; Letter from the Commissaire Central to the Saigon Mayor, "A.S. de l'agent BOUFFIER, Antoine, de la police municipale," Saigon, May 17, 1912; Note from Commissaire de Police Farge, Saigon May 14, 1912.

<sup>129</sup> CAOM, GGI 35523, "Dossier de M. Bouffier." Letter from Chef du 2e Bureau Burquet to the Saigon Mayor, Saigon, May 28, 1912; Letter from the Commissaire Central to the Saigon Mayor, "A.S. de l'agent BOUFFIER, Antoine, de la police municipale," Saigon, May 17, 1912; Note from Commissaire Farge, Saigon May 14, 1912.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

promotion. He was still only a low-ranking agent of the 2nd class of the police urbaine in January 1921 when he was again disciplined for unspecified reasons.

Agents Ferriol and Rizio were among the few eventually fired for their bad behavior, but both had violated the law repeatedly. The nature of their offenses also show clearly the ways agents asserted privilege vis-à-vis persons below them in the hierarchy. Paul Ferriol was hired in Hanoi in 1907 as an agent of the 3rd class in the PAJ.<sup>131</sup> He remained in the police until January 1909. Ferriol's offenses included being habitually drunk on the job, missing shifts, showing up late, threatening other agents, causing scenes in bars, disregarding traffic laws, and assaulting a Vietnamese man by the name of Le Nhu Phuong, who filed a complaint against Ferriol in May 1908.<sup>132</sup> On another occasion in August 31, 1908, he threatened his superior while in a state of drunkenness.<sup>133</sup> In 1909, his *commissaire* finally requested his firing "habits of intemperance and ill-discipline." The last straw had been an incident involving Ferriol, his Vietnamese girlfriend ("congai" in the report), and a rickshaw driver. After a rickshaw driver pulled the couple around town for three and a half hours, Ferriol offer him only a piece of bread as payment. He and his girlfriend then chased and threw rocks at the man, broke the top of the rickshaw, and when he fled, the Vietnamese woman took the rickshaw home with her. The French company that employed the rickshaw driver filed a complaint on his behalf and Ferriol eventually paid them 3

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<sup>131</sup> CAOM, GGI 3850, "Police Administrative, Dossier Ferriol, agent de 3e classe, (révocation) 1909." Commissaire Central in Tonkin to GGI (Directeur du Cabinet et du Personnel) Hanoi, Hanoi January 9, 1909; Arrêté signed December 24, 1908 by Klobukowski; Letter from the RST to GGI, "Objet: Projet d'arrêté portant révocation de M. FERRIOL Agent de police administrative et judiciaire," December 11, 1908; Commissaire Central in Tonkin to the RST Hanoi Décembre 9, 1908. Letter from Ferriol to the Commissaire Central, Hanoi, October 17, 1908.

<sup>132</sup> CAOM, GGI 3850, "Dossier Ferriol," Relevé des rapports et plaintes formulées contre l'agent Ferriol de la police administrative et judiciaire depuis son admission dans l'Administration. (Covers incidences from 1907-1908).

<sup>133</sup> CAOM, GGI 3850, "Dossier Ferriol," Complaint from Verneuil and Pottecher, Pousse-Pousse Saigonnais, to M. le Commissaire du 1er arrond. Hanoi, December 9, 1908. Letter from Commissaire central in Tonkin to the RST Hanoi, September 4, 1908.

piastres in damages (his salary at the time was 102 piastres per month).<sup>134</sup> He was fired shortly thereafter on account of his already thick disciplinary record.

At around the same time in Saigon a Frenchman named Rizio joined the municipal police.<sup>135</sup> Shortly after joining as an entry-level agent in 1909, Rizio lost two days of pay for "acts of pointless violence against a European prostitute," and two months later he was penalized for being found asleep, during a night shift, on the table of a money changer in the market. In 1910, Rizio was severely reprimanded for "violation of home and injury" of an Indian man, Soupprayah, and the following year his superiors officially reprimanded him, again, for sleeping on duty. In April 1912, he was punished for "abandoning his post," and again in September for wrongfully arresting a Vietnamese woman. Finally, in 1913, Rizio showed up to his post drunk. A board of inquiry dismissed him shortly thereafter. In both cases, their superiors, upon firing them, made a point of noting that their uniforms were habitually untidy.

Asserting colonial privilege could of course involve substantial monetary gain. Police impunity, combined with material expectations about colonial recompense, facilitated corruption both large and small. In addition to complaints about extortion, the colonial police leadership profited by protecting gambling dens in particular. Within the space of just a few years, all three *commissaires central* in Indochina were implicated in separate corruption cases. In 1908, the *procureur général* in Hanoi wrote the RST about his alarming investigation into corruption by commissaire Brault and brigadier Valette. Both were found to have been involved in protecting local gambling syndicates and Brault had borrowed or extorted a substantial amount of money from various people in Hanoi. The RST recommended demoting Brault, post haste, for the

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, III59/N81(4), "Ville de Saigon, Personnel européen de la Police municipale 1912;" Letter from Directeur des Bureaux to Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, "Licenciement d'un agent européen de la police municipale." Saigon, April 16, 1913.

reason that "this functionary...has lost prestige and authority which must be attached to his position" because of "his repeated dishonorable behavior (*compromissions*) with his subordinates and certain citizens (*administrés*)."<sup>136</sup> Brault and Vallette were suspended for ten months.<sup>137</sup> Both were demoted, although most of the Brault's sanctions were amnestied.<sup>138</sup> What is most notable about this case is that they were pursued by the administration because their crimes had become public knowledge via the colonial press. The RST wrote, alarmed, in August 1908 that in light of such blatant complicity in crime, "a purge [in the police] is necessary."<sup>139</sup> Brault however remained in the police until he retired in 1914.

In Phnom Penh, the general prosecutor tried to transfer Commissaire Dupuis in 1903 due to egregious corruption and complicity in gambling.<sup>140</sup> Neang Huoi, a woman who ran a popular gambling den was also Dupuis girlfriend and the mother of his two children. The prosecutor complained that because Neang Huoi was the "woman" of the police chief, she was immune to the law. Dupuis nonetheless remained in the police was promoted to commissaire central in Phnom Penh in 1910 where he earned 13,000 francs a year starting in 1910.<sup>141</sup> In Saigon in April 1910, Commissaire Central Belland (of rubber plantation fame) was accused of taking kickbacks from a gambling den in Cholon. He died a few months later. In one of the more serious cases,

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<sup>136</sup> CAOM, GGI 3872, Police administrative (Tonkin) "A.s. du service de la police du Tonkin et des faits reprochés à M.M. Brault et Valette." Procureur Général, Chef du Service Judiciaire en Indo-Chine Michel, to the RST in Hanoi, Hanoi August 4, 1908. TTLT I, RST 21482 RST to GGI," Objet: Au sujet du service de la Police," Morel, Hanoi, August 15, 1908; GGI to RST, Hanoi, "A.s. du service de la police au Tonkin et des faits reprochés à M. Brault. " Saigon, August 27, 1908.

<sup>137</sup> CAOM, GGI 3872, "Des faits reprochés à M.M. Brault et Valette." Dossier de l'enquête M. Brault, Commissaire Central de Police p.i. à Hanoi, sent to the Gouverneur général de l'Indochine Hanoi, August 5, 1908; CAOM, GGI 30726, Police Urbaine, Valette, Louis. Personnel dossier. CAOM, FM, EE/II/378/3, Dossier Personnel of Brault, Gabriel, Anatole, Police.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. For more about this case see also: CAOM, GGI 30726, Police Urbaine, Valette, Louis. Personnel dossier.

<sup>139</sup> CAOM, GGI 3872, "Des faits reprochés à M.M. Brault et Valette." Letter from the RST, Hanoi, August 14, 1908.

<sup>140</sup> CAOM, GGI 3859, Personnel file Dupuis; "A.s. de M. Dupuis Commissaire central de police à Pnom-Penh [sic] 1903. "Police Administrative—Cambodge. Letter from Daurand-Forgues, Procureur Général p.i., Chef de Service Judiciaire en Indo-Chine, to M. le RSC à Phnom Penh, Saigon, May 18, 1903.

<sup>141</sup> CAOM, GGI 3859, Personnel file, Dupuis, "a.s. de M. Dupuis Commissaire central de police à Pnom-Penh [sic] 1903." Police Administrative—Cambodge. Arrêté, Hanoi, March 9, 1910, GGI Picquie. Letter from Paul Luce, RSC to GGI, Phnom-Penh, November 11, 1909.

Saigon's Commissaire Albertini went to trial in France in 1888 for corruption. He and fellow policeman Pavé were acquitted.

The cavalier behavior of agents did not disappear after the 1917 police reforms. In 1927, Haiphong Mayor Eckert complained that his European police agents needed to be taught a "sense of discipline."<sup>142</sup> In 1939, sous-brigadier Rauzier of the Haiphong municipal police was accused of trying to sneak into the cinema with his family.<sup>143</sup> When he failed, he threatened the owner of the cinema, who filed a complaint. In September, he was found "deep asleep" while on duty and on a separate occasion refused to carry out orders. A disciplinary committee dismissed the charges in 1940. Even more revealing about personnel at this late date, after Vichy GGI Jean Decoux put Sûreté chief Paul Arnoux in charge of the entire police force in 1941, among Arnoux's first actions was to take advantage of his new powers to fire French policemen he deemed too sick, prone to drink, or otherwise "un-desirable officers."<sup>144</sup>

Serious transgressions could not always be overlooked. Kérébel, discussed in chapter 1, shot two Vietnamese victims and was immediately fired. Another police agent, Delices (no first name given), an Indian agent of the 5th class in the Cochinchina urban police, was convicted in 1917 of murdering fellow police agent Roch. Delice was sentenced to five years in prison and had to pay 1,500 in damages.<sup>145</sup> In another case of brutality that alarmed the administration, in

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<sup>142</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine de Hanoi et Haiphong de la Sûreté du Tonkin 1926-29;" "Monsieur L. F. Eckert, Administrateur-Maire à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin Hanoi, "Objet: Réorganisation de la police urbaine." Haiphong, September 13, 1927.

<sup>143</sup> CAOM, RSTNF 5, "Service ou Bureau Conseil de discipline, Formulaire;" Letter from Rivoal to GGI, "Personnel, A/S conseil de discipline concernant M. Rauzier." March 29, 1940.

<sup>144</sup> TTLT II, Phủ Thống Đốc Nam Kỳ, 1C 09-11, "Đặt qui ông sau đây trong trường hợp nghỉ việc đặc biệt ở Sở Cảnh sát: Goumelle, Bouger Michel năm 1942," Note pour Monsieur le Gouverneur (Bureau du Personnel) from Le Chef Local des Services de Police Arnoux, Saigon, August 4, 1941; TTLT II Phủ Thống Đốc Nam Kỳ, 1C 5-37, Hồ sơ về việc ông Gourmelon cựu thám sát viên cảnh sát bị cách chức và điều trị tại bệnh viện năm 1941," Note pour Monsieur le Gouvernement (Bureau du Personnel), from Le Chef Local des Services de Police Paul Arnoux (Contrôleur général de 1ere classe de la Sûreté Générale) Saigon October 1, 1941; Note pour M le Gouv (Cabinet) Le Chef Local des Services de Police Arnoux, Saigon October 8, 1941.

<sup>145</sup> CAOM, GGI 30769, Delice personnel file; Letter from Goucoch to GGI, Saigon, October 12, 1907," A.S. de M. DELICES Agent de 5e classe de la Police Urbaine, condamné par la Cour Criminelle de Saigon à 5 ans de réclusion

July 1922 Saigon sous-brigadier Paul Hugon was investigated by the criminal court for an attack on a Vietnamese man carried out in the course of "his regular duties as an agent of the public force."<sup>146</sup> Although the exact details are not in his files, according to Prosecutor Sice, "the violence was carried out with a real brutality, with the aid of a whip (*nerf de boeuf*) and without any legitimate motive."<sup>147</sup> A complaint about a second serious attack on another man by the name of Tran Van Vang was also filed in July. Hugon had only been employed in the police for four months. His commissaire wrote apologetically to the tribunal that Hugon acted often "without thinking" and had an "easily irritable temperament." The Governor considered Hugon mentally unbalanced. Someone else asked why the police would keep him employed: "should we wait until he has killed another Vietnamese?"<sup>148</sup>

Yet all Frenchmen involved in the case proved reluctant to sanction Hugon and instead moved to soften any repercussions. They were uneasy about his crimes, but attributed his problems to injuries suffered during his decorated military service. Prior to joining the police in March, Hugon served in France, Morocco, and Tonkin, and fought in World War I in the Belgian theater and at Verdun. Hugon was injured in the war by shrapnel and diagnosed with traumatic epilepsy. Hugon was in the end not fired, but was fined 200 piastres for the attack and also forced to pay the hospital bills for his second victim, Tran Van Vang.<sup>149</sup> At the same time, those

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et à 1.500\$ [piastres] de dommages intérêts pour meurtre"; Arrêté signed by Gouverneur général de l'Indochine A. Sarraut in Saigon, November 1, 1917.

<sup>146</sup> CAOM, GGI 35511, "Pièces du dossier sanctions disciplinaires de M. Hugon, Sous-brigadier de polices urbaines, retirées par application de la loi d'amnistie de 3 janvier 1925." Le Chef du Service du Personnel to Le Chef du Service du Contentieux et du Contrôle administratif au Gouvernement général. Hanoi, October 31, 1923.

<sup>147</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/112, "Pièces divers relatives au personnel de police 1919-1929;" Le Procureur de la République près le Tribunal de 1ere instance de Saigon à Monsieur le Procureur général Président la cour d'appel, Saigon, Saigon August 28, 1922.

<sup>148</sup> CAOM, GGI 35511, "Pièces du dossier sanctions disciplinaires de M. Hugon," Letter from le Chef du Service du Personnel to Le Chef du Service du Contentieux et du Contrôle administratif au Gouvernement général. Hanoi, October 31, 1923.

<sup>149</sup> CAOM, GGI 35511, Pièces du dossier sanctions disciplinaires de M. Hugon, Sous-brigadier de polices urbaines, retirées par application de la loi d'amnistie de 3 janvier 1925; Letter from the GGI Robin to Goucoch, Saigon, "A.S.

involved cautiously tried to prevent future disaster: the Goucoch wrote the GGI that Hugon should be let go, or the GGI should at least move him to another region (*pays*).<sup>150</sup>

### **Violence, Race, and Prestige in the Plural**

In these cases the idea of "prestige," and its close relatives "honor," and "dignity," remained central to the rules surrounding police discipline. Boonen's conduct at the Chinese pagoda required action because his behavior had "done well to diminish the French police in the eyes of the Asians."<sup>151</sup> Coatanéa's and Brault's main offenses was that their misbehaviors were public, exposing the French police to "scandal." What prestige and dignity meant precisely in the colonial context and how they worked is not easy to pin down.<sup>152</sup> Historians have examined the efforts to which colonizers went to manufacture and preserve the prestige of whiteness in the colonies. Anxiety about prestige was, at its roots, anxiety about class divisions within the European community, as well as a gendered, male-dominant imagining of French conquest. As Mizutani writes for India, the main concern among upper class whites was that "the increasingly visible pauperization of the domiciled [*métis* and poor whites] might disgrace white racial prestige in the eyes of native subjects."<sup>153</sup> Sager argues that poor whites in Indochina were a clear affront to prestige, which is why the state made efforts to replace them with cheaper

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de M. Hugon, Sous brigadier stagiaire de Polices Urbaines," Hanoi, November 1923. Letter from Goucoch to GGI, "A.s. d'une condamnation encourue par le sous-brigadier de Police HUGON " October, 2, 1923.

<sup>150</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/112, "Pièces divers relatives au personnel de police 1919-1929," Gouverneur de la Cochinchine à Monsieur le Gouverneur général de l'Indochine (Service du Personnel) Hanoi, "A.s. des faits reprochés à M. Hugon sous-brigadier stagiaire de la police urbaine," Saigon, no date.

<sup>151</sup> CAOM, GGI 35522, "Dossier 'Sanction disciplinaires' retiré du dossier de M. Boonen agent des Polices Urbaines par application de la loi d'amnistie. Blâmes;" Letter from Commissaire Plagne to the Haiphong Mayor, "A.s. de agent Boonen," Haiphong, August 16, 1911.

<sup>152</sup> As Stoler writes on the problem of using prestige ("not a stable signifier that worked this way or that") as a self-evident category, it is more productive to ask: "why the category was so resonant and relevant, what sentiments it mobilized, and what conditions and circumstances were thought to put this *thing* called 'white prestige' in jeopardy?" Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, 54, 207-208.

<sup>153</sup> Satoshi Mizutani, "Historicising Whiteness: From the Case of Late Colonial India" ACRAWSA e-journal 2, 1 2006; Satoshi Mizutani, *The Meaning of White: Race, Class, and the 'Domiciled Community' in British India 1858-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Vietnamese recruits.<sup>154</sup> Indigenization was also tied to colonial legitimation, a semi-step towards self-rule under French tutelage.<sup>155</sup>

The police remained relatively immune to indigenization efforts, in part because of the importance of policing in the eyes of the administration but also due to concerns about loyalty in Vietnam's security institutions. Those at the bottom could not be so easily replaced also because Europeans were always needed to police Europeans. In 1926, GGI Alexandre Varenne listed the police and Sûreté among the services in the Indochina administration explicitly reserved for the French. An enclosed document (not dated) specifies that the rank of *commissaire de police* was reserved exclusively for "*Français*."<sup>156</sup>

Prestige was tied to notions of proper behavior and a narrow definition of Frenchness that viewed colonization as a respectable bourgeois project, which did not correspond to the realities of colonial immigration, as seen in chapter 1. There were in fact multiple "prestiges" at work in colonial parlance that overlap but are not necessarily interchangeable: of whiteness, of Frenchness, of the European, of the colonial state, and so on. Considering the possibility of co-existing prestiges helps explain the slipperiness of the term itself. It also gave prestige an elasticity that made it durable because it could be applied to different contexts in defense of an imprecise and changing ideal of civility.

A short but revealing story in the Tonkin press highlights some of the key aspects of multiple prestiges relevant to understanding why this was the main issue surrounding police discipline and police violence. In 1912, *L'Avenir du Tonkin* bemoaned a recent, unfortunate

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<sup>154</sup> Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina," 160-168. Class was central to white colonial identity. Paul Sager stresses, for Vietnam, that white men who failed to maintain a "certain standard of 'respectability'" were not strictly external to the state; French colonial state employees met this criteria, which led, in his argument, to indigenization efforts which attempted to replace class (poor whites) with race (educated Vietnamese) in the colonial bureaucracy.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 269, Dossier 2371 (1), "Tableau indiquant les emplois réservés en Indo-Chine aux Français," n.d., no author; in same file with "Dépêche Télégraphique," [also on the subject of limiting indigenization] from GGI Varenne to Colonies, Paris, Hanoi, Febraury 13, 1926.



spectacle in Haiphong. The previous Saturday morning, the newspaper complained, white European soldiers could be found on display performing manual labor and transporting furniture including beds, chairs, and "other things," by hand on the docks. Meanwhile, on the sidewalk "annamites [Vietnamese] snickered [*ricanaient*] at the passage of our soldiers transformed into *coolies*." A passing French officer was obliged to "reestablish the compromised prestige" with a "timely slap." The newspaper requested that in the future that if the military had to use European soldiers for manual labor, they should at least be given carts, because of the "double question" of prestige, that "of the uniform, and [that] of the European."<sup>157</sup>

This story speaks to the interplay of class, race, labor, and violence in the colony. The newspaper writer considered it demeaning for white soldiers to perform manual labor because that was the work of "coolies," a derogatory term for Asian laborers, mostly of Chinese origin, which carries both a strong racial and class connotation. Manual labor was not just designated the domain of Asians, but of the poorest, unskilled workers. (Coolies were not hired in this instance to move the furniture because the army was trying to economize on labor cost). Second, when Vietnamese spectators laughed, they "compromised" the "prestige," which then had to be rescued by a passing European. Through an act of causal violence (the timely slap), he restored the order of things. Violence became the mechanism in this thinking through which prestige was restored. At the same time, prestige was vulnerable to laughter; it required validation, which made spectators participants in its construction or its undoing.

By raising the "double question" of the prestige of uniforms (the soldiers) and the prestige of whiteness (the Europeans), and presenting them as two separate concepts, this article suggests how badly behaving policemen were doubly an affront to the colonial order of things by violating the racial hierarchy (white prestige) and the administrative one (uniform prestige). The

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<sup>157</sup> *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, March 11-12, 1912.

two came into conflict in the context of policing because many wearing police uniforms were not white, as explored in chapter 3. Thinking of prestige in the plural helps explain the paradox of a sometimes self-defeating racial hierarchy—why the leadership was often preoccupied with white agents' behavior but was at the same time powerless to sanction them.

As Vann writes, everyday violence at the hands of white residents served a purpose—it was not just "a central feature of the culture of daily life in colonial Hanoi," it was important "to the nature of white colonial identity."<sup>158</sup> This had a convoluted logic and handicapped the colonial police both in how the police dealt with white criminals and how superiors handled the bad behavior of white policemen. When newly appointed GGI Albert Sarraut made a controversial statement in 1912: "If I saw a Frenchman hitting an Annamite I would climb down from my car and deliver them myself to an agent of the *force publique*," a *L'Avenir de Tonkin* editorial was quick to denounce this sort of thinking as "scandalous" and dangerous. "If M. Sarraut had a little more experience in the colony, he would understand that ... *the damage he would cause to the French prestige* in arresting with his white hands a cruel Frenchman ... *would be infinitely greater* than a beating on the skin of a coolie."<sup>159</sup> Prestige simultaneously gave a reason to sanction such behavior, and prevented authorities from acting against the "cruel Frenchman." Violence against natives, the author wrote, was the lesser of "two evils," given that otherwise, prestige and the entire colonial value system were at stake.<sup>160</sup>

Violence was unquestionably a white prerogative. In 1899, *L'Opinion* employee A. Blanc-Saba was surprised to find himself summoned to the Saigon Commissariat on a Saturday

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<sup>158</sup> Michael G. Vann, "White City on the Red River: Race, Power, and Culture in French Colonial Hanoi, 1872-1954" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 1999), 440. For a discussion of the casual nature of colonial violence, see especially "Chapter 7: Fear and Loathing in Hanoi: Violence in the Colonial City." See also: Michael G. Vann, "Fear and Loathing in French Hanoi: Colonial White Images and Imaginings of 'Native' Violence," in *The French Colonial Mind, Volume 2: Violence, Military Encounters, and Colonialism*, ed. Martin Thomas, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

<sup>159</sup> "Le Prestige," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, August, 20, 1912, 2. Emphasis mine.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

morning for having injured a Chinese man.<sup>161</sup> He had encountered Ngo Co Vanh, "a great devil of a Chinese," while in the bedroom of *L'Opinion's* bedridden director. Ngo, a debt collector sent by the *Banque de l'Indochine*, was met with a shove by Blanc-Saba (Blanc-Saba conceded perhaps a little curtly). Ngo then filed a complaint for assault while the *Banque d'Indochine* wrote a letter in his support. Blanc-Saba was outraged ("What strikes? what injuries? where are the traces, the marks, the scars, the doctor's certificate, the witnesses?") and the *commissaire* confessed to be perplexed as well. Blanc-Saba concluded that the man had received a "lesson" about French bedroom etiquette, at the same time he warned: "Feeling supported by certain Europeans, the insolence of the Chinese grows every day."<sup>162</sup>

At the same time, the correlation between prestige and violence was complex. They had a inconsistent relationship because of the purportedly bourgeois nature of the colonial project. Violence was the antidote to injured prestige, but excessive violence invited censure, as did a loss of "self control."<sup>163</sup> A 1906 article in *Le Courrier d'Haiphong* reported that a European attacked a Vietnamese woman with a stick or rod (*canne*). He broke a finger on her right hand and she had to be rushed to the hospital.<sup>164</sup> The newspaper stated unequivocally: "We reproach the perpetrator for this brutal act and demand against him a severe sanction." On another occasion, *L'Avenir du Tonkin* criticized a French policeman who injured a Vietnamese worker. Such brutality was, they felt, unbecoming of an agent of the law.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> "Morgue Chinoise," *L'Opinion*, May 18, 1899.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Emmanuelle Saada, "The Empire of Law: Dignity, Prestige, and Domination in the 'Colonial Situation,'" *French Politics, Culture & Society* 20, 2, (Summer 2002) 113.

<sup>164</sup> "Acte de brutalité," *Le Courrier de Haiphong*, November 28, 1906.

<sup>165</sup> *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, June 19-20, 1905, 2. See also: "Un Acte de Sauvagerie," *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, April 5, 1906.

How white colonials treated non-Europeans was itself a class marker. Sager writes that an indicator of low class behavior in Vietnam was to treat the colonized "contemptuously."<sup>166</sup> Jock McCulloch remarks that in white-on-worker violence in southern Rhodesia, only "poor whites" used "fists" and "boots," touching the workers themselves.<sup>167</sup> Out-of-control personal violence was in this interpretation mutually degrading, implicating perpetrator and victim. Meanwhile, controlled, impersonal violence reflected power and dignity. Authority ideally stemmed from the capacity to use violence but doing so selectively, calmly, and without excess. This broke down in the police because individual agents themselves were caught up in the hierarchy, and what they found was that not only did they not rank very highly, the hierarchy itself was unstable and had to be maintained. And the response to these situations was more often than not to resort to direct, personal violence, which perpetuated the violence/prestige problem.

Emmanuelle Saada's work adds insight to the class element of the prestige puzzle by looking at its longer genealogy. She traces the seemingly "anachronistic" terms of prestige and dignity in the colonies back to the *ancien régime*, court civility, and an aristocratic "logic of honor." The presence of these concepts in the colony then stems, in Saada's analysis, as much from the metropole trying to control a colonial periphery through behavioral norms as these same colonizers trying to control the colonized. What was at stake then was ultimately the quality of Frenchness among the ruling class ("This was a way of keeping the French French") defined by "certain codes of behavior thought central to French identity."<sup>168</sup> Saada also foregrounds prestige's centrality to state power and legitimation as well as its contradictory relationship with

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<sup>166</sup> Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina," 167.

<sup>167</sup> Jock McCulloch, "Empire and Violence, 1900-1939," in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 229-230.

<sup>168</sup> Saada, "The Empire of Law," 113.

violence, arguing that prestige and dignity contributed to symbolic domination which physical domination alone could not maintain.<sup>169</sup>

### **Uniforms**

If protecting the prestige of Europeans was about upholding racial hierarchy, the prestige of the uniform was about projecting state authority through the bodies of agents of all races. Uniforms were as a result frequently at the center of discussions about the relationship between prestige and authority. This worked two ways: shoddy uniforms themselves hurt prestige, and therefore authority, while bad behavior carried out while in uniform undermined what the uniform stood for (in the view of the French leadership: impersonal, dignified, controlled authority). In the following example, the uniform was worn by Lao agents, yet the question of state prestige as something apart from racial prestige was very much at issue.

In 1930, the director of the Laos customs department reported that a recent inquiry showed "relaxed discipline and dress of the native personnel of the active service." He summed up the prestige/violence paradox when he wrote: "They should never lose sight that their prestige over native subjects...results less from the use of force that is their prerogative than to the dignity and the correctness of their attitude." Acts of brutality and corruption detracted from this purpose, he contended, and therefore from their prestige. Both "their dress and their behavior" must therefore "be irreproachable."<sup>170</sup> Again, agents of the state had the right to use violence, but it was far preferable for authority to replace the need for force. The fact that violence occurs so often in police encounters suggests then a breakdown in authority.

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Le Directeur des Douanes et Régies de l'Indochine Selsis, to Sous-Directeurs et l'Inspecteur indépendant des Douanes et Régies au Laos, Hanoi, August 20, 1930, in "Bulletin trimestriel de l'Association amicale des fonctionnaires indigènes des Douanes et Régies de l'Indochine," (Hanoi, s.n.?) p. 75. Available at the BNF: <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb327334876/PUBLIC>

Impeccable dress was a way of conveying legitimacy and garnering respect for officers of the law, while untidy clothes had the opposite effect. A 1911 letter to the newspaper *L'Avenir du Tonkin* reported that Vietnamese police in Hanoi did not know how to wear the hat nor the belt of their new uniform and had put them on backwards.<sup>171</sup> The reader wrote that he had earlier related to the commissaire a mnemonic phrase to teach agents to remember how to wear the uniform, and he was surprised to hear recently a Vietnamese policeman reciting it to himself out loud, even while his own uniform was mismatched. In 1913, *L'Opinion* teased the appearance of the police as well as their scarcity: "The agents of the municipal police encountered on the streets of Saigon not only are quite rare, they are quite pitiful. Have we by chance forgotten to provide them new uniforms...?"<sup>172</sup> Also in 1913 a writer to *L'Avenir du Tonkin* complained to about the non-uniformity of police uniforms: "I believed until recently that our municipal police, when on duty, must wear the uniform, the dress recognizable and respected by all." Nonetheless, "when I walk the streets I encounter agents in service dressed a little too much haphazardly. ... Certain among them neglect a bit much that which is an integral part of their function—and which is important—the outfit."<sup>173</sup>

An article from 1904 in *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, meanwhile, wrote that chief "among the numerous questions which the new mayor and municipal council must examine" Hanoi's police uniform. The author, who ranked this an imperative matter, contended that uniforms should be provided to both European and Vietnamese agents, but especially to the latter who could least afford clothes because of their "modest salary." The Vietnamese agent, "the poor devil," could barely afford food and housing and "one wonders how" he could support himself and a family.

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<sup>171</sup> "La tenue des miliciens de la police," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, August 9, 1911.

<sup>172</sup> IIB.56/222, "Fusion des polices," newspaper clipping: L. D. "La Sûreté dans le marasme," *L'Opinion*, October 14, 1913.

<sup>173</sup> "On réclame," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, September 8-9, 1913.

By contrast, investing in the uniforms was investing in police image. "The police needs prestige and consideration. It is important, consequently, that the dress of the agent [is] uniform and correct."<sup>174</sup> Complaints like these were never just about uniforms, but about larger issues of state authority as channeled through the bodies of police agents themselves.

### **Behavior "improper for a police officer:" Gender and Police Violence**

In 1897, a low-ranking French Indian policeman beat a Vietnamese prostitute in a public space in Saigon. The Indian agent refused to pay her upfront, and he later confessed to hitting and kicking her because she then called him a "dirty Indian." This incident (explored in more detail below) exposes the chaotic grey area between competing colonial hierarchies of race, gender, and class, a space in which violence proliferated. It also illustrates how openings in colonial hierarchy complicated the distinction between legitimate violence (violence that obeyed the logic of colonial hierarchy) and illegitimate violence (which inverted the order of things). Victims cited above were often individuals vulnerable to abuse according to the framework of colonial hierarchies: rickshaw drivers, Chinese poultry vendors, an Indian civilian, a Vietnamese sailor. Meanwhile, violence under the "wrong" circumstances, which went against this order or was clearly excessive, exposes the cracks and inconsistencies within colonial hierarchy.

Appealing to the idea of "French prestige" was a strategic move for a group of Vietnamese protesting sexual violence. In 1929, an anonymous group of "natives of the elite class" in Hanoi drew attention to the police agents' low social status—referring to them as "*misérables*"—to make common (class) cause between the wealthy letter writers (self-described elites) and the higher-ranking administrators to whom the letter was addressed. In 1929, they wrote in French to the Minister of Colonies in Paris in protest over abuses by French agents "lacking totally in education" and recruited among the unemployed. These agents, according to

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<sup>174</sup> "Chronique Locale," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, October 15, 1904, 2.

the complaint, raped poor Vietnamese women who had been arrested under "some pretext."<sup>175</sup> The letter implored: "we hope that these police agents recruited among the unemployed in the colony and belonging to an inferior class, will never be authorized to HIT or MISTREAT the natives..."<sup>176</sup> They demanded the repatriation of the agents in order "not to compromise the prestige of France." The file does not indicate if there was any action taken.

How men treated women, as with how Europeans treated non-Europeans, was itself a class marker. Women appear in the documents as individuals requiring protection, innocents who should be exempt from "out-of-control" violence. But if breaking a Vietnamese woman's finger crossed a line, at the same time liaisons between European men and Vietnamese women were part and parcel of expected colonial privilege. European men always outnumbered European women in Indochina.<sup>177</sup> Almost half of French policemen were single in Hanoi in 1927 (40 out of the city's 77 French policemen were married), and both married and single policemen had *congais*.<sup>178</sup> There was also a great deal of posturing in front of women. In at least two of the stories above the abuses resulted from attempts to impress Vietnamese girlfriends (the chickens and the stolen rickshaw). In an incident discussed in chapter 3, a white police agent berated subordinates in front of his wife, which became a bone of contention.

French agents frequented brothels, and prostitutes were a particular target for police violence. Jules Ployer, a *sous-brigadier* in the Saigon municipal police, was disciplined in 1913 for breaking into the home of a Vietnamese woman Phu Thi Phai *dit* Thi Nam, who was

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<sup>175</sup> CAOM, NF, Carton 16, Dossier 155, "Requête en date du 1e Février 1929 accompagnée de un annexe, formulée par un groupe d'indigènes Indochinois relativement à la manière d'agir de certains agents de police européens," Hanoi, February 1, 1929.

<sup>176</sup> Capitals in original.

<sup>177</sup> Philippa Levine, ed., *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>178</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine de Hanoi et Haiphong de la Sûreté du Tonkin 1926-29;" Chef du Service de la Sûreté du Tonkin Arnoux to le RST, Hanoi, December 9, 1927.



registered as a prostitute.<sup>179</sup> She filed a formal complaint the next day against Ployer and two other Europeans who worked for the immigration service, who together had beat her and broken up her furniture. Commissaire Paganel wrote that the men had probably had too much to drink. Ployer was disciplined because his behavior was "improper for a police officer" but mainly for the "more serious offense" of abandoning his post as chief of the Cau Ong Lanh police station.<sup>180</sup> He also tried and failed to bribe Thi Phai into dropping the complaint in exchange for five piastres. As a result of this and other misconduct, Ployer lost his *chef de poste* position and was transferred to another district.<sup>181</sup>

In 1897, an Indian policeman employed in the European ranks faced a complaint for hitting a prostitute in the street after she refused to return with him to his home unless he left a one piastre payment with her boss (*patronne*) first.<sup>182</sup> Enock insisted he would pay her at his place, but Tran Thi Huu refused, and Enock kicked and slapped her. The woman cried for help, and another Indian police agent appeared and brought them back to the police post, where French agent Botton, placed her in the jail "for a few moments." Thi Huu went to the *commissariat* the next morning to file a complaint for Enock's attack and also for having lost a gold earring worth 2.50 piastres during the beating. The *commissaire* concluded that Enock was guilty. Central Commissaire Belland asked the mayor for a "punishment of four days of suspension of salary"

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<sup>179</sup> CAOM, GGI 35517, Punitons retirés du dossier Ployer (police) par application de la loi d'amnistie du 3 Janvier 1925. Commissaire Lecoeur to the Saigon Mayor, "a.s. d'une plainte contre le sous-brigadier PLOYER," February 3, 1913.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. Chef du 2eme Bureau to the Saigon mayor, Saigon, March 5, 1913; Le Procureur de la République près le Tribunal de 1ere instance, Saigon. "Demande de communication du dossier d'enquêté de l'affaire PLOYER et consorts," February 13, 1913; Letter from Le Procureur de la République to the Maire of Saigon, February 12, 1913.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, Letter from commissaire Lecoeur to the Saigon Mayor, "a.s. du sous-brigadier PLOYER, relevé de ses fonctions de chef de poste à Cauonglanh. Saigon, February 10, 1913; Commissaire Lecoeur to the Saigon Mayor, "a.s. d'une plainte contre le sous-brigadier PLOYER," February 3, 1913; Letter from Commissaire Paganel to Commissaire Central de police, Saigon, February 2, 1913.

<sup>182</sup> CAOM, GGI 30745, Personnel Dossier de Enok [sic], Saravarety; Commissaire Belland to the Saigon Mayor, "Demande de punition contre agents Botton et Enock." October 12, 1897; Procès-verbal, Constatant une enquêté faite contre l'agent Enock" Commissariat de Police 3e arrondissement. Jacotin, Victor, Onésime, Commissaire de police p.i., October 11, 1897.

because of "the scene (*scandale*) caused by the transgressions of this agent, considered mediocre" and sanctioned Botton for his mishandling of the complaint. Again, the sanction was not for brutality per se but rather for the scene caused.

Enock meanwhile claimed he hit her because she had called him a "*sale malabar*" or dirty Indian.<sup>183</sup> As discussed in chapter 3, the French Indians' ambiguous place in the racial hierarchy additionally complicated the colonial order of things, exposing contradictions. Much as Coatanéa lashed out in the Chinese restaurant when his authority was questioned, Enock responded to disrespect (both to his status as a policeman and a French citizen) with violence. This incident, and the many like it, shows both how vulnerable women were to abuse and how quickly policemen resorted to violence when their precarious place in the order of things was not respected. Both incidences appear in the archive, however, because the injured women went to the *commissariat* to file a complaint.

## Conclusion

In much of the literature, police violence is explained as resulting from colonial state repression. Elsbeth Locher-Scholten writes for the Dutch East Indies that "The police were a straightforward instrument of colonial power at the disposal of the Dutch civil service." As a result, "The growing structural distance between the police and the populace... created space for more impersonal and conceivably more violent police behavior."<sup>184</sup> Marieke Bloembergen's findings, also for the Dutch East Indies, suggest quite the opposite, that precisely a lack of oversight perpetuated violence: "the state could not supervise its own police as well as wished" and that "lack of control over police...allowed violence to flourish."<sup>185</sup> This chapter explored a

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, "State Violence and the police in colonial Indonesia circa 1920," in *Roots of Violence in Indonesia*, eds. Freek Colombjin and J. Thomas Lindbald (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), 100-101.

<sup>185</sup> Bloembergen, "The Dirty Work of Empire," 150.

third possibility, arguing that colonial social structures and expectations created circumstances for abuse, namely the larger culture of privilege and impunity. As long as the constraints of prestige remained in place, the administration had in many ways its hands tied when it came to white policemen. Violence stemmed from a lack of real authority and respect, a poor and often only short-term antidote for injured prestige.

The next chapter turns to Indian and Corsican policemen employed in Saigon's European cadre to continue this discussion of the relationship between race, violence, and prestige. It illustrates the enduring importance of race and argues that Corsicans, in spite of their "not-quite-whiteness" in Vietnam became more normalized as white in the context of police work because of the link between white prestige and legitimate violence. French Indian policemen, meanwhile, were subject to discrimination, including a 1907 attempt to demote those in the bottom three ranks from the European hierarchy. At the same time, assimilationist policies which gave non-Europeans authority over Europeans in matters of law and police created tensions that manifested most visibly in the Saigon's struggle to police white crime.

### Chapter 3: Indians, Corsicans, and the Limits of Assimilationism in the Saigon Police

On the night of July 18, 1909, Saigon municipal police agent Rasson Dessaints noticed an idle rickshaw man whom Dessaints later claimed was acting suspiciously, or "as though he had found and appropriated a rickshaw abandoned in the street." Dessaints hailed the man to verify his papers (*carte réglementaire*). As soon as the man saw the policeman, he started to run away, hastily abandoning his rickshaw in the process. He was too slow, and Dessaints managed to grab him by his hair, restrain him, and attempt to question him. Dessaints did not speak Vietnamese and had difficulty making himself understood. The rickshaw driver, who did not speak French, began struggling and calling for help. A crowd of people described by reports as "curious natives" gathered, and witnesses later reported that the agent also hit and kicked his prisoner.<sup>1</sup> One witness claimed Dessaints was drunk.

The commotion drew the attention of Vietnamese agent Tran Van Nguon. Nguon spoke to the prisoner in Vietnamese, which aggravated his police superior who could not follow their conversation. Dessaints shoved Nguon away and went in search of a translator. He enlisted Pierre Cai, a bilingual employee at a local store, through whom the prisoner offered an innocent explanation for his flight: he was too tired to pull more passengers that night. (It later came out that Dessaints was well known for never paying his fare, a good reason to bolt at the sight of him). According to Dessaints, he recognized the incident as a misunderstanding and considered the matter closed. He would, nonetheless, find himself facing a disciplinary committee the following month for brutality, among other charges.

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<sup>1</sup> CAOM, GGI 30731, "Dossier Personnel de Dessaints, Rasson dit Ponnoutamby. Police urbaine." Conseil d'enquête, Procès-Verbal. Septemeber 28, 1909. Rapport au Conseil d'enquête, Aff. Dessaints; Mémoire en Défense to the Conseil d'enquête; "Notes" Saigon, July 1909, signed Chef de Poste; "Rapport concernant l'agent Dessaints et relatant ses faits et gestes au sujet d'une plainte formulé contre lui," signed agent Sognet, not dated.

At first glance, Dessaints' beating of the rickshaw driver might seem like just another instance of casual violence carried out by Europeans against non-Europeans typical of colonial encounters, as discussed in chapter 2. Rasson Dessaints, however, was neither white, nor European, nor Vietnamese, but rather one of Saigon's more than fifty Indian police agents.<sup>2</sup> Born in Pondicherry in 1876, he immigrated to Saigon in 1900 and joined the municipal police in 1906. Like other Indians in the police, Dessaints had French citizenship and was employed in the European cadre. The number of Indians in the Saigon police was substantial: in 1907, the city's 256 policemen included 57 Indians, 39 Europeans, and 160 native cadre agents, meaning Indians made up 59% of Saigon's European personnel in 1907.<sup>3</sup>

The European police cadres in Cholon, Hanoi, and Haiphong as well ended up employing French citizens originating from the French periphery, either from the colonies or recently acquired territories. As seen in chapters 1 and 2, Corsica—which had been incorporated into France in the late eighteenth century—provided a large percentage of white European police recruits, a demographic who were, as Sager and others have argued, regarded as "not quite white" in the colony.<sup>4</sup> Many of the remaining Europeans in the Saigon police came from French India. Also represented in the European ranks were French-Vietnamese *métis* recruits—legally French by virtue of their paternity—and naturalized Vietnamese, who had applied for and obtained citizenship.<sup>5</sup> There were nonetheless limits to their advancement in the European police

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<sup>2</sup> CAOM, GGI 30731, "Dossier Personnel de M. Dessaint;" Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1916. Dessaints had worked as a writer (*ecrivain*) for the "arsenal de la Marine" for 4 years and 3 months before joining the police. For personnel numbers, see CAOM, NF 221, 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon."

<sup>3</sup> This was especially remarkable given that Indians only made up .002% of the total Cochinchina population (approx. 2,000,000) at the time. For population statistics: Natasha Pairaudeau, "Indians as French citizens in colonial Indochina, 1858-1940" (Phd diss., University of London, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina: Race, Class, and the French Colonial Employer-State, 1848-1945" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2014), 292-295; Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 117.

<sup>5</sup> This is a complicated question, but in general, *métis* were considered French as long as their French father

along racial lines. Indian, *métis*, or naturalized Vietnamese did not reach the rank of *secrétaire* or above, while many Corsicans (and at least one naturalized Belgian) did.

The admission to the European ranks of non-Europeans was the direct result of assimilationist policies, which privileged legal status (*statut personnel*) over race in matters of law and civil rights. Applying universalist ideals to an institution of colonial authority like the police nonetheless presented a problem: how to reconcile the fact of racialized subjugation with the assimilationist promise that legal status trumped racial difference? Where did Indians, *métis*, and other non-European police agents fit into Indochina's "colonial order of things?" As a policeman employed in the European cadre, could Dessaints exercise the same prerogative of casual violence vis-à-vis *indigènes* as a white Frenchman? Could he effectively discipline white lawbreakers?

For the police leadership, the question of where Indians, *métis*, and others fit into the colonial order of things, and their resulting capacity to represent of the colonial government, was not just academic. Racial difference mattered for police work because the use of legitimate violence and colonial authority was deeply tied to ideas of white prestige and racial hierarchy. This chapter looks both at how Indians complicated the colonial order of things internally to the police, and more broadly at the consequences of using a diverse police force to police diverse colonial societies. Non-European policemen struggled to discipline white criminals because the nature of legitimate violence remained rooted in racial difference.

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recognized them. However, I found cases where their father was unknown, but French heritage was "presumed" and therefore the police candidate was eligible for the European cadre. See TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/259, "Dossiers des Candidats au concours pour l'emploi d'inspecteur stagiaire de la Police de Sûreté (Session de Septembre 1931)" addressed to the Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, January 13, 1932; For more on the ambiguous legal status of the *Métis(se)* in Vietnam see: Christina Firpo, "Lost Boys: 'Abandoned' Eurasian children and the management of the racial topography in colonial Indochina, 1939-1945," *French Colonial History*, 8, (2007): 203-221; Erica J. Peters, "Colonial Cholon and its 'missing' *Métisses*, 1859-1919, *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, 21 (September 2009), <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue21/peters.htm>; Emmanuelle Saada, *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

## Indians in Cochinchina

Indians in Southeast Asia are most often associated with commerce and money lending, but in Cochinchina most worked for French employers, either in the administration or for private businesses. Indians were also employed in certain niches, including the police, justice service, customs department, and in security services more broadly as night guards, prison wardens, and military auxiliaries. The presence of Indians in Cochinchina resulted from several intersecting historical developments. Following a campaign in Pondicherry for equal French rights (a story in its own right, described by Natasha Pairaudeau), starting in 1881 Indians in French territories were offered citizenship. There was precedent for the *ancien* colonies, of which Pondicherry was one: in 1848, French citizenship had been extended to "all people in Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyana, and Reunion."<sup>6</sup>

As Pairaudeau describes in her work on Vietnam's Indian community, obtaining citizenship in French India was very different from the naturalization process available to Vietnamese colonial subjects, which also began in 1881. For the Vietnamese, naturalization involved a lengthy application process and an evaluation of the subject's "Frenchness" as a standard for determining whether or not they were appropriate for citizenship.<sup>7</sup> French Indians, by contrast, were uniformly offered citizenship regardless of cultural or linguistic qualifications. Because accepting required Indians to renounce native or religious law and subject themselves to the French legal code they were known as *renonçants* or renouncers. They also adopted a French

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<sup>6</sup> Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader, "Introduction: Race in France" in *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference*, eds. Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Pairaudeau, "Indians as French citizens," 16. As a result, the numbers of Vietnamese who ever successfully obtained French citizenship were small, likely in the mid-hundreds. According to de Gantès in 1906, 256, or 2% of Saigon's French population, were naturalized Vietnamese, de Gantès' dissertation, 22; See also: Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization*, trans. Ly Lan Dill-Klein (Berkeley: University of California Press, English ed., 2009), 216. For a discussion of the origins of French naturalization for Vietnamese see also Milton Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and Response, 1859-1905* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 126-130.

surname. Pairaudeau estimates that there were about 2,000 *renonçants* in Cochinchina on the eve of World War II. They were joined in the colony by about 1,500 subjects of French India who had declined renunciation and 4,000 British Indians.<sup>8</sup>

The Indian community in Saigon proved adept at using their citizen status and voting rights to exert political pressure disproportionate to their numbers.<sup>9</sup> According to historian Charles Fourniau, Mayor Blanchy ranked among those able to count on re-election because of the "loyal voices" of the colony's 300 or 400 Pondicherry Indian voters.<sup>10</sup> Ernest Outrey, the consummate *colon* and champion of French settler rights in Vietnam, was also an advocate of Indian causes. In return for his continued support, their votes helped elect and re-elect him as Cochinchina's representative in France starting in 1921. With evident prejudice, one French politician complained of the Indians in 1897 "For the most part good men without education, [their] intellect little developed. They form the solid core of Blanchy's clientele, who gives them jobs in the police or the municipal road works and imposes them on the governor."<sup>11</sup> De Gantès suggests that French politicians may have encouraged immigration to Vietnam, although not to staff the bureaucracy: "One of the better-known 'colonial stories' claimed that a Cochinchina *député* paid for hundreds of people to travel from *Pondichéry* to Saigon so that they could give him their support [in elections]."<sup>12</sup> In 1912, for the first time an Indian ran for office in Saigon and won 293 votes.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Pairaudeau, "Indians as French citizens," 18.

<sup>9</sup> "La Justice en Indochine," *Bulletin du Comité, L'Asie Française*, April 1907, 127-128.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Fourniau, *Vietnam. Domination coloniale et résistance nationale (1858-1914)*, (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2003), 602.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> De Gantès, "Migration to Indochina," 17-18. Pairaudeau, "Indians as French Citizens," 146, 169.

<sup>13</sup> *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, May 3; "Saigon, Elections municipales," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, May 6-7, 1912. In this election, 1,027 of the colony's 2,438 registered voters voted to elect 6 to the municipal council, and could vote for up to 6 names at a time. Foray won with 718 while several others received in votes in 600s. 6th place had 612 votes.



It was precisely this voting power that led to the presence of Indians in the municipal police, but not the PAJ, which was accountable to the colonial state rather than the city. The Saigon municipal police was criticized for its excess "political appointees," an oblique reference to the Indians. In a few alleged cases, Indians fired for disciplinary reasons were reappointed following an election.<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon was unique to Saigon because only Saigon had an elected council at this time and of the five *pays* of Indochina only Cochinchina elected a deputy to represent its French community in Paris.<sup>15</sup>

Coming to Indochina gave *renonçants* space to exercise special rights as French citizens vis-à-vis non-French citizens. Pairaudeau illustrates the process by which Indians ensured that renouncing was in fact the legal equivalence of citizenship, which, as she argues: "only served to widen a jarring gap between their rights, as incoming migrants, and the rights of the colonized people indigenous to Cochinchina."<sup>16</sup> The majority of Indian *renonçants* who came to Indochina were from the Tamil colonies, Pondicherry and Karikal, and most were Christian or Hindu. Few Muslims accepted renunciation since it required rejecting Islamic law, although non-*renonçants* also immigrated to Indochina. However, as Pairaudeau notes, the Indochina administration did not make an effort to distinguish French Indians who had renounced from those who had not, so in practice all Indians in Saigon's services were "effectively renouncers."<sup>17</sup>

Although legally French, the police employed Indians in an objectively inferior capacity. Hanoi's PAJ in 1905 included a special position in the native hierarchy of *agent temporaire indien* at the annual salary of 600 piastres (which was more than the highest paid native agent,

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<sup>14</sup> Pairaudeau, "Indians as French citizens," 206; CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Letter from Belland, Commissaire Central to Duranton, Président de la Commissaion Municipale, Saigon, Saigon, September 12, 1907.

<sup>15</sup> Tonkin, meanwhile had a delegate.

<sup>16</sup> Pairaudeau, 72.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

who made 500 piastres, but much less than the European salaries).<sup>18</sup> It is unclear if this was intended for British or French Indians. The Saigon police, meanwhile, employed Indians in the European hierarchy, but starting in 1896 created ranks below the existing ones just for them. For instance, a white recruit would join as an agent of the 3rd class and earn 3,000 francs per year. Indians joined as European agents of the 7th class and earned only 1,400 francs. They could be promoted to the 6th, 5th, and 4th classes, at 1,800, 2,300, and 2,800 francs, and eventually join the regular cadre as agents of the 3rd class, and advance up to the rank of *sous-brigadier*. In 1905, Saigon's European cadre employed 38 agents in these bottom ranks reserved solely for Indians. The other Indians had advanced beyond the 4th class so were recorded alongside metropolitan recruits. In 1907, the mayor cited this practice of employing Indians in sub-European ranks as precedent for his Indian demotion law, indicating in his argument the common sense recognition that Indians were not really French.<sup>19</sup>

### **Indians in the Police**

The practice of employing Indians as Europeans in Vietnam shows up as early as the 1860s.<sup>20</sup> In 1865, Indian civilians in Saigon filed a complaint against Indian police interpreter Appassamy. Among the early policemen was police brigadier Charles Douressamy, who had an unusual but long career in the Saigon police. He was born in 1855 in Karikal, India where his father was president of the Karikal local council. Douressamy was listed as unemployed when he joined the Saigon police as an interpreter in 1872 at the age of 17. He was detached to the justice service in 1874 and returned to the PAJ police in 1876 as an agent of the 3rd class and to the

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<sup>18</sup> CAOM, GGI 7779. Projet de réorganisation de le police de Sûreté générale en Indochine (Mission de M. Gautret), 1905-06; "Police administrative et judiciaire du Tonkin." From 1905 or 1906.

<sup>19</sup> CAOM, NF, Carton 221, Dossier 1774, Duranton, Président de la Commission Municipale, to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Saigon July 26, 1907.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Bouchot, *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de Saigon, 1859 à 1865*, (Saigon: Imprimerie Nouvelle A. Portail, Rue Catinat, 1927), 225. In 1865, Indians living in Saigon filed a complaint against Indian police interpreter Appassamy. While the nature of the complaint was not detailed, prosecutor Vial wrote that he found the accusations very serious and ordered the suspension of the interpreter pending a review of the case by a tribunal.

police municipal in 1879. He resigned several months later to work as director of the agricultural service on the island of Phu Quoc from 1881 to 1890. He reintegrated to the colonial service in 1890 as an agent of the 2nd class for the PAJ. He achieved the rank of sous-brigadier (bypassing agent of the 1st class) in 1891 but was fired in 1897. He was reintegrated the following year, 1898 as an agent of the 1st class. Douressamy was an above average agent in that he was listed as speaking Tamil, Vietnamese, and Malay. He was single. Unfortunately, his file ends abruptly in 1898.<sup>21</sup>

Migration to Indochina accelerated following the 1881 renouncer law.<sup>22</sup> The reasons Indians chose to immigrate to Indochina and join the police are similar to the entry-level French metropolitan policemen explored in the previous chapters. They tended to come from middle to lower socioeconomic backgrounds, although unlike the metropolitan French they often had clerical training and not military service, which made some Indians more formally educated than their white counterparts. The colony similarly offered these men opportunities to enhance their socioeconomic position—while white agents could expect to enjoy privileges of colonial life among a non-white majority, Indians could expect to enjoy privileges by virtue of their citizenship in a country where very few were legally French.

Indian agents enjoyed modest benefits including pensions and sick leave. The widow of Gnanaprégassame Delices, who worked in the Saigon police from 1909 to 1916, applied for assistance based on her husband's service from Pondicherry in 1939.<sup>23</sup> The colonial service opened a pension file for him. But neither was the police a means to a life of luxury. For both

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<sup>21</sup> CAOM, GGI 24625, Douressamy (Charles) agent de police, notice individuelle.

<sup>22</sup> De Gantès describes them as one of the three main immigrant groups in the nineteenth century, the other two coming from Bordeaux and Réunion (Corsican immigration picked up in the 1900s). De Gantès, "Promoting the Colonial Idea," 17.

<sup>23</sup> CAOM, GGI 61559, Dossier de pension de M. Delices. Letter from the widow Delices to the GGI in Hanoi, Pondicherry, April 8, 1938.

metropolitan and Indian agents in Vietnam, there remained problems with low pay, discipline, disease, and a general ignorance of both Vietnamese and French penal codes. Some Indians did not speak French and not many spoke Vietnamese. A few spoke only Tamil.

Economic need prompted future agent Belevindirassamy Jean to leave India for Vietnam. Jean, born in Rettiarpalom, Pondicherry in 1863, moved to Saigon in 1899 in search of work to support his family, which included his widowed sister and her four children, and his own wife and their children.<sup>24</sup> Jean's prior job in India as a government clerk (*écrivain a la conservation des hypothèques*) did not pay enough to support them. He made the voyage to Saigon in 1899, where he arrived unemployed. After a brief stint working for the customs department—from which he was dismissed for unspecified reasons—he sent several letters to the Saigon mayor pleading for a position on the city police. In one of his letters he wrote: "I came to this colony with the sole desire of finding here my daily bread (*pain quotidien*) and I remain without a position for 15 months."<sup>25</sup> He asked to be appointed as a police agent of the 7th class (the lowest rank) "*au titre Français*," as a Frenchman. At the very least, he asked to secure a place as a Vietnamese *brigadier*, a higher rank with a lower salary in the lower hierarchy. He concluded his plea to the mayor with "you will never regret [this] favor."<sup>26</sup> Such were his material circumstances when he joined the police. In 1912, his *commissaire* complained that he did not speak French.<sup>27</sup> He nonetheless had a long career in the police and retired in 1925.

In a similar case, Savavarety Enock was born in 1872 in Rettiarpalean, Pondicherry and arrived in the colony in 1893.<sup>28</sup> He worked for four months as a night guard (*gardien de nuit*) at

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<sup>24</sup> CAOM, GGI 30871, Jean Belevindirassamy personnel file, Letter from Jean to the Saigon Mayor soliciting employment. Saigon, January 30, 1902.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> CAOM, GGI 30871, Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Le Commissaire de Police, Saigon, August 1, 1912.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> CAOM, GGI 30745, Mairie de Saigon, Personnel, Dossier de Enok [sic], Saravarety, Letter from S. Enock to M. le Maire de la ville de Saigon, Saigon, May 8, 1895.

mayor Paul Blanchy's warehouses. In 1895, he applied to join the municipal police to support his family. He received mediocre reviews and at least two disciplinary actions but reached the rank of *sous-brigadier* by 1918. In his 1918 annual review he was listed as a widower with four children.<sup>29</sup>

In another application pleading poverty, Emmanuel Lami wrote that he was the sole breadwinner for "a large family" and he asked for a job in the police in order to be able to "live honestly" in 1898. Lami was born 1876 in Port-Louis (Ile Maurice), a French island near Réunion.<sup>30</sup> His family's address was in Pondicherry, where he worked for eight months as a *commis* or clerk for the justice of the peace. Lami arrived in Indochina in 1894 and tried his hand at a variety of jobs, both in the administration and commerce, but, as he wrote in his application, he lived a precarious existence. He was hired in 1898 at the age of 22 as a Tamil interpreter and the next year as a police agent.<sup>31</sup> He advanced until he reached agent of the 1st class in 1918. He died of pneumonia in 1919 at the age of 43.

The background of Indian applicants often included clerical work, which required a degree of literacy. Marie Declasse for instance was born February 21, 1865 in Pondicherry. He married in 1885 and spent one year in Pondicherry also working as a clerk (*commis greffier*) at the justice of the peace. He arrived in the colony unemployed and looking for work in 1894. He joined the police as an agent of the 7th class in 1897 and had reached the rank of agent of the 3rd class in 1913. He died in June 1918. Lejeune Ramot was 24 years old when he joined the Saigon police as an agent of the 7th class, and his previous job had been as a scribe.<sup>32</sup> He was born in

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<sup>29</sup> CAOM, GGI 30745, Mairie de Saigon, Personnel, Dossier de Enok, Saravarety, Personnel de la Police Urbaine, Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1918.

<sup>30</sup> CAOM, GGI 30781, Lami (Emmanuel Agassamy), Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1918.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Lami to the Saigon Mayor, Saigon January 4, 1898.

<sup>32</sup> CAOM, GGI 30782, Dossier de Lejeune-Ramot (Moutton), Avis de décès concernant M. Lejeune Ramot Moutton agent de 2e classe de la Police Urbaine. May 1919.

Karikal, India in 1880 and by 1901 had arrived in Saigon. He had already worked in the colony for 2 years (1901-1903) as a temporary writer (*écrivain journalier*) at the arsenal. He joined the police in 1904. In 1905, Belland wrote in his review that Lejeune was a "rather good Indian agent."<sup>33</sup> He received good to mediocre reviews and worked his way up the hierarchy. In 1919 he died and his widow returned to India. He was 39 years old.<sup>34</sup> Declasse's widow qualified for a pension, but only at the low rate of 900 francs per year.<sup>35</sup>

There were potential advantages for the colonial state in employing Indians in the police. Their lack of local ties made Indians as potentially trustworthy as the Vietnamese were potentially suspect, given French fears over Vietnamese agents' loyalties. Employing Indians might have appeared one possible way for the French to circumvent the "collaboration dilemma" (chapter 4). Many Indians who emigrated were educated in French and had clerical experience. Some believed Indians tolerated better working in the tropical climate.<sup>36</sup> The police also had ongoing problems filling the European police ranks, as described in chapter 2. Finally, they were cheaper to employ in the Indian-only ranks of 7th, 6th, and 5th class.

Outside of clerical work, however, the French did not actively recruit Indians for the police and did not view Indians as effective policemen. Rather, members of this community secured jobs in Saigon's municipal services by virtue of their voting power as French citizens among a tiny electorate. Indians were prevented from serving in the army or navy until 1905, so did not share the military background of most of the French police. One exception was

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<sup>33</sup> CAOM, GGI 30782, Dossier de Lejeune-Ramot, Bulletin de Notes, Saigon le 15 October 1905, Commissaire Belland.

<sup>34</sup> CAOM, GGI 30782, Dossier de Lejeune-Ramot, Arrêté granting passage to India to widow Lejeune and her 4 children, Saigon, December 13, 1919.

<sup>35</sup> CAOM, GGI 30732, personnel dossier Marie Deleclasse [sic]; Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1917, Saigon, August 20, 1917.

<sup>36</sup> CAOM, NF, Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Letter from Durantou, Président de la Commission Municipale to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Saigon, May 24, 1907.

Appassamy Sandana, born 1889 in Karikal.<sup>37</sup> He earned his primary school certificate and arrived in the colony in 1909 where he worked as a store clerk (*magasinier*).<sup>38</sup> He was drafted into the 11eme RIC in the class of 1909 in Saigon and became a soldier of the 2nd class in 1910. He completed his service in 1911. He was again mobilized in 1915 and sent to France, where he reached the rank of corporal in 1918. Appassamy returned to Saigon and joined the Sûreté in 1919 as an inspecteur of the 6th class. Nonetheless he too ended up with a desk position. The police found him an effective accountant and assigned him to the payroll department. He died in 1925 at the age of 36.<sup>39</sup> Indian recruits like Sandana found a niche in bookkeeping over more traditional police work.

As mentioned in the introduction, by 1907, 57 of 256 total municipal police employees were of Indian origins, or 22.2%; the rest were classified as European (39 police or 15.2%) and native (160 police or 62.5%). Almost two decades later, in 1923, Saigon's municipal police had 234 policemen, of which 31 were born in India for a total of 13%, a decrease from 1907 but still a significant cohort. No other Indochina police came close to these numbers of Indians. A 1937-38 inquiry into the numbers of Indians working in the administration found that they were concentrated in Cholon and Saigon. The same report also showed that the police was the single largest employer of Indians in Cochinchina in 1937. For the region of Saigon-Cholon, a report from December 1937 revealed the presence of 29 Indians in the colonial administration, of which 14 were policemen (13 "Hindus" and 1 "créole"), and the remaining belonged to the regional services, including the customs service, which employed 15 Indians between them.<sup>40</sup> In January

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<sup>37</sup> CAOM, GGI 30872, Dossier de M. Sandana (Appassamy), décidé le 12-8-1925.

<sup>38</sup> CAOM, GGI 30872, Dossier de M. Sandana (Appassamy), Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, Caisse de Retraite de Services Civiles Locaux. Saigon, April 4, 1920.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch divers 1812. "Liste des fonctionnaires originaires en Inde, 1938;" Georges Nadaud, Police de l'Indochine, Cochinchine, "Liste des fonctionnaires et agents du Personnel de la Police originaires de l'Inde Française." Saigon, January 5, 1938; L'administrateur de la Région, Henry George Rivoal, Région de Saigon-

1938, the Cochinchina police chief reported 29 Indians in all of Cochinchina's police services. According to this list, creoles, or those of mixed racial heritage, were employed in higher positions than other Indians.<sup>41</sup>

What was also novel in 1937 is the presence of Vietnam-born Indians among the police personnel. For instance, André Jason was born in Cholon to Indian parents, while Roger Le Fauscheur, a *sous-brigadier* in training, had been born in Hanoi to a "white Creole from India."<sup>42</sup> This generation of Indochina-born Indians had the advantage of speaking Vietnamese, greatly increasing their utility to the service. The record also shows that they also kept up their ties to French India and to the local Indian community. Laurent Tamby, who at the time of the survey held the rank of *inspecteur principal hors classe*, was one of these men born in Saigon to Indian parents in 1889. In 1921, following a short military career, he joined the police at the age of 32 as an agent of the 3rd class. In 1924, he married an Indian woman in Vietnam and they had five children. He continued to move up the hierarchy, and in 1927, his superiors transferred him to the Sûreté. He and his family spent his paid leave in Pondicherry. By 1943, he had earned several honorific distinctions, including the Medal of Honor for the police. He was still serving in 1943, during the Japanese occupation, when his superior Arnoux wrote in his file that Tamby was a "model of conscience and devotion."<sup>43</sup>

The admission of French Indians to the "great French family" was always qualified however. They were excluded from the senior police ranks and on average paid less than European policemen.<sup>44</sup> Dessaints' encounter with the rickshaw driver, explored in the next

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Cholon, Liste Nominative des fonctionnaires et agents originaires de l'Inde Française en service dans l'Administration Régionale de Saigon-Cholon et dans la police urbaine de la Région. Saigon, December 13, 1937.

<sup>41</sup> French-Vietnamese were called *Métis*, while French-Indians or Portuguese-Indians were called créoles.

<sup>42</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch divers, 1812.

<sup>43</sup> CAOM, GGI, C, 690, Personnel File, M. Laurent Tamby. Note for Chef du Service du Personnel au Gouvernement General, Hanoi, February 12, 1927; Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Hanoi, November 24, 1943.

<sup>44</sup> CAOM, NF, Carton 221, Dossier 1774.



section, is a useful point of departure for thinking about how Indians complicated the order of things. Periodic efforts on the part of the French leadership to single out Indian policemen for discrimination and demotion further revealed common sense understandings of racial difference at odds with colonial rhetoric.

### **"A lot of noise for nothing:" the case of Dessaints continued**

No sooner had Saigon police agent Rasson Dessaints escorted the rickshaw man away from the scene in 1909 than the Vietnamese police agent, Nguon, set about building a case against him. Nguon collected testimony from witnesses in the crowd and impounded the rickshaw left behind at the scene.<sup>45</sup> He was aided by other Vietnamese agents evidently keen to see Dessaints' departure. When the rickshaw driver, 21-year-old Nguyen Van Luong, came to fetch his vehicle he filed a brutality complaint against Dessaints, an act that the disciplinary committee later described as a "spontaneous" act of "small vengeance."<sup>46</sup> It is unclear if he was encouraged to do so by Nguon. Nguon also added his own violence charge to the complaint for the shove he received from Dessaints. Meanwhile, other Vietnamese agents solicited statements from merchants who had loaned Dessaints money, claiming that he had outstanding debts in violation of policy. When Dessaints learned of the charges against him (which by then also included having been late for a recent shift and failing to stamp the workbooks of Vietnamese agents) Dessaints sought his own witnesses, including Pierre Cai, who had served as his interpreter. Cai claimed that Dessaints' prisoner did not appear distressed, but also stated that he did not witness the incident personally.

When the French police station chief, agent of the 1st class Gaston Sognet, arrived at the station and learned of the rickshaw man's charges, his reaction was to loudly upbraid Dessaints.

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<sup>45</sup> CAOM, GGI 30731, "Dossier Personnel de M. Dessaint," Conseil d'enquête, Procès-Verbal. September 28, 1909. Rapport au Conseil d'enquête, Aff. Dessaints; Conseil d'enquête, Procès-Verbal. September 28, 1909.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Sognet proceeded to use racial slurs against the Indian agent in front of his fellow police agents as well as Pierre Cai. This sort of public humiliation had happened many times in the past, often in front of the Vietnamese agents and Mrs. Sognet as well. On this occasion, Dessaints lost his temper and yelled back, which earned him additional disciplinary charges for disobedience and "threats." According to Dessaints, Sognet threatened to beat him up, to which Dessaints responded: "I am not your slave."<sup>47</sup> Dessaints claimed that Sognet had born a grudge against him since the first day he reported for duty and filed a counter-complaint. Commissaire Belland sided with Sognet and asked the Governor to demote Dessaints. Per protocol, a disciplinary committee assembled to review the case in August 1909.<sup>48</sup>

Although the Vietnamese agents and their French superiors stood united against Dessaints, their zeal was also the case's downfall. The disciplinary panel acquitted Dessaints of the brutality charges on the grounds that the agents putting together the case were overly prejudiced against him.<sup>49</sup> They criticized especially the chief of the police post, Sognet, whom the committee regarded as equally ill disciplined in his rough handling of Vietnamese civilians, including a troubling recent incident in which he had arrested a Vietnamese man for no reason and kept him overnight in a cell.<sup>50</sup> They also criticized Sognet for his determination to find Dessaints guilty and also for his use of racial slurs. The committee warned of the "improprieties [inconvenants] that can arise for the prestige of our police," should the police show "tolerance" towards Sognet's mode of investigation and "a priori" assumptions. Again, the language of prestige served as the guiding rationale behind disciplining. They also took the position that

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> CAOM, GGI 30731, "Dossier Personnel de M. Dessaint," Mémoire en Défense to the Conseil d'enquête, n.d.

<sup>49</sup> CAOM, GGI 30731, "Dossier Personnel de M. Dessaint;" Conseil d'enquêté, Procès-Verbal. Septemeber 28, 1909.

<sup>50</sup> For this offense, Sognet had 4 days of salary withheld. CAOM, GGI 30731, "Dossier Personnel de M. Dessaint," Conseil d'enquête, Procès-Verbal. Septemeber 28, 1909.

since both were European agents, albeit of different classes (1st and 6th respectively), they were more or less equals: "One must note that for an agent of the 1st class, Sognet, Dessaints is almost a colleague. The former believed himself authorized to speak with a certain liberty."<sup>51</sup> Race in this view did not factor into their equation.

Sognet had refused to treat the Indian agent as an equal—in his statement he called Dessaints a habitual liar and referred to Saigon's Indian electorate as mindless sheep (*moutons de Panurge*).<sup>52</sup> Sognet, in his defense, denied calling Dessaints a "con" (idiot) although he qualified this by adding that "this word is generally common [courant] in the mouths of Europeans." He also objected to having his statement challenged by an Indian "given very easily to lying."<sup>53</sup> As for Dessaints' debts, the committee wrote that the police (French and Vietnamese) had in the past encouraged lenders and merchants to file complaints against "Indian agents," not just Dessaints. The rest of the case, the committee wrote was "based on what? ... The testimony of a Vietnamese woman and a rickshaw coolie."<sup>54</sup> In the end, the committee upheld only a dereliction of duty charge and transferred Dessaints to another district.<sup>55</sup> The sanction went into his already thick permanent record.<sup>56</sup>

Racially charged conflicts like this one suggest how employing Indians as equals with metropolitan Frenchmen had the potential to upset the hierarchy, and also how class and gender both overlay and disturbed racial ordering. In his counter-complaint, Dessaints was fixated first on Sognet's humiliation of him in front of a woman, an affront not just to his status as a French

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> CAOM, GGI 30731, "Dossier Personnel de M. Dessaint," Dessaints to the Commissaire de police de 2eme arrond. Saigon, July 20, 1909; Rapport concernant une plainte formulé par l'agent Dessaints. Saigon, June 22, 1909.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Between 1906 and 1913 he received seven disciplinary sanctions. He was eventually suspended from the police in August 1920, the last entry in his file. CAOM, GGI 30731, "Dossier Personnel de M. Dessaint;" Letter from commissaire central de Police Belland to maire de la ville, Saigon March 15, 1913.

citizen and a policeman, but also to his masculinity, as he was prevented from retaliating against his superior. The committee took into consideration the "harsh words that his boss addressed to [Dessaints] before the natives who must have laughed into their sleeves, and before Madame Sognet."<sup>57</sup> Class also created competing orders, as socio-economic disparities between the French and Indian agents heightened racial anxiety and conflict. Sognet was at the bottom of the white French hierarchy, and Sognet's habit of berating Dessaints in front of Mrs. Sognet suggests posturing.<sup>58</sup> The disciplinary committee clearly regarded Sognet as an ill disciplined agent who was not in a position to treat Dessaints as an inferior.

Dessaints faced discrimination, but neither was he innocent, as evidenced by the rickshaw driver's complaint and witness statements. There is also a larger pattern of violence in his file during his long career. Just as Sognet took advantage of his (small) position of authority to berate Dessaints in front of his wife, Dessaints took advantage of his (small) position of authority to get free rickshaw rides around Saigon, and then beat the rickshaw driver who refused him. What emerges in this anecdote is less a concerted colonial policy of violence and more a culture of casual brutality and (racialized, gendered, classed) posturing, in which individuals exerted claims to privilege within the framework of racial hierarchy.

Finally, this incident suggests another phenomenon of racial hierarchy explored further in chapter 5. Nguon, the lowest ranking agent in the story, had quietly become the instigator of the entire drama with Sognet (by impounding the rickshaw and taking witness testimony), but his role was quickly forgotten. The ambiguous status of Indians vis-à-vis white Frenchmen, along with their unfamiliarity with local languages, empowered intermediaries like Nguon to exploit these divisions and exercise influence beyond their rank.

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<sup>57</sup> CAOM, GGI 30731, "Dossier Personnel de M. Dessaint," Conseil d'enquête, Procès-Verbal. Septemeber 28, 1909.

<sup>58</sup> Chapters 1 and 2.

## Indians and White Policemen

In his work on Indochinese colonial society, de Gantès argues that Indians "were not considered 'true Frenchmen' by either the Europeans or the local population, because of the colour of their skin and because their civil and political rights had been contested."<sup>59</sup> The Saigon police leadership opposed the appointment of Indians, and they did not accept them as equal to white agents. In 1896, Commissaire Belland stated bluntly his aversion when he responded to one Indian's application that: "European jobs should be reserved exclusively for subjects who really are Europeans."<sup>60</sup> The mayor nonetheless hired the agent in question.

There were earlier objections as well. At an 1886 Colonial Council meeting in Saigon, Director of the Interior Noel Pardon complained that Indians were being appointed as Europeans in the police. They were furthermore appointed without Commissaire Tourillon's approval, Pardon contended, and agents were retained despite requests by Tourillon for their dismissal. Neither did Indians make good police agents according to Pardon:

some Indians were appointed as Europeans, although they were unable to render any service, whether as a European or Asian agent, because they knew neither the language nor customs. Requests for punishment made by the Commissaire Central produced no results, and agents who dismissal was requested based on facts of undoubted gravity were kept in office.<sup>61</sup>

Pardon sought to remove the police service from municipal authority and place it under his own department, thus removing the possibility of "political appointees." The Council agreed that the police needed reform, but tabled the issue without resolution.

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<sup>59</sup> Gilles de Gantès, "Migration to Indochina: Proof of the Popularity of Colonial Empire?" in *Promoting the colonial idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France*, eds. Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 15-28.

<sup>60</sup> CAOM, GGI 30.745, Mairie de Saigon, Personnel, Dossier de Enok, [sic] Saravarety; Belland, Commissaire Central p.i. à Maire de la Ville Saigon, Saigon May 22, 1895.

<sup>61</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB24/233(1), Clipping from a newspaper, official, printed article pasted onto paper. Handwritten at top: "Conseil Colonial, Session ordinaire 1886-1887, séance du 1er Février 1887." "Projet de réorganisation de la police Rapport."

Belland, Tourillon's successor as Commissaire Central, made it clear that he opposed hiring Indians.<sup>62</sup> Belland argued that the Indians were not able to render the same service as a European because "The European population is absolutely impervious to all interventions by Indian agents in the conflicts which arise daily between them and the native population; they accept even less [Indian] intervention in the disputes between Europeans." He did concede that Indians usually spoke French and "wear the uniform better" than Vietnamese agents.<sup>63</sup> Belland worked closely with Mayor Duranton to demote Indian agents in 1907 and to limit their recruitment. This attempt to exclude Indians from the European ranks on the grounds that they were not "really European" backfired as the Indians' citizenship status was upheld and affirmed the following year. There was popular support for Duranton's actions. The Saigon-based newspaper, *L'Opinion*, wrote in 1906 against the practice of employing Indians because "In the police, they cannot replace French agents."<sup>64</sup>

Lecoeur, who succeeded Belland as *commissaire central*, sought to exclude Indians from the police through less overt means. In 1910, Lecoeur wrote the Governor that the Indian agents in the Saigon police needed to go. Lecoeur found that his European subordinates in general were not "up to the task" of policing but the Indians were "even more worthless [*plus nuls encore*]."<sup>65</sup> Lecoeur wrote disdainfully that "The Indian agents, in my opinion, have had their time as policemen...they should disappear to extinction and be replaced by rigorously chosen French agents." He went on to list problems with Indians: they were "Without prestige, timid and unsure of themselves" and "includes many drunkards [*ivrognes*]. In service at night the Indian agents

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<sup>62</sup> CAOM, GGI 30745, Enok, Saravarety personnel file; Belland, Commissaire Central p.i. [par intérim] to Maire de la Ville Saigon, Saigon, May 22, 1895.

<sup>63</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Belland to Duranton, Saigon, September 12, 1907.

<sup>64</sup> "Les Indiens," *L'Opinion*, August 27, 1906.

<sup>65</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222. "Fusion des polices;" Rapport du Commissaire Central p.i. [par intérim] Lecoeur à Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine sur les réformes à apporter aux divers services de police chargés d'assurer l'ordre et la sécurité publique," Saigon, November 1910.

falls asleep too easily, or disappears from his quarter, without the supervising officer coming to find him, despite his searches and his calls on the whistle."<sup>66</sup>

Problems with an Indian agent were ascribed not to the individual but rather to his Indian-ness, and used as evidence of larger problems with Indians in general. As seen in chapter 2, there were no shortage of metropolitan agents with long disciplinary records for indolence, violent outbursts, or proclivity for drink, yet these vices were not attributed to their race or place of origin. In a 1911 report, Lecoecur touched on the larger problem when he alluded to the Indians' awkward place in the colonial hierarchy. He wrote that the French (white) police agents objected to working alongside Indians as equals. He found too often that "poorly informed" Frenchmen recruited from the metropole would expect to have a "rather elevated position" in the "native environment." Nonetheless,

When these new agents find themselves, arrived from France, obliged to wear a uniform lacking prestige...assigned to street service, side by side with native agents dressed like them and carrying the same rank, enlisted with Indian agents of clear inferiority, they realize their mistake and they then have but one fixed idea: leave the police by any means possible.<sup>67</sup>

Indians were openly disparaged by their superiors, which also undermined their authority in the eye of the Vietnamese agents and Saigon's civilians. The racial hierarchy, combined with assimilationist laws, was potentially self-defeating in the police.

### **Indians and Vietnamese Policemen**

If the uneasy equal relationship between the French and Indians created uncertainty about where each stood, Indians undoubtedly stood above the Vietnamese in the colonial order. The French punished Indians for treating Vietnamese as equals or entrusting them with important tasks. In 1909, a disciplinary board in Saigon judged Indian Agent Sinniamourd guilty of

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IB35/212, "Personnel-correspondance et arrêtés du personnel, police administrative 1910-12."

negligence for having trusted a Vietnamese agent to escort a murder suspect to the police station.<sup>68</sup> Employees in the European and indigenous hierarchies were never equals, regardless of rank.

For their part, Indians drew attention to the fact that the legal rights they held were not extended to the Vietnamese, and that because of this each should be treated differently. The Saigon municipal committee demoted Indian sous-brigadier St. Louis in 1907, and in their letter to their colonial representative in Paris, signed by no less than 18 Indian community leaders, they argued that the ruling was invalid for the reason that the committee included two Vietnamese officials. "The annamites Truong and Paulus Cua are only French subjects and at this rank are, in our opinion, not competent to answer a question in which the motive is the denial of civil rights of a certain category of citizens." St. Louis should, the letter argued, "only be judged by his peers."<sup>69</sup> They were both colonial subjects and therefore, the letter claimed, ineligible to pass judgment in a case in which the defendant was a citizen.

Some Vietnamese policemen resented the privileging of Indian agents over Vietnamese ones and viewed being subjugated to both the French and Indians as a double injustice. If French domination rested on the alleged racial superiority of white colonizers, how to explain the favoring of French Indians over Vietnamese in the colonial hierarchy? As Brocheux and Hémery argue, the Vietnamese "perceived the disparity of status and rights that existed between them and those they judged as colonized [Indians and black Frenchmen], and to whom they denied a superiority that they were reluctantly willing to grant to Europeans."<sup>70</sup> In 1907, Mayor Duranton

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<sup>68</sup> Sinniamourd's hearing is in Dessaints' file: CAOM, GGI 30731, "Dossier Personnel de M. Dessaint," [sic] 1906-1919.

<sup>69</sup> CAOM, GGI 17248, Police Municipale-Cochinchine, "A.S. des agents de police indiens, citoyens français de la Ville de Saigon;" "La question des agents de Police Originaires de l'Inde Française à Saigon," Deuxième mémoire (1) adressée le 30 août 1907 à M. le Sénateur Godin pour être communiquée au Ministère des Colonies."

<sup>70</sup> Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, 191.



would cite "the repugnance of annamite [Vietnamese] agents to obey Indians" as a reason to phase them out altogether. Belland, who supported the mayor, wrote that colonial subjects "profess a profound disdain for the Indian race which they consider to be a race absolutely inferior; they generally show hostility towards all interventions by Indian agents and do not accept without protest the comments that they make."<sup>71</sup>

During the 1906 debate over the Indian demotion law, Nguyen Van Long, a Vietnamese member of Saigon's municipal council, objected to the privileging of Indians. Long pointed out "the native agents have no right to administrative leave" while the Indians did.<sup>72</sup> A French member retorted that Vietnamese agents did not need leave as their families were in the colony, and in this regard, "the natives are better favored than the Indians and Europeans." The discussion turned to other matters and he did not press the issue. The following day, however, Long again objected to the subordinate position of Vietnamese agents vis-à-vis Indians, citing gross disparity in their salaries.<sup>73</sup>

Even decades later, after the French surrendered claims to the colony, a senior Vietnamese policeman recalled the injustice of having been subordinated to Indians. In 1955, an American police advisor interviewed Commissaire Lecan who had 20 years of Saigon police experience. When asked to provide a brief history of the police, Lecan took the opportunity to express bitterness about the earlier privileging of Indians over Vietnamese:

all important command positions were held by Frenchmen. Regardless of experience or training, the Vietnamese employees of the Sûreté were never considered to be more than auxiliaries. ... From the beginning, approximately one third of the Sûreté personnel were natives of Pondicherry, Karikal, etc. ... These individuals were employed as agents, who

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<sup>71</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon;" Hilaire (and others) to the Ministre des Colonies, Paris, "Aperçu des services rendus et des actes de courage accomplis par les agents Indiens de la police de Saigon," Saigon, June 18, 1907.

<sup>72</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon;" Ville de Saigon, Commission Municipale, Extrait du Registre des deliberations. Session ordinaire de Novembre 1906, Séance du 12 Novembre 1906, Procès-Verbal.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

used Vietnamese interpreters. They were held in higher esteem by the French, in spite of the fact that most were less well instructed or experienced than many of their Vietnamese counterparts.<sup>74</sup>

According to Lecan, only Vietnamese policemen were subject to France's racial double standards, while Indians enjoyed the same benefits as French employees, including administrative leave and housing stipends. Lecan joined the police in 1935, at a time when there were fewer Indians. Nonetheless, he revealed enduring resentment.

Vietnamese nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s took on an anti-Chinese and anti-Indian character. As Pairaudeau shows, such political figures as Bui Quang Chieu gained notoriety by protesting France's privileging of Indians and Chinese at the expense of the Vietnamese. His political party organized boycotts against these communities, which could and did turn violent. The privileging of Indians in the police was, in hindsight, clearly not a deliberate divide and rule policy however on the part of the French. Rather it was a consequence of France's colonial theories and policies, which led to the extension of citizenship to non-Europeans, combined with the initiative of the Indians themselves. One could go so far as to say that Indians worked in the colonial police in spite of the French police leadership, this fact itself an insight into the topsy-turvy and contested nature of racial and colonial hierarchies.

### **Corsicans, the Cohort of Conquerors**

Was race all that kept Indians from blending into the French cadre and being accepted as French? French Indians had a different first language (Tamil), cultural practices, and in some cases religion—although the majority of renouncers were Catholic.<sup>75</sup> The constellations of differences potentially setting this community apart were therefore multilayered and complex. Race nonetheless played a major role in their exclusion, or at least set a high barrier to their

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<sup>74</sup> Jack E. Ryan, "Brief History of the Sûreté in Vietnam," (Saigon, 1956). Booklet and interview sponsored by the Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group.

<sup>75</sup> Pairaudeau, "Indians as French citizens."

inclusion, and this is illustrated by comparing the divergent experiences of the police's two major intra-colonial cohorts: the Indians and the Corsicans.

Both groups were intra-colonial in the sense that they immigrated to Indochina from recently acquired edges of the French Empire—the Indian territories became French in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and Corsica in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. Both appear in the Saigon police's in large numbers (most of the Saigon municipal police who were not Indian in 1907 were Corsican, as Pairaudeau also notes).<sup>76</sup> The police's divergent treatment of Corsicans and Indians reveals how the tension between race and citizenship, as markers of colonial status, played out unevenly. The Corsicans—whose homeland, Indians liked to point out, had been part of France for fewer years than Pondicherry—became more normalized as white in the colony, even though they actively asserted a separate Corsican identity.<sup>77</sup> Indian agents, by contrast, were singled out for criticism in explicitly racial terms in ways Corsicans never were.

Historians of Indochina are aware of the prevalence of Corsicans in the administration, but this cohort has received little scholarly attention, at least for Vietnam.<sup>78</sup> In a recent correction, Paul Sager emphasizes their numbers and argues that Corsicans "made up a large and identifiable segment of Indochina's 'administrative proletariat.'" <sup>79</sup> He writes "Corsicans were less questionably 'Europeans,' but their national and racial belonging was subject to suspicion. They

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<sup>76</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Arrêté signed Mayor Duranton, Le président de la Commission Municipale [lists all police personnel by name from 1907], Saigon, March 5, 1907.

<sup>77</sup> "With regard to their French citizenship, they had an antecedence that was invoked by one of them in a reply to a magistrate at the Saigon courthouse who was of Corsican origin: 'Sir, we were French one hundred years before you!'" Brocheux and Hémary, *Indochina*, 190.

<sup>78</sup> Jean-Louis Pretini, "Saigon-Cyrnos. Les Corses à Saigon," in *Saigon 1925-1945*, ed. Philippe Franchini (Paris: Editions Autrement, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina," 292.

had not been accepted in mainstream French culture as fully French."<sup>80</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai also argues that Corsicans were seen as something other than fully French: "Vietnam, itself a colony, was also affected by the imperfect assimilation of Corsicans into metropolitan France. ... They resented the mainlanders, who did not bother to disguise their disdain for these recent and not entirely assimilated citizens."<sup>81</sup> Yet in the context of the police, Corsicans disappeared into the larger category of white Frenchmen. They were seemingly normalized, by virtue of their race, as French in the police because of the overriding concern for whiteness as a prerequisite for colonial authority and legitimate violence.

Corsica was a leading source of recruits for the French Empire, mostly famously in the colonial army but also in the civilian administration. Historian Francis Arzalier cites studies estimating that in 1930, 20% of French colonial soldiers were from Corsica, even though "the island's population never reached 1% of that of the hexagon."<sup>82</sup> They immigrated to North Africa—Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco—and made up a substantial percentage of the European population in Indochina. Although Corsica only had around 200,000 people in 1930, there were an estimated 12,000 Corsicans in Saigon in 1939, comprising 12% of the colony's Europeans.<sup>83</sup> At the same time there were about 2,000 French Indians in Saigon.<sup>84</sup> Corsican immigration to Vietnam happened slightly later than Indian immigration, but gained momentum around the turn of the century following Paul Doumer's expansion of the colonial monopolies and tax service (*Douanes et Régies*), a major colonial employer.<sup>85</sup> Also pointing to the relatively late date of this

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>81</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 117.

<sup>82</sup> Francis Arzalier, *Les Corses et la question coloniale* (Ajaccio: Albiana 2009), 61.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>84</sup> Pairaudeau, "Indians as French Citizens."

<sup>85</sup> Intra-colonial migrants made up a substantial percentage of Europeans in Indochina. The most prominent three groups were from Corsica, La Réunion, and India, but individuals could be found in the administration with connections to virtually all France's overseas possessions. Migration from metropole to colony by contrast was

community's arrival, Cochinchina's first "Association of Corsicans" appeared in 1905.<sup>86</sup> The Hanoi branch reconstituted itself in 1913 at a meeting of 32 people.<sup>87</sup>

According to Sager's research, half of Corsicans in Indochina worked for the administration.<sup>88</sup> Corsicans, like Indians, were represented in certain colonial services, particularly the police, customs service, and prison service. Félix Dioque, who would become one of the highest ranked Sûreté chiefs, began his Indochina career in Cholon's customs service. In 1906, he remarked with some surprise that almost everyone else in the tax and customs service was Corsican (Dioque was himself from the Hautes-Alpes region).<sup>89</sup>

Although legally incorporated into France in the 1790s, Corsicans still belonged more to the French periphery around the turn of the century, culturally, linguistically, and socially. Several historians have stressed Corsica's own colonial-esq origins to help explain the island's special role in the Empire. Arzalier argues that the expansion of French territory under the Third Republic provided badly needed career opportunities: "From 1860, Corsica was paradoxically the bride to the French colonial empire under construction" as local recruits left the island due to underdevelopment and a lack of employment opportunities. Corsica was therefore "promoted to essential auxiliary to the expansion of France's overseas territories."<sup>90</sup> Historian Robert Aldrich, who writes about the close relationship between Corsica and the empire, attributes emigration to

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notoriously underdeveloped, and has been attributed to France's low birthrates, an anemic colonial recruitment service, and general disinterest of metropolitan French in the Empire. The trend of migration between or within the colonies has been described in detail elsewhere. Pairaudeau observes that "French citizens both in the Metropole or with both parents born in France made up only a third of all persons (approximately 7,000 of some 16,000) with the legal status of Europeans in 1937. Even then, many were from peripheral areas of France, most notably Corsica." In his work on Vietnam's colonial society de Gantès came to similar conclusions about the role of the empire in propagating the empire, a development also observed in the British Empire with regards to the Scottish and Irish.

<sup>86</sup> De Gantès, "Migration to Indochina," 26.

<sup>87</sup> "Les Corses," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, September 2, 1913.

<sup>88</sup> Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina," 293.

<sup>89</sup> George Dioque, *Félix Dioque, un colonial: Six ans en Guinée ... quarante ans en Indochine, de 1898 à 1946* (Gap: Société d'études des Hautes-Alpes, 2008), 98-100.

<sup>90</sup> Arzalier, *Les Corses et la question coloniale*, 60.

a lack of mainland volunteers, high birth rates in Corsica, the lack of economic opportunities on the island, and finally to a tradition of military service.<sup>91</sup>

This chapter's framing of Corsicans and Indians as intra-colonial migrants is of course contingent on the question of whether it makes sense to compare the two regions. The legal situation of Indians and the practice of renunciation was in fact more similar to the four communes of Senegal. Corsica was never governed as a colony, and its complex historical relationship with France cannot be done real justice here. Briefly, France came into possession of Corsica in the late eighteenth century through military conquest.<sup>92</sup> Prior to the Revolution, it was ruled as territory under the monarchy—neither a colony nor an "integral" part of France.<sup>93</sup> It became a full province during the Revolution.

There were parallels between how the French approached the governing of Corsica in the nineteenth century that call to mind later colonial projects, including cultural assimilation through schools and the military and humanist rhetoric.<sup>94</sup> A minority conceptualized it as a humanitarian project.<sup>95</sup> France also sought to replace or supplement the Corsican language, which was more closely related to Italian: "Children learned there [in Corsica], along with colonial ideology, the French language that was rarely used at home."<sup>96</sup> This acculturation gave

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<sup>91</sup> Robert Aldrich, "France's Colonial Island: Corsica and the Empire," *French History and Civilization*, papers from the George Rude Seminar, 3, (2009): 112-125.

<sup>92</sup> Corsica had been ruled by Genoa since the fifteenth century. In the 1720s, Corsicans rebelled against foreign rule and in 1755 established an independent republic. The war became too costly for the Genoans who in 1764 sold Corsica to France. It took several more years for French troops to pacify the island, acquired mainly because of its strategic position in the Mediterranean. Thadd E. Hall, *France and the Eighteenth Century Corsican Question* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), xix, 1-3.

<sup>93</sup> Aldrich, "France's Colonial Island," 113.

<sup>94</sup> Matei Candea, *Corsican Fragments: Difference, Knowledge, and Fieldwork* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 47; Hall, *France and the Eighteenth Century Corsican Question*, 221-222.

<sup>95</sup> Hall, *France and the Eighteenth Century Corsican Question*, 216.

<sup>96</sup> Arzallier, *Les Corses et la Question Coloniale*, 61.

Corsicans the linguistic skills and cultural knowhow to "leave the village and misery" behind to join the French colonial administration, "in the cohort of conquerors."<sup>97</sup>

In short, both Indians and Corsicans originated from economically disadvantaged groups in peripheral areas of the French empire, and both actively maintained a distinct regional identity in the colonies. As Jean-Louis Pretini argues, Corsicans sought to remain Corsican in the colony.<sup>98</sup> One of vehicles for this was a Corsican newspaper in Saigon, sponsored by the Corsican *amicale*, which began publication in 1923.<sup>99</sup> As Pretini writes, Corsicans both saw themselves on the margins among Europeans and as more benevolent and able to integrate by marrying Vietnamese women.<sup>100</sup> Many spoke Corse to each other, and some never mastered French, just as many Tamil speakers in Saigon never became fluent. Like Indians, Corsicans maintained strong ties to their homeland, traveling back on their *congés* and sending their children back to study. It was therefore not the case that Corsicans made more of an effort to integrate culturally with the metropolitan community in Vietnam. Yet they disappear into the French police ranks while Indians did not.

### **Corsicans in the Police**

The experience of the Indians and the Corsicans exposes unresolved tensions in local thinking over who really was French in Indochina, and for whom Frenchness was out of reach. Based on how their origins were discussed (or not discussed) in internal documents, Corsicans are not easily distinguished from agents from Bordeaux or Lille. Their heritage is often only apparent because of their clearly Corsican last names, which resemble Italian surnames, and the biographical data in their files. Conversely, police superiors regularly, almost automatically,

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Pretini, "Saigon-Cyrnos," 92.

<sup>99</sup> The *Saigon-Cyrnos: Bulletin Mensuel de L'Amicale Corse de la Cochinchine et du Cambodge* ran poems and stories in the Corsican language, included articles on Corsican history, politics, economy and other news.

<sup>100</sup> Pretini, "Saigon-Cyrnos," 94-95.

noted Indian heritage as a defining fact of their identity and employment. They were never just policemen, but always Indian policemen. In their annual evaluations the leadership gauged their progress and performance against other Indians. The form for European personnel also included a line for an address in France, for which Indian files list: *néant*, or none. Corsican hometowns, meanwhile, are listed under this entry.

Even the most successful Indians were praised on these terms—they were a good employee, for an Indian. Emmanuel Lami had a long, successful career in the Saigon police, climbing the hierarchy from agent of the 7th rank in 1898 to agent of the 1st in 1918.<sup>101</sup> Lami received praise from his superiors over the years and had few disciplinary issues. Yet in his 1907 evaluation, Commissaire Lecoeur could only describe Lami in the following terms: "One of the few Indian agents that can be noted: Good agent."<sup>102</sup> In 1905, Belland wrote in his annual review that Lejeune Ramot, another Indian in the Saigon police, was "a rather good Indian agent."<sup>103</sup> This was customary in the Indian personnel files.

On the flip side, the behavior of bad employees was explained as a flaw in their Indian heritage, particularly accusations of drunkenness and indolence. In 1907 Lecoeur wrote of agent Mouttapa that he was "on par with other agents of the *cadre supérieur* [the short-lived Indian cadre], but he does not surpass them."<sup>104</sup> This made him, Belland summed up in the same review, a "Worthless agent [*agent nul*]."<sup>105</sup> Agent of the 5th class, Saint Antoine, meanwhile, was characterized in Belland's shorthand in 1907 as "negligent, sleepy, many shortcomings. Bad server...does not perform any useful service" and Rayappen, another agent of the 5th class, was

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<sup>101</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/343/1, Lami, Emmanuel Agassami; Commissaire Central to Maire of Saigon, July 11, 1919.

<sup>102</sup> CAOM, GGI 30781, Lami (Emmanuel Agassamy), Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Commissaire Lecoeur, Saigon, September 5, 1907.

<sup>103</sup> CAOM, GGI 30782, Dossier de Lejeune-Ramot (Moutton), Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1905.

<sup>104</sup> CAOM, GGI 30728, Personnel file, Mouttapa, Ayassamy, Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 1907, Commissaire de police Lecoeur, Saigon, September 5, 1907.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.



"without value" and a "mediocre server, although driven by goodwill he is inept, like the majority of Indians working for the public force."<sup>106</sup> This stereotype of the "worthless" Indian, who allegedly ran from crime scenes, had material consequences. It was one of the mayor's main arguments for their demotion in 1907 (discussed below).

The charges against Indians for their alleged unsuitability for police work did not necessarily correspond to performance. For every Lami, there was the poor-to-mediocre Corsican or mainland agent who also caused their commissaires frustration (chapter 2). For instance, Angelino Jean Leca was born in 1884 in Abori, Corsica.<sup>107</sup> In November 1917, his police superior described Leca as only a "passable agent," who was "lacking zeal and energy."<sup>108</sup> He had been assigned to guard at the slaughterhouse (*abattoir*), a menial job that involved ensuring compliance to health and sanitation ordinances. Another supervisor complained the same year that Leca worked just enough when he came up for promotion to advance to the next rank, then returned to doing "nothing."<sup>109</sup> He did not report many crimes, and had been written up for negligence in 1913.

The difference between Lami, Mouttapa, and Leca was that in the case of the Indians, the police leadership ascribed their quality as employees, or lack thereof, to their origins, whereas Leca's shortcomings were just a part of his individual character. His Corsican heritage remained evident only in his name and place of birth. The police leadership never singled out all Corsicans for demotion in the same way they sought to block Indian employment by pointing to Mouttapa as exhibit A of this cohort's inherent unsuitability for police work.

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<sup>106</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Belland, Commissaire Central to Duranton, Saigon, September 12, 1907.

<sup>107</sup> CAOM, GGI 30785, Dossier Personnel, Leca, Ange Jean. Avis de décès concernant M. Leco Angelino, Agent de 1ere Cl. de la Police Urbaine. Cholon, September 2, 1918.

<sup>108</sup> CAOM, GGI 30785, Dossier Personnel, Leca, Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Cholon, November 30, 1917.

<sup>109</sup> CAOM, GGI 30785, Dossier Personnel, Leca, Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Année 1917.

One of the only conflicts between mainland French and Corsican policemen in the police records does confirm that inter-ethnic tensions persisted. In a singular case, Corsicans working in the Haiphong police filed a formal complaint with their representative in 1915 about discrimination against Corsicans. In 1915, Corsican agent Nicolai and *brigadier* L'Hote wrote to the Corsican Senator in Paris that commissaire Rechard had made "malicious remarks" against Corsicans in the police and insulted their "professional dignity." Gabrielli, the Corsican representative in Paris, contacted the GGI to register his protest on behalf of his "compatriots." The RST instructed the central commissaire in Hanoi to open an investigation, following which he concluded that the accusation was groundless. "Mr. Rechard denies having made malicious remarks with regards to Corsican agents" and both Nicolai and L'Hote had a history of complaining over "the slightest thing."<sup>110</sup>

In a separate incident, in a letter from 1916, Senator Gabrielli inquired after the long stalled police reorganization reforms, as these reforms would greatly benefit his constituents in the police.<sup>111</sup> The administration forwarded his letter to the Indochina Personnel Service with the "urgent" recommendation that the Department of Finance "obtain, in the shortest possible delay, his agreement to the proposed reorganization."<sup>112</sup> The reforms were finally passed the following year, in 1917, resulting in "famous promotions" and pay raises in the police.<sup>113</sup>

### **"The great French family:" The 1907-08 Indian police demotion protests**

The tension between legal status and race in the police came to a standoff in 1907 when Saigon's Mayor Duranton created a separate employment category for the city's Indian police

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<sup>110</sup> TTLT I, RST 023945, "Plainte adresse sur les propos malveillants tenues a l'égard de ses compatriotes employés dans la police de Haiphong, 1915;" Gabrielli, Senteur de la Corse, to GGI, May 8, 1915; Commissaire Central au Tonkin to RST, Hanoi, July 10, 1915.

<sup>111</sup> CAOM, NF, Carton 215, Dossier 1638, Note pour Le Service du Personnel "Organisation de la police" n.d., but references Gabrielli's May 15, 1916 letter.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Morlat, *Répression Coloniale*, 49.

personnel. Although the Indians were citizens, and had been included in French employment lists prior to 1907, this new, "special, superior" category put them below French citizens of European origin in terms of benefits and promotion eligibility, but still above the Indochinese in terms of pay scale. Saigon's small but organized Indian community mobilized, arguing that the law violated the policemen's rights as Frenchmen. After an eighteenth-month campaign, a Paris-based commission overturned the demotion and the mayor resigned. What this shows is that despite the apparent hollowness of the promise of assimilationism, the Indians' effective use of France's own colonial rhetoric exposed the state to demands for equality which Paris politicians could not ignore. Race mattered, but so too did citizenship, social standing, and access to international support networks.

Saigon Mayor Duranton's January 1, 1907 law, approved by the governor in February, created a separate employment bracket for Indian policemen employed in the bottom three ranks (agents of the 7th, 6th, and 5th class), which had been reserved exclusively for Indians since 1896.<sup>114</sup> While their salaries remained the same, personnel in this category were stripped of the Europeans benefits: retirement, housing stipend, and the *compte d'assistance* (emergency assistance). They would also receive leave every five years instead of three, and become eligible for promotion every three years instead of two.<sup>115</sup> What was called simply the "Indian cadre" in Colonial Council debates became the euphemistic "*cadre special superieur*" before the law passed in 1907, suggesting that Duranton and his supporters were aware that singling out Indians by name might expose the Council to criticism.

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<sup>114</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," "Ce qui se passe aux colonies, Les immortels principes! La question des Indiens CITOYENS FRANÇAIS en Cochinchine," (Saigon: Imprimerie 157 Bis. Rue Catinat, 1907).

<sup>115</sup> CAOM, GGI 17248, Police Municipale-Cochinchine, "A.S. des agents de police indiens, citoyens français de la Ville de Saigon;" "La question des agents de police originaires de l'Inde Français à Saigon," Deuxieme memoire (1) adressée le 30 août 1907 à M. le Sénateur Godin pour être communiqué au Ministère des Colonies."

While disputes over the Indians' legal status had erupted earlier in other colonial services, namely the postal service in 1901, none came close in scale to the 1907 demotion. In response to the new law, the Indian community hired a lawyer by the name of Sambuc in January, and on his advice they signed their monthly pay slips under the new terms with the phrase "commitment not binding" to demonstrate their rejection of the new contract.<sup>116</sup> As a result, their pay was withheld for at least three months.<sup>117</sup> Durantou demoted the highest ranking among them, sous-brigadier Saint Louis, as a penalty for "collective insubordination."<sup>118</sup> Saigon's Indian community began advocating on behalf of the police with French politicians in Paris. This was not the Indian community's first experience with taking on the administration. In 1901, complaints about the treatment of Indian postmen and tax inspectors, both of which classified Indian workers as "indigenous" despite their citizenship status, were also successful in part thanks to the intervention of Cochinchina's colonial deputy (Ernest Outrey's predecessor) Deloncle. The Indian police campaign was much larger and, in the end, more decisive.

Led by Saigon businessman Hilaire Arokiam Madit, members of the Indian community carried out the campaign on behalf of the Indians in the police. They sent a telegram to the Minister of Colonies sometime between the first publishing of the law in January and April 11, 1907 when they followed up with a longer complaint that framed the arrêté as an attack on French republican values and freedoms. (One of the later booklets in favor of their cause begins by quoting the Declaration of the Rights of Man). In the telegram, they maintained that the new law was illegal since it "infringes on the legal principal incontestable rights of man" and asked for Paris's intervention: "Cochinchina Indian colony deeply unsettled protests with deep respect

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<sup>116</sup> Pairaudeau, "Indians as French Citizens," 198; *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

France public powers solicited your high intervention to maintain acquired rights." <sup>119</sup> On April 11, 1907, the same group of Indian *renonçants* wrote the Colonial Minister, addressing as well Cochinchina's deputy Deloncle, who had previously been sympathetic to Indian causes, this time with a more lengthy explanation for their grievances. <sup>120</sup> Again they phrased their complaint in "rights of man" language: "it is surprising that the president of the municipal commission of Saigon...was able, with the stroke of a pen, to abruptly remove the quality of citizenship from a population of men long habituated to the idea that they belonged to the great French family."<sup>121</sup> The law discriminated against *renonçants*, they claimed, purely on the basis of their race, skin color, and place of origin, something they argued was "anachronistic" and "illegal" besides. <sup>122</sup>

By May, the complaint had made its way back from Paris to Duranton, via the GGI and Governor. In his rebuttal to the accusations, Duranton feigned surprise and held his ground. He wrote that the poor service rendered by the Indians in the police, largely ignorant of the local language and customs, meant that they did not warrant European pay and their numbers needed to be reduced for the good of the service. Furthermore, in creating the Indian cadre he had the support of chief of police Belland himself. <sup>123</sup> Duranton wrote that:

At the time I took office, I was brought to see that the service of the Municipal police, in the opinion even of the Central Commissaire, was absolutely worthless in Saigon. ... Overall, moreover, the Indian does not possess, either regarding his morality or physicality, any of the necessary qualities to ensure a police service. Naturally timid and fearful, without energy, completely lacking in discipline and too puny, these agents are in

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<sup>119</sup> CAOM, NF, Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon." Télégramme, Ministre des Colonies, Paris, n.d.

<sup>120</sup> CAOM, NF, Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon." Le group des Indiens renonçants Citoyens Français résidant en Cochinchine à Monsieur le Ministre des Colonies à Paris, Saigon, April 11, 1907.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Letter from the Deputy Deoncle to the Minister of Colonies, Paris, May 20, 1907.

<sup>123</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Letter from Belland, Commissaire Central to Duranton, Président de la Commission Municipale, Saigon, Saigon, September 12, 1907.

no way qualified...and are unprepared to stop the bands of apaches and other criminals who terrorize Saigon...<sup>124</sup>

Duranton meanwhile argued that Indians lacked the military background to be good policemen, since Indian *renonçants* were exempt from military service until 1905.<sup>125</sup> Duranton also favored candidates with military credentials, automatically excluding Indians.

Mayor Duranton further argued that Indians had always belonged in a special category in the police and his reform was not a divergence from past practice.<sup>126</sup> The 1896 police reorganization had created new ranks of 5th, 6th, and 7th class agents within the European cadre reserved for Indians, even if they were not labeled as such. He claimed that the acceptance of this earlier law (or their failure to protest it) showed that Indians recognized that they were not truly French and therefore did not merit European treatment.<sup>127</sup> He cited the fact that since 1897, no Indian agent had used the European benefits: Indian agents had not liquidated their *compte d'assistance* or asked for housing pay even when eligible. They also rarely took advantage of the six months paid leave available to Europeans every three years. Among the 57 Indian agents employed in 1907, there had only been seven instances of administrative leave since 1893, and those were taken by agents who had already been in Saigon for 4 to 6 years. The mayor argued "This is indisputable proof of the way which they tolerate the climate, living here like at home" and therefore they did not require the same benefits afforded the Europeans who needed the paid leave for health reasons.<sup>128</sup> Reiterating the same point in a June letter, he wrote that Indians never

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<sup>124</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Letter from Duranton, Président de la Commission Municipale to le Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Saigon, May 24, 1907.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Letter from Duranton, Président de la Commission Municipale, to le Lieurentant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Saigon, July 26, 1907.

<sup>128</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Duranton to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Saigon, May 24, 1907.

availed themselves to European benefits "because it is known that only *European* personnel had the right to assistance money."<sup>129</sup> Durantou claimed that he was simply formalizing what had long been an informal, but accepted, division.<sup>130</sup>

The Indian community in turn reached out to international networks, including politicians in Pondicherry and Paris, and carefully crafted appeals which employed rights of man language to defend their position. In June, Hilaire's group again contacted the Minister of Colonies to refute the accusations made in Durantou's letter, particularly his claims of the uselessness of Indian agents. They included lists of exceptional service rendered by Indian agents and official recognition they had received for this service.<sup>131</sup> In a fashion reminiscent of colonial soldiers asserting right to citizenship for having defended the nation, the community who rallied to the support of the agents stressed the sacrifices made by Indian agents injured in the line of duty. Police work was a job, but it was also a service for which the Indian sacrifices in defense of the French law should be respected. The Indians proved adept at generating publicity and turning French colonial rhetoric to their advantage. Hilaire and the other supporters published a booklet, "*La question des Indiens*," in support of their cause which included newspaper editorials by Europeans in Saigon supporting them and objecting to their demotion to the status of "half-citizen."<sup>132</sup> They distributed this booklet widely. One went to Algeria's deputy in Paris. They also

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<sup>129</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon." Italics in original.

<sup>130</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Letter from Durantou, Président de la Commission Municipale, to le Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Saigon July 26, 1907; See also: Letter from Durantou, Président de la Commission Municipale, to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Saigon, November 10, 1907;

<sup>131</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Hilaire and others to the Ministre des Colonies, "Aperçu des services rendus et des actes de courage accomplis par les agents Indiens de la police de Saigon," Saigon, June 18, 1907.

<sup>132</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," "Ce qui se passe Aux colonies, Les immortels principes! La question des Indiens CITOYENS FRANCAIS en Cochinchine," (Saigon: Imprimerie 157 Bis. Rue Catinat, 1907).

involved the Senator of French India, Godin, who wrote the GGI on their behalf.<sup>133</sup> French Indian *renonçants* of high standing in Pondicherry lent their support as well.<sup>134</sup> They also contacted the League for the Rights of Man with their case.

The back and forth continued between Duranton, the Minister of Colonies, the deputy of Cochinchina, the Governor of Cochinchina, the Deputy of French India, the GGI, and the renouncer community in Saigon. In July, Duranton was forced to defend himself to the governor, reiterating his arguments at length, particularly with regards to the ineffectiveness of the Indian police agents. Of the 29 disciplinary actions he had taken against the non-indigenous police in his role as mayor, he wrote, in the first 6 months of 1907, 28 had been against Indians. He went on to list their other offenses: "If to this is added a revocation for flagrant offense of theft of clothing (convicted by the tribunal) to the detriment of an annamite; a second revocation for fraud (the complaint coming from the prosecutor of the republic), a demotion for clear and public drunkenness, the balance sheet of penalties becomes 31..." Belland supported the mayor's claims, but the tide was turning against Duranton.

In March 1908, a little over a year after the law was first passed, a Ministry of Colonies' litigation committee (*comité du contentieux*) convened in Paris to review the case. On March 30, they ruled against Duranton and the special cadre arguing that it violated the Indian's right to equality under the 1881 renouncer law.<sup>135</sup> GGI delayed implementing the ruling, according to Pairaudeau, for four months out of respect of Duranton's authority and out of fear of the

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<sup>133</sup> CAOM, GGI 17248, Police Municipale-Cochinchine, "A.S. des agents de police indiens, citoyens français de la Ville de Saigon;" "La question des agents de police originaires de l'Inde française à Saigon," Deuxieme memoire (1) adressé le 30 août 1907 à M. le Sénateur Godin pour être communiqué au Ministère des Colonies."

<sup>134</sup> CAOM, NF, Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon."

<sup>135</sup> CAOM, GGI 17248, Police Municipale-Cochinchine, "A.S. des agents de police indiens, citoyens français de la Ville de Saigon;" "Ministère des colonies—comité consultatif du contentieux (Séance du 30 Mars 1909), Au sujet de la situation de la police de Saigon," AVIS, Le Conseiller d'état, président, Signé: Bouffet.



emotions the affair had stirred up in Saigon.<sup>136</sup> Finally, in August 1908, the GGI abrogated the law and Garrigenc replaced Duranton as mayor. One result was that future reformers could not exclude Indians in explicitly racial or ethnic terms. This episode allowed the Indian community to assert their equality with Frenchmen in the police, and in the process further distance themselves from colonial subjects. The Vietnamese council members remained largely quiet during the 1907 campaign, which, had it failed, could have had implications for the *métis* and naturalized Vietnamese agents admitted to the European hierarchy.

Belland's successors remained critical of the presence of Indians in the municipal police, but were more careful about singling out Indians for special attention. Lecoecur wrote privately in his police reorganization proposals that he wished to remove them entirely.<sup>137</sup> Informal exclusion and discrimination persisted. In 1923, Deputy Ernest Outrey wrote the Minister of Colonies with a complaint he had received that Indians in the police were being "systematically" passed over for promotions, some with 20 years of service.<sup>138</sup> A 1937-38 inquiry showed that the police was the single largest employer of Indians.<sup>139</sup> The numbers of Indians in the police were however less than half their peak in the 1900s.

A large part of Duranton and Belland's case against employing Indian agents amounted to their lack of authority and inability to police criminals, particularly white men, which had a grain for truth to it. The problem with Indian agents had less to do therefore with their alleged personal

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<sup>136</sup> Pairaudeau, "Indians as French Citizens."

<sup>137</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222. "Fusion des polices;" Commissaire Central p.i. Lecoecur to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, "Sur les réformes à apporter aux divers services de police chargés d'assurer l'ordre et la sécurité publique," Saigon, November 1910.

<sup>138</sup> CAOM, NF 16, 155; CAOM, NF Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon."

<sup>139</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch divers 1812. "Liste des fonctionnaires originaires en India, 1938." Nadaud, Police de l'Indochine, Cochinchine, "Liste des fonctionnaires et agents du Personnel de la Police originaires de l'Inde Française." Saigon, January 5, 1938; L'administrateur de la Région, Henry George Rivoal, Région de Saigon-Cholon, Liste nominative des fonctionnaires et agents originaires de l'Inde Française en service dans l'Administration Régionale de Saigon-Cholon et dans la police urbaine de la Région. Saigon, December 13, 1937.

failings however and more to do with the overriding logic of colonial hierarchy. Non-white representatives of the state appeared powerless in the face of white crime because to persecute these wrongdoers went against the same rules that justified colonialism itself. The next section explores this under-studied side effect of France's reliance on non-Europeans in the police, mainly Indians but also Vietnamese, *métis*, and others, in large numbers.

**"That would be the last straw, a European arrested by Natives"**

One night in December 1884, a band of 20 to 25 European sailors and seamen roamed Saigon's second arrondissement, armed with iron rods and triangles (*bâtons et triangles en fer*). Around 9 p.m., seven or eight of them discovered a lone Vietnamese police agent at his post outside the Justice of the Peace. They pushed him to the ground, beat him, tore his uniform (*lui déchirèrent ses vêtements*), and stole his watch before fleeing and evading capture.<sup>140</sup> *Le Saigonnais* reported the incident the next day, framing it as one of many examples of aggression by sailors and soldiers in the Saigon streets that went unpunished. The newspaper asked why the authorities appeared powerless to stop such behavior.

On another occasion, in 1912, a European soldier went out of his way to injure an Indian police agent in uniform. Two off-duty artillerymen (both NCOs) had been riding a rickshaw around Saigon's notorious Boresse quarter when they passed an Indian police agent on foot.<sup>141</sup> One of the men stopped the rickshaw to confront the Indian under the pretext that the Indian had looked at him with "a look of insolence." He demanded an explanation from the poor policeman, and then proceeded to beat him up. A passing Frenchman heard the policeman's cries for help and intervened on his behalf. A complaint was later filed against the soldiers.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> *Le Saigonnais*, December 11, 1884.

<sup>141</sup> Present-day Ben Thanh market.

<sup>142</sup> "Un agent de police est passé à tabac," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, June 2, 1912.

In both of these instances, non-white policemen in uniform were not just unable to stop white crime, they were actively targeted for violence at the hands of Europeans. Neither agent had been attempting to enforce the law or intervene at the time, nor did they personally know the aggressors. In the first case, the Vietnamese agent had been passively sitting at his guard post. In the second, the passing Indian agent had, the soldier decided, looked at him the wrong way. The presence of non-Europeans in police uniforms was for some enough of a violation of the colonial order. Racial violence in these cases thus produced an inversion of police violence, with police themselves the victims of attacks.

Non-European agents were vulnerable to violence and retaliation at the hands of Europeans when they attempted to assert their authority as policemen. In 1906, Indian agent Mouttapa was "rather seriously injured" while arresting a sailor. This incident happened around midnight in October 1906 when four seamen (*matelots*) and three soldiers of the colonial infantry entered the Café Shanghai in Saigon. When the Chinese owner refused to serve them, they began breaking things, compelling the owner to summon the police.<sup>143</sup> Agent Mouttapa, who was walking from his residence on his way to take up his post, saw two of the sailors fleeing down the street. He went after them and managed to stop one. The sailor then stabbed Mouttapa in the arm. Agents Vyolette and Franchi later arrested the man. Commissaire Etiévant wrote a week following the incident that the Indian agent had been unable to work ever since.

In 1893, Indian agent Lauocet was injured "more than once" while arresting unruly soldiers, to the extent that he almost lost an eye.<sup>144</sup> In 1898, "criminals" seriously injured Indian agent Lebeau during an attempted arrest on Borese Street. The agent almost died from his

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<sup>143</sup> CAOM, GGI 30728, Personnel file, Mouttapa, Ayassamy, Commissaire Etiévant (Louis Alexis) to Commissaire Central Belland, October 28, 1906.

<sup>144</sup> CAOM, NF, Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Hilaire and others to the Ministre des Colonies à Paris Saigon, June 18, 1907. Aperçu des services rendus et des actes de courage accomplis par les agents Indiens de la police de Saigon."

injuries, and later received a 50-piastre award from Saigon's mayor for his efforts.<sup>145</sup> In 1903, agent Francisque (also Indian) arrested a soldier who, while being taken into custody, bit the police agent's fingers. Agents St. Antoine and Lami received unspecified injuries in 1905 while carrying out an order to arrest a soldier.<sup>146</sup>

Neither was the problem limited to Indians. In November 1866, in the early year of French rule, a Vietnamese guard named Bian attempted to intervene in a dispute between two French sailors. One of them turned on him and cut him in the right shoulder.<sup>147</sup> In 1882, the newspaper *l'Independent de Saigon* wrote that two soldiers tried to hit a Vietnamese police agent in Saigon who refused to "procure them women."<sup>148</sup> The agent ran away and the soldiers went on to cause a ruckus. In 1906, a Vietnamese police agent by the name of Dinh was injured while attempted to arrest two soldiers who "caused a scandal" while drunk at a shop run by a Vietnamese man.<sup>149</sup> There are many such examples in the archives.

Frustrated administrators tended to blame what they described as the inherently inferior qualities of Indian and native agents for their inability to deal with French criminals. Central Commissaire Belland summed up the problem in 1907 when he wrote that Europeans were "absolutely impervious to all interventions by Indian agents in the conflicts which arise daily between them and the native population."<sup>150</sup> He went on to write: "one cannot count on their intervention as long as this order is troubled by Europeans, soldiers, sailors, etc ... which is

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> CAOM, GGI 12118, "Jugement du quartier-maître Maillefet et du matelot Purlis par la Justice Maritime à Saigon, pour être auteurs de bruit et tapage nocturnes et de coups de blessure, 1866;" "Bruit et tapage nocturnes et coups et blessure," Commissaire Alexandre Mathieu, Saigon, November 20, 1866; L'officier de police judiciaire, "Renseignements," n.d.

<sup>148</sup> *L'Independent de Saigon*, October 10, 1882, 2.

<sup>149</sup> CAOM, NF, Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon."

<sup>150</sup> CAOM, NF, Carton 221, Dossier 1774, "Indo Chine. Protestation Indiens contre leur classement dans la police de Saigon," Belland to Duranton, Saigon, September 12, 1907.

ordinarily the case in Saigon. At best, they dare to intervene in fights between natives, on the condition that they feel supported by the population and are not isolated."<sup>151</sup> In 1910, Lecoeur complained that the Indian agents should be done away with altogether:

Without prestige, timid and unsure of themselves, they can do nothing and demand nothing of the European population, nor of the annamites...by whom they are ridiculed. They don't dare act against French who violate police regulations. If at any point when they are on duty there occurs a fight between sailors, [or] a soldier overturns a rickshaw, the Indian agent, for fear, does not intervene. He moves away and marches from the scene of the crime. The very rare exceptions only confirm this rule.<sup>152</sup>

Commissaire Leceour had earlier sent an incident report to Belland in 1905 to illustrate the poor quality of Indian agents. Lecoeur collected the Indian policeman's statement in this instance because he wanted to show Belland "the value and bravery of Indian agents. I say 'agents' because Jean is considered one of the least bad."<sup>153</sup> In the early morning hours of June 17, 1905, police agent of the 7th class, Aroquiassamy Jean, was working the midnight to 5:30 a.m. shift. Noticing that the bar *Café de Gare* was open after midnight and serving a few customers who were quite loud and drunk, Jean decided to issue a citation. He went inside where the owner claimed to have special permission to be open until 2 a.m., and Jean asked to see the permission. At the same time, one of the European customers, in Jean's account, "threw himself" at the Indian agent, while threatening or insulting him. The agent wrote "I was so afraid, I ran but the customer followed..." Jean kept running "until I fell flat on my stomach." He scrapped his leg and damaged his uniform. Back at the station, two of the Europeans from the bar filed a complaint that agent Jean had not treated them with due respect. In their version, Jean was

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222, "Fusion des polices;" Commissaire Central p.i. Lecoeur to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, "sur les réformes à apporter aux divers services de police chargés d'assurer l'ordre et la sécurité publique," Saigon, November 1910.

<sup>153</sup> CAOM, GGI 35519, "Blâmes retirés par application de la loi d'amnistie, Jean Aroquiassamy," Copie du Rapport du 16 au 17 juin 1905, Saigon, Commissaire de Police Lecoeur to Commissaire Central, June 19, 1905.

jumpy, and fled at the slightest movement. After reading the report, Belland requested Jean's dismissal, but he remained in the police until at least 1924.<sup>154</sup>

Chapter 2 touched on the symbolic problem "bad Frenchmen" posted for French prestige in the colony. They also presented a law and order problem in the years leading up to World War I. Colonial newspapers are full of stories about the lawless conduct of soldiers, seamen, and sailors in particular, and anger at the administration for not protecting French *colons*. While undoubtedly common to contemporary port cities, "white crime" was considered a real problem in Saigon. Historian Charles Meyer cites several cases where sailors and soldiers threatened public safety in Saigon, resulting in complains from the white settler community: "For example, the 25 sailors armed with sticks who, on December 6, 1884, chased any police agents they encountered, or the two drunk English sailors 'who entered the establishment of Madame Villa and after attempting to steal a sausage fell on this person with assaults.'"<sup>155</sup>

In 1882, an editorial in the *L'Independent* appealed to military authorities to lift a ban on soldiers visiting Asian-owned drinking establishments following an incident in which a drunken soldier stabbed and killed a Chinese bar owner in Saigon.<sup>156</sup> Also in 1882, a group of drunken soldiers beat a Chinese man to death. Following this incident, Saigon's Colonial Council attempted to address what they recognized as a problem, in which "every night, such violent scenes occur in the quarters haunted by soldiers and sailors."<sup>157</sup> The council passed a motion aimed at introducing military patrols in these areas "to stop the continual fights of drunk soldiers," resorting to military intervention since "the municipal police, composed of three

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid

<sup>155</sup> Charles Meyer, *Les Français en Indochine 1860-1914* (Paris: Hachette, 1996), 74.

<sup>156</sup> "Humble supplique," *L'Independent de Saigon*, October 3, 1882, 4.

<sup>157</sup> André Baudrit, *Contribution à l'histoire de Saigon: extraits des registres de délibérations de la Ville de Saigon (Indochine Française) 1867-1916, Deuxième Partie* (Saigon: Impr. J. Testelin, 1936), 167.

quarters Asian agents, is powerless to stop the violence scenes."<sup>158</sup> The patrols do not appear to have ever been implemented.

Again, in 1890, Colonial Council member Monceaux, a doctor who also worked with the criminal courts in Saigon, criticized police inaction in face of those who disturbed the peace and attacked and damaged personal property with impunity:

each time a transport or a war ship arrives, Charner Boulevard<sup>159</sup> is invaded by whole bands of sailors and soldiers looking for adventure [...] Their exploits are not confined to revolting, obscene songs, they also engage in fighting [...] they do not miss an opportunity to engage in excess: they throw bricks at the shutters without anyone intervening; they will attack any residence; never do you see a police report on these saturnalia.<sup>160</sup>

In another complaint about the notorious Boresse quarter from 1894, this one recorded in *Le Courrier de Saigon*, the author wrote of criminals: "They are often armed with brass knuckles, knives, and *coupe-coupes* [machetes]. The native policeman...almost always closes his eyes." The article went on that "the agents of the public force are so terrorized by these bandits, they do not even dare to make them pay their taxes. ... Why can't the municipal police carry out a serious clean-up in the Boresse neighborhood?"<sup>161</sup>

Again, in 1903, councilor Pech complained at a Colonial Council meeting about the "the scenes of disorder that occur every day at the Boresse quarter, under the eyes of the powerless police." The council President responded straightforwardly that this area was simply beyond their control: "In that which concerns the neighborhood of the *marais Boresse*, it would require a rather special police. The current police, either European or Indian and above all Indigenous, is powerless to repress the excess that occurs... ." At present, he went on, both the police were "powerless to stop the encircling of sailors, who sometimes throw prostitutes out of windows,

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Today Nguyen Hue street.

<sup>160</sup> The punctuation is in the original. Cited in Meyer, *Les Français en Indochine*, 75.

<sup>161</sup> "Le quartier Boresse," *Le Courrier de Saigon*, Septembre 8, 1894, 2.

take tiles from the houses to throw at passersby... ."162 He concluded that only with the aid of the army could the police hope to bring the situation under control.

Why were colonial police agents consistently unable to take action against brazen lawlessness? Understaffing and a lack of training did not help, but there was also a certain colonial logic to the crimes. Attempts to arrest a drunken sailor had the potential of leading to violent confrontations in the colonies or elsewhere. But in colonial Saigon there was the additional problem that the law's enforcers were usually Indians or Vietnamese agents. They made up the majority of the police force and were far more likely than European policemen to be working the streets on active duty. Vietnamese agents were also most vulnerable to retaliation as they were denied access to guns, further undermining their authority.<sup>163</sup>

The colonial order of things rested on "racialized physical violence" that permitted institutionalized and casual violence of the colonizer against the colonized, but never the other way around. For a French police agent to arrest a Vietnamese suspect was business as usual; for a Vietnamese or Indian police agent to arrest a French suspect would be to turn the racial rules governing the colonial order on their head. A letter to the editor, published in *L'Independant de Saigon* in 1882, further illustrates this point. The French author vehemently objected to the idea that the conquered could police the conqueror, in his mind a laughable proposition. He wrote: "We must all ask ourselves in the provinces if the Annamites have not subjugated France, if they are not the conquering race..."<sup>164</sup> He was angered by the idea that village notables could be potentially endowed with police powers and have jurisdiction over Europeans. "Could there be the peculiar idea of converting the tricolor belts of annamite mayors into the scarves of a police

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<sup>162</sup> Procès-Verbaux, Conseil Colonial, Séance du 28 Juillet, 1903, "Au sujet de la police indigene, Rapport de la Commission, n. 7" (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1903), 57.

<sup>163</sup> A. Belland, *Police de Saïgon. Guide des agents de police de la ville de Saïgon* (Saïgon: Impr. de Claude, 1897).

<sup>164</sup> *L'Independant de Saigon*, December, 12, 1882, 3.



*commissaire* and to use them against French citizens? That would be the last straw, a European arrested by natives..." He blamed governor Le Myre de Vilers for Vietnamese "insolence" and his "outdated" directives with "encouraging the natives in this way." He went on: "In France, the policeman says: *hit*, the subaltern agent shouts *knock out*; here the governor says: do not hit the annamites, respect them..."<sup>165</sup> The letter's hostility is indicative of the larger problem that colonial dominance was dependent on racial dominance, yet the French were also very much dependent on Vietnamese and Indian agents to carry out police work. In this sense, such encounters can be understood as a question of conflicting hierarchies and prestige: the prestige of the Vietnamese in uniform (representing state authority) and the prestige of whiteness (the racial hierarchy) came into open conflict in the person of the non-European policeman.

Uniforms again were symbols of police authority, and they became a target for those looking to undermine that authority when wielded by non-Europeans. In the above incident, for example, the soldiers tore up the Vietnamese agent's uniform. In another telling anecdote, a newspaper praised a European for putting a Vietnamese policeman in his place, the agent's offense being his dress and confidence. In 1903, *L'Avenir du Tonkin* mocked Vietnamese police agents "in their beautiful new flashy uniforms" for not behaving towards Europeans with "correctness." To remedy this, the journalist wrote that a French friend recently had to put a Vietnamese policeman in his place by insulting the agent and "sending him packing," possibly by giving him a whack on the back.<sup>166</sup> The snippet ended: "charming, isn't it?"

Police uniforms are an ongoing theme because they impinge on questions of prestige(s), and the violation of their sanctity presents concerns central to governance and power.<sup>167</sup> The

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> "Drole de policeman," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, May 21 1903.

<sup>167</sup> Belland, *Guide des Agents de Police de La Ville de Saigon*. European police officers and agents received both a sword or bayonet (*épée* or *sabre*) and a revolver, while Asian agents were issued only a sword or bayonet.

French press lodged countless complaints about the poor state of uniforms and about the agents' inability to wear them correctly. Lecoecur wrote of the French agents who resented wearing the same uniforms as their Indians colleagues. Belland praised Indians for at least "wearing the uniform better" than Vietnamese agents. Vietnamese agents, meanwhile, were poked fun at because of their uniform. In 1872, French zoologist Murice observed in his travelogue policemen coming and going from a police post in Saigon. He commented that he found the Indochinese in police uniforms both absurd and humorous:

About the middle of the street, on the right side, I saw a police post from which, together with a few Europeans, Malabars [Indians], Chinese and especially Annamites came out. The latter, small men dressed as policemen with their small swords, their very small *salaco* [a kind of hat] and their long plat [of hair] placed on the sides of the head, had the appearance of bully boys which was amusing in the extreme.<sup>168</sup>

The uniform as worn by non-Europeans incited violence and also incited laughter. Both can be seen as strategies to atone for damaged prestige, and to attempt to restore the colonial order.

Disparaging European treatment of Vietnamese and Indian agents unsurprisingly further damaged their authority as representatives of that same colonial state, a potentially self-defeating development. In 1883, a Chinese congregation leader named Fooki refused to obey an order delivered to him by an Indian policemen and "provoked a ruckus against him [the Indian] and hit him." The French had to resort to arresting him, either for not complying with the order, for violence against the Indian policeman, or both.<sup>169</sup>

Undermining the majority non-European agents undermined the authority of the police itself. The struggle to police white criminals was the byproduct of a fundamental problem related to the colonial logic of racially-coded legitimate and illegitimate violence. Non-white agents were restrained in their capacity to wield legitimate violence when confronted with white

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<sup>168</sup> A. Murice, *People and Wildlife in and Around Saigon: 1872-1873*, trans. Walter E. J. Tips (Bangkok: White Lotus Co Ltd, 1999), 8.

<sup>169</sup> CAOM, GGI 65267, Le Chef de l'office general de Police, "Evénements à Signaler," Saigon, August 21, 1883.

criminals because the racial hierarchy exposed them to retaliation. In this instance, the same hierarchy that undergirded the colonial order ended up working at times against the ability of the state to enforce even basic law and order.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter illustrated how France's peculiarly assimilationist approach to race and citizenship and the employment of Indians and other not white or "not-quite-white" agents in the European cadre complicated the police's racial order in unexpected ways, particularly concerning the exercise of police authority. The 1907 conflict over the employment of Indian agents as Europeans demonstrates both the material limits of assimilationism, and the enduring importance of race as the variable ordering colonial life, as do the everyday police reports of white crime. Another unintended result of colonial hierarchies ordered (however messily) by race was the empowerment of those at the bottom. Chapters 4 and 5 turn to the police's lower, indigenous ranks. Although typically overlooked in the literature, Vietnamese police recruits, along with a minority of Cambodians, Chinese interpreters, and others were key figures working in the colonial interface. These agents ended up wielding a degree of independence because of the state's dependence on them, again turning the hierarchy on its head.

## Chapter 4: Vietnamese Agents and the Colonial State's "Collaboration Dilemma"

The colonial state relied on intermediaries to staff the police's lowest ranks. Those in the "native cadre" were less expensive to employ, came from a larger recruitment pool, and provided badly needed local knowledge and translation services for their European police superiors. While their numbers varied, the native personnel usually made up around 65 to 75% of the total police numbers, and reached as high as 84% in Cholon in 1898,<sup>1</sup> or 81% in Haiphong's street police in 1927.<sup>2</sup> In 1877, more than 75% of the Saigon police personnel were listed as Asian (*asiatique*).<sup>3</sup> This trend was even more pronounced in the rural police where indigenous employees averaged 95% in 1898 in Cochinchina, with only one or two European *gendarmes* assigned per province to oversee this force.<sup>4</sup> Vietnamese agents also worked longer hours than their European counterparts and had fewer vacation or sick days, so were more likely to be on the street at any given time. Theirs was, for many, the face of the colonial police.

That at least three or four out of every five representatives of the *force publique* were not French in Vietnam's colonial cities is a detail that bears scrutiny. While these statistics may not be new to scholars, this study is the first to consider the ramifications of the police's reliance on non-white agents to carry out the lion's share of everyday police work in Vietnam. This chapter begins by looking at the thorny question of employing intermediaries in the police from the perspective of the state. It asks how the French administration dealt with the question of

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<sup>1</sup> TTLT II, IB24/231(2), Chef de 1re bureau, "état donnant la composition et l'effectif des forces de la police européenne et indigène à Saigon à Cholon dans les arrondissements de la Cochinchine pour le mois d'août 1898," September 17, 1898.

<sup>2</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine de Hanoi et Haiphong de la Sûreté du Tonkin 1926-29;" L. F. Eckert, Administrateur-Maire to RST, "Réorganisation de la Police urbaine" Hanoi. Haiphong, September 13, 1927.

<sup>3</sup> CAOM, GGI 10274, "Note de l'amiral Duperre et du contre-amiral Lafont sur l'organisation de le Direction de l'Interieur du Gt de la Cochinchine, 1876-1877; "Situation Générale du Personnel de la Direction de l'Interieur et des Services qui en dependant." In 1877, Saigon and Cholon has 57 Europeans, and 188 Asians for 245 total personnel. Asians = 76.7%. See also chapter 1 for early police personnel numbers and ratios.

<sup>4</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB24/231(2), le Chef de 1re bureau, "état donnant la composition et l'effectif des forces de la police européenne et indigène à Saigon à Cholon et dans les arrondissements de la Cochinchine pour le mois d'août 1898," September 17, 1898.

employing Vietnamese recruits in the security services, or more precisely, in what quantity, at what rank, and under whose supervision. Chapter 5 then explores how some agents were able to exercise exceptional influence because of their "middle" position in the colonial power structure and especially due to their role as informal interpreters.

For reasons beyond its control, the colonial state was highly dependent on these agents to staff the police, yet the French in the colony were recurrently ambivalent about their dependability and loyalty. This underlying tension, what I call the "collaboration dilemma," had ramifications for how Vietnamese agents were employed and deployed. The state's approach to intermediaries can be understood as the negotiated product of countervailing attitudes and economic and other practical pressures that forced the question in favor of hiring Vietnamese agents. Political turmoil, or the betrayal of a Vietnamese agent, meanwhile caused the leadership to question their reliability and only half-empower them, most notably by denying them guns and otherwise undermining their authority as policemen. Understanding the underlying tensions in French policy (to employ or not to employ) as a result of the collaboration dilemma helps explain why the French employed Vietnamese in the police the way they did—in large numbers, but with limited authority, and often without supervision and support.

### **Collaboration as a "double-edged sword"**

Postcolonial scholarship has not been kind to intermediaries, something recent historians have begun to overcome.<sup>5</sup> The stigma of collaboration cuts both ways: after Vietnamese independence, telling the story of those who willingly worked for the French—in the "dreaded" police no less—became difficult for both Vietnamese nationalists (for whom it undermined a narrative of racial and national unity) and French colonial sympathizers (for whom the history of

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<sup>5</sup> Cindy Nguyen, "Beyond Betrayal: Collaborators in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century French Colonial Vietnam," *Columbia East Asia Review* (Spring 2011): 43. [http://www.eastasiareview.org/issues/2011/articles/2011\\_Nguyen.pdf](http://www.eastasiareview.org/issues/2011/articles/2011_Nguyen.pdf)

violence and racial subjugation becomes impossible to deny). Patricia Pelley's study on the formation of postcolonial Vietnam's historiography critiques the tendency of Communist Party historians to label all colonial era opponents as "'reactionaries' and 'traitors.'"<sup>6</sup> Building on Pelley's insights, Cindy Nguyen's study of one "arch-collaborationist"—intellectual-reformer Nguyen Van Vinh—also troubles "the simple binaries of 'collaborator' and 'hero,' 'patriot' and 'traitor' as rubrics for understanding Vietnam's colonial situation in the early decades of the twentieth century."<sup>7</sup> Reframing maligned figures—those who worked with and for the French—as middles (chapter 5) gives historians a more productive paradigm for thinking about their role in the interface of the colonial order.

As historians of colonial armies have shown, the central riddle of colonization was that colonizers were ultimately dependent on the colonized to do the legwork of colonizing.<sup>8</sup> The two main colonial security services—the civil police and the military (including various native militias in the provinces)—encountered a similar dilemma. The literature on Vietnamese troops shows some of the ways colonial powers attempted to wield what Henri Eckert calls a "double-edged sword," and provides useful comparisons for thinking about how military work differed fundamentally from police work in the colony.<sup>9</sup> Eckert shows that the decision to use Vietnamese soldiers was a divisive issue for the nineteenth century colonial administration. The pragmatic need to employ Vietnamese troops eventually prevailed, and no major military

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<sup>6</sup> Patricia M. Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002) 3. See also conclusion, especially p. 238.

<sup>7</sup> Nguyen, "Beyond Betrayal." To dismiss Nguyen Van Vinh as a collaborationist, Nguyen argues, is to miss his contribution to Vietnamese linguistics and Franco-Vietnamese literature, and also to greatly overstate distinctions between his actions and those of celebrated Vietnamese patriots like Phan Boi Chau. Nguyen Van Vinh, interestingly for the purposes of this chapter and Hunt's work, was first trained as an interpreter, and his major life work was to translate French literature into quốc ngữ. Nguyen concludes that "In his role as translator and author, Nguyen provided a cultural highway for Vietnamese to understand French and Western ideas, as well as for the French to better comprehend the Vietnamese." He was thus a consummate "middle."

<sup>8</sup> Karl Hack and Tobias Rettig, eds., *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Henri Eckert, "Double-edged swords of conquest in Indochina: *Tirailleurs Tonkinois, Chasseurs annamites* and militias, 1883-1895," in *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia*, eds. Karl Hack and Tobias Rettig (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 126-153.

operation in Indochina took place without them. As he summarizes the situation: "Sans armée indochinoise, pas d'Indochine française." No Indochinese army, no French Indochina.<sup>10</sup> The French were nonetheless hesitant to arm and empower non-French auxiliaries for fear of disloyalty. In his work on colonial soldiers in Vietnam in the interwar period, Tobias Rettig describes the state's "love-hate relationship" with the colonial military, which he contends came down to a question of perpetually doubted loyalties.<sup>11</sup> "Although [Indo-Chinese soldiers] were indispensable, most of the French were never too sure about the loyalty of soldiers who were both enforcers of colonial order and colonized subjects."<sup>12</sup> Fear of rebellion also caused them to adjust what they considered a "safe ratio" of French to Vietnamese, to achieve the "right racial balance among French Indo-China's troops."<sup>13</sup> Such distrust, Rettig argues, undermined any chance of a genuinely collaborative relationship.<sup>14</sup>

These studies suggest similarities between the army and the police. The police leadership also balked at entrusting Vietnamese to hold leadership positions, or, for much of the colonial period, even equipping them with guns. Employing police intermediaries without allowing them any real authority was potentially self-defeating from the state's perspective—good *commissaires* had to trust their subordinates' judgments. The nature of police work was also distinct from the military in several important ways. First, police agents on the streets in general had greater discretion and a broader scope of intervention. The much larger military usually operated in

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<sup>10</sup> Henri Eckert, "Les militaires indochinois au service de la France (1859-1939)" (PhD diss., Lille: A.N.R.T, Université de Lille III, 1998), 339.

<sup>11</sup> Tobias Rettig, "French military policies in the aftermath of the Yên Bái mutiny, 1930: old security dilemmas return to the surface," *South East Asia Research* 10, 3, (November 2002): 312.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 325, The post-Yên Bái mutiny army sought to employ 50% Vietnamese and 50% French or ethnic minority, after years of a 1 to 3 or 4 ratio.

<sup>14</sup> Tobias Rettig, "Contested loyalties: Vietnamese soldiers in the service of France, 1927-1939" (PhD diss., London: School of Oriental and African studies, 2005).

units, under a clear command, while the police (which might number only a few dozen agents) often worked alone or in pairs by necessity but also design.

While the colonial police model theoretically required European leadership to monitor Vietnamese agents at all times, ample evidence suggests that Vietnamese police agents did not have constant European supervision. As explored in chapters 1 and 2, the European cadre was not only understaffed, at any given time a portion of the European agents would be on leave, out sick, or otherwise missing their shifts. Europeans were also often unwilling to patrol during the hottest parts of the day or in the early hours of the morning.

The combination of their scarce numbers and the pressure to produce results meant that Vietnamese agents worked independently but had enormous discretion to enforce (or not enforce) laws and intervene in the lives of civilians in an official capacity. While agents in the Vietnamese cadre did not have broad powers of arrest, outside of stopping crimes *en flagrant*, it was up to them to alert their European superiors to misdeeds. Tasked with vague instructions to ensure "law and order" and keep the peace meant that anything from a carriage crash to a bar room brawl to a case of spoiled meat at the market were potentially cause for police intervention (or a shakedown). Or he could create an incident; asking to see tax or identification cards ended up being a common way to harass or extort civilians. In short, police work was unusually independent and its scope was the most broadly defined of any colonial service.

A final characteristic separating colonial troops from colonial police agents was the nature of their recruitment and employment. Both earned derisory salaries at the lowest levels—the Vietnamese police were paid only slightly more than Vietnamese soldiers—which made it very difficult to attract desirable candidates. But while the army resorted to conscription to fill its ranks, as a civilian institution the police never did. Those who joined the police did so



voluntarily, and could leave just as easily. Vietnamese agents were likely aware of how difficult they were to replace which gave them more leverage vis-à-vis their French employers than their military counterparts.

### **Why Join the Native Cadre Police?**

Being a police agent was a generally difficult job, with exposure to extreme weather, disasters, violence, physical demands, and long, irregular hours. Vietnamese agents also had to contend with the stigma of collaboration on the one hand, and overt racism on the part of their French superiors on the other. Those in the native cadre made up the majority of agents, but they earned a mere fraction of their European counterparts of the same rank, around 1/8th in 1900. Police work, or its closest pre-colonial equivalent of guard or soldier (*linh*), was historically held in low regard as Eckert argues in the context of the colonial army.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, police work offered a steady paycheck with opportunity for advancement.

The social profile of entry-level Vietnamese recruits was not entirely different from many of the entry-level French agents. Like their French superiors, Vietnamese agents were not formally educated, and at least a few were illiterate. They also came from rural areas and likely had farming or military backgrounds. Agents were typically recruited from the colonial army, to which most had been conscripted. Like Indian and French policemen, their primary motivation for joining the police appears to have been economic, and some left when better jobs became available.

An early mention of a Vietnamese police agent with personal detail appears in a report from 1866. A 24-year-old police guard identified only as Bian was attacked in Saigon when he tried to intervene in a dispute between European sailors. His written testimony about the incident had to be recorded by an interpreter, indicating that he did not speak French. The interpreter also

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<sup>15</sup> Eckert, "Les militaires indochinois," 194.

signed Bian's statement in the police report for the reason that Bian "does not know how to sign."  
This tells us that Bian was young, at 24, and that he was illiterate.<sup>16</sup>

Native cadre salaries were very low, even by comparison with other unskilled careers. Police salaries started at just 8 piastres/month in 1900 in both Saigon and Hanoi and topping out at around 40 piastres/month at the highest native rank. Following an 1896 Saigon police law (which remained in effect through 1910) salaries were as follows, starting at the lowest rank:

Auxiliary agents: 8 piastres per month  
Agent of the 4th class: 12 piastres per month  
Agents of the 3rd class: 15 piastres per month  
Agents of the 2nd class: 18.75 piastres per month  
Agents of the 1st class: 22.33 piastres per month  
Sous-brigadier of the 2nd class: 25 piastres per month  
Sous-brigadier of the 1st class: 28.17 piastres per month  
Brigadier of the 2nd class: 31.25 piastres per month  
Brigadier of the 1st class: 37.50 piastres per month

The Hanoi municipal police's native cadre salaries in 1905 were:

Agent of the 4th class: 8 piastres per month  
Agents of the 3rd class: 10 piastres per month  
Agents of the 2nd class: 11.75 piastres per month  
Agents of the 1st class: 13.83 piastres per month  
Sous-brigadier of the 2nd class: 16 piastres per month  
Sous-brigadier of the 1st class: 18 piastres per month  
Brigadier of the 2nd class: 20 piastres per month  
Brigadier of the 1st class: 30 piastres per month  
Interprète "de auxiliaire:" 22 piastres per month  
Interprète de 1ere class: 45 piastres per month<sup>17</sup>

In Haiphong in 1910, Vietnamese agents were further given a lodging stipend of 10 piastres and another 10 piastres for their uniform.<sup>18</sup> Salaries were comparable if slightly higher for Phnom Penh in 1905:

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<sup>16</sup> CAOM, GGI 12118, "Bruit et tapage nocturnes et coups et blessure," Commissaire Alexandre Mathieu, Saigon, November 20, 1866; L'officier de police judiciaire, "Renseignements," n.d.

<sup>17</sup> See also: CAOM, GGI, 7779. Projet de réorganisation de la police de Sûreté générale en Indochine (Mission de M. Gautret), 1905-06.

<sup>18</sup> "Le Personnel Indigène de la Police," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, January 25, 1910, 2.

Agent of the 5th class: 10.42 piastres per month  
 Agent of the 4th class: 12.50 piastres per month  
 Agents of the 3rd class: 15 piastres per month  
 Agents of the 2nd class: 17.50 piastres per month  
 Agents of the 1st class: 20 piastres per month  
 Brigadier of the 2nd class: 27 piastres per month  
 Brigadier chef: 35.50 piastres per month  
 Secrétaire auxiliaire of the 2nd class: 25 piastres per month  
 Secrétaire auxiliaire of the 1st class: 41.67 piastres per month

Police wages on the low end are more akin to a soldier or domestic servant, but with the possibility of advancement. By comparison, in 1890 a rickshaw puller earned 4-6 piastres per month, agricultural workers made around 18-21 piastres per month (60-70 cents a day), and domestic workers made around 12 piastres per month.<sup>19</sup> According to Jean-Dominique Giacometti's work on wages in the colony, in 1910, a Saigon cook would make around 20 piastres a month and a "congai" (live-in girlfriend) could earn around 10 piastres (although not all congais were paid).<sup>20</sup> Eckert writes for the nineteenth century that soldiers were paid at minimum 9 piastres a month, and that economic opportunities outside the army meant that this salary presented little incentive to join.<sup>21</sup> Only the poorest ended up being conscripted because those who could afford to paid someone else to enlist in their stead.<sup>22</sup> In 1887, soldiers also received 10 cents per day for cost of living expenses, or about 3 piastres per month, putting them on par with domestic workers. Even later, in the 1920s, Jean-Dominique Giacometti writes that "Vietnamese blue collars and unskilled workers such as rick-shaws, domestic staff, workers in

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<sup>19</sup> Haejeong Hazel Hahn, "The Rickshaw Trade in Colonial Vietnam, 1883-1940," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 8/4 (2014): 47-85. See p. 56 for rickshaw driver wages.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Dominique Giacometti, "Wages and consumer prices for urban and industrial workers in Vietnam under French rule (1910-1954)" in *Quantitative History of Vietnam*, eds. Jean-Pascal Bassino, Jean-Dominique Giacometti, Konosuke Odaka, English editing: Suzanne Ruth Clark (Tokyo: Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University, 2000), 205.

<sup>21</sup> Eckert, "Les militaires indochinois," 203.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. According to Cochinchina's 1891 budget, a Vietnamese soldier in Cochinchina would earn a base wage of between 4.6 piastres/month (as a *tirailleur* of the 2nd class) and at the high end 38 per piastres per month (as a sous-lieutenant of the 1st class). "Chaptire V—Services Militaires, Rapport de la commission," in Procès-Verbaux, Conseil Colonial, Séance du 9 Janvier 1891, (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1891), 126.

factories" earned just under 15 piastres.<sup>23</sup> In this same period, Vietnamese civil servants with families, by contrast, averaged 85 piastres per month. Police salaries, starting at just 8 piastres, were therefore hardly competitive.<sup>24</sup>

In 1910, a reporter named Le Van Ngo interviewed a former Vietnamese agent by the name of Phan who had left the Saigon police precisely because of the pay. In the article printed in the *Le Réveil Saigonnais*, Ngo wrote:

As for native agents, it has become particularly difficult to recruit them, their starting salary being too trivial [*insignificant*]. The Annamites think that it is preferable to be a servant [*boy*] in the service of a Frenchman at 15 piastres per month or in the service of a rich annamite at 7 piastres per month, [where they are also] lodged, dressed, and fed, sooner than risk getting beat up over the public peace.<sup>25</sup>

Phan stated that he had had to quit the Saigon police because at a salary of 15 piastres he could not support himself, his wife, and their three children.<sup>26</sup>

Colonial state employment presented some appeal, and a job in the police could be a foot in the door to functionary work. It was not seasonal and agents had some job security and were paid in cash. For the less scrupulous, police work was also an opportunity to engage in extortion and other lucrative criminal activity. In later years, policemen also received small housing and clothing stipends. Their paychecks also went further if they were single. In Hanoi in 1927 Vietnamese agents were more likely to be single than their French counterparts.

	European, Single	Euro., Married	Native, Single	Native, Married
Sûreté personnel	12	21	38	79
Urban police personnel	25	19	230	9
Total personnel	37	40	268	88

Source: TTLT I, RST 37567, Letter from Le Chef du Service de la Sûreté du Tonkin Arnoux to RST, Hanoi, December 9, 1927.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Giacometti, "Wages and consumer prices," 205.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Le Van Ngo, "Le service de la Sûreté en Cochinchine," *Le Réveil Saigonnais*, May 28, 1910, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Vietnamese agents were often employed in lieu of Europeans because they were cheaper. To compare European and native salaries of the same rank: a Vietnamese agent of the 3rd class in Saigon was paid 15 piastres per month, while a European agent of the 3rd class earned 125 piastres per month. This meant the European was more than 8 times more expensive than a native agent of the same rank, not including additional benefits of paid leave, sick leave, and transportation costs.

Low wages, as Zinoman has argued for the colonial prisons, contributed to corruption.<sup>28</sup> In 1913, Saigon's *conseiller municipal* Moyaux wrote to *L'Opinion* about the need to raise dismal salaries so that these Vietnamese agents could be trusted to support Europeans in the police: "To be able to count on these indispensable auxiliaries, it is necessary to raise their starvation wage [*solde de famine*] that forces them to take recourse in corruption."<sup>29</sup> With only low pay to offer, the police struggled to recruit and retain Vietnamese agents. In 1913, Hanoi *planton* (clerk) Pham Nguyen Cay left his job at which he earned only 120 piastres per year. He was replaced by Le Si Bang, who joined the Hanoi police at an annual salary of 96 piastres, or only 8 piastres per month.<sup>30</sup> Desertion cases were not unheard of. Former colonial soldier Nguyen Van Su applied to work as an agent of the 4th class in Cochinchina in 1888, but abandoned his post after just 4 days.<sup>31</sup> In a report on the police in the north, administrator Gauret complained in 1905 that Vietnamese agents were overly sensitive, and "at the slightest remark, they give their resignation and often even quit their job without telling anyone."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine de Hanoi et Haiphong de la Sûreté du Tonkin 1926-29;" Letter from Le Chef du Service de la Sûreté Arnoux to RST, Hanoi, December 9, 1927.

<sup>28</sup> Zinoman, *Colonial Bastille*, chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>29</sup> *L'Opinion*, October 23, 1913.

<sup>30</sup> "Commissariat Central," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, August 27, 1913.

<sup>31</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IA.9/212(9).

<sup>32</sup> CAOM, GGI, 7779. Projet de réorganisation de la police de Sûreté générale en Indochine (Mission de M. Gautret), 1905-06.

As in the European cadre, the primary motivation of Vietnamese job seekers appears to have been economic. A 1907 article in *l'Asie Française* claimed that Vietnamese police agents were recruited from among the unemployed, or otherwise "among the servants."<sup>33</sup> Applicants themselves wrote that they were in dire need of employment. In October 1931, an out-of-work printer by the name of Huynh Van Tai applied, for the second time, to join the Saigon police. Desperation drove him to seek employment in the police, or so he wrote Colonial Minister Paul Reynard. After the Saigon police rejected his application due to his age and lack of military service, Tai appealed directly to the Colonial Minister, writing that he needed work because of his "large family, of which I am the sole breadwinner, finds itself plunged into the most atrocious misery." He went on to connect his own poverty with the growing popularity of communism in the colony, "driven by hunger, [there are those] forced to blindly follow the bad leaders who promise them the moon," while suggesting that he was one of those people would rather starve than to entrust his security to "those types."<sup>34</sup> His request was denied. His letter had been translated from Vietnamese, indicating that he was not proficient in French.

In addition to Vietnamese recruits, the lowest ranks of the Saigon police also included a small minority of other agents categorized as "natives" including a handful of Cambodians and Chinese interpreters. The only reference I located of Cambodians employed in Saigon comes from 1885, when Tourillon indicated that two Cambodians had been recently employed, one in Cholon, the other in Saigon.<sup>35</sup> Both were fluent in French. The first had been fired in September after opium use left him too exhausted to work. This discharge had followed a history of disciplinary actions for "shortcomings in his service." The other Cambodian agent, by contrast,

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<sup>33</sup> "La Justice en Indochine," *Bulletin du Comité, L'Asie Française*, April 1907, 127-128.

<sup>34</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB30/153, Demande d'emploi, HUYNH-VAN-TAI to Monsieur le Ministre des Colonies passage à Indochine, Saigon, October 15, 1931.

<sup>35</sup> CAOM, GGI 11569, "Police; personnel, 1885," Tourillon, commissaire central, to Chef de Cabinet du Gouverneur, Saigon, November 27, 1885.

had distinguished himself. Kres had joined the police in 1883 as an agent of the 4th class, but had left to work for the opium monopoly (*regie d'opium*) in Cambodia. He earned a good mention in his file for saving a sailor from drowning.

The correspondence surrounding Vietnamese recruitment is less available than for the Europeans, but based on available data the native cadre had similar problems with both quantity and quality of agents. In 1919, the president of the *Commission Municipale* in Cholon wrote the governor about long-term problems hindering Vietnamese recruitment.<sup>36</sup> Under the new system, urban police agents had to pass exams that were advertised two months in advance. "This method of recruitment presents many drawbacks" because potential candidates do not "keep informed on job offers made in this manner" and the lengthy process created "considerable delays that ended up discouraging the most capable candidates." The most recent exam needed to fill twelve vacancies but resulted in the hiring of only three Vietnamese agents. Almost thirty had applied, "almost all before the announcement of the exam" and half were weeded out because of problems with their files. In the end, six were offered jobs, and only three of those actually joined. This system only allowed the recruitment of candidates "incapable of doing anything else."<sup>37</sup> He therefore requested a more flexible hiring process, in which the *commissaires* would review candidates as they applied.

In 1927, the Cochinchina police had a budget for 350 Vietnamese agents, but actually employed only 260.<sup>38</sup> The Sûreté chief noted several problems with recruitment, the first of which was, again, the lengthy exam process. In 1926, the Cochinchina police had attempted to

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<sup>36</sup> TTLT II Goucoch IIB.56/112, "Pièces divers relatives au personnel de police 1919-1929;" Le Président de la Commission Municipale to Goucoch, Saigon, "Recrutement d'agents indigènes de la police urbaine." Cholon, April 23, 1919.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB25/121(2). L'administrateur Chef du Service de la Sûreté, "Conseil Colonial Livre Vert 1926-1927;" "Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service de Sûreté pour l'établissement du Livre-Vert de 1926-1927," Exempleire 1 [this looks like a draft], June 10, 1927.

recruit 100 Vietnamese agents, but the "formalities" leading up to the police entrance exam eliminated all but 38 applicants. The report's author furthermore urged his superiors to raise the native policemen salaries to attract more candidates.<sup>39</sup> A report for 1929 painted a similar picture. Although the police budget grew rapidly in the face of increasing anti-colonial activity, recruitment still lagged behind. In 1929, the Cochinchina police had filled only 300 out of 380 positions by the year's end.<sup>40</sup>

In 1924, Haiphong Mayor Krautheimer wrote the RST urging the forced retirement of several agents in the Tonkin Sûreté who he claimed provided no service to the police. For the Vietnamese agents, he wrote that "I insist especially for the infirm, the crippled [*impotents*], the crazy [*fou*], and the incapable be sent home as soon as possible."<sup>41</sup> In 1939, Chef de Sûreté in Cochinchina Nadaud wrote his superior asking for the dismissal of several *agents indigènes* of the urban police because they were no longer fit for service.<sup>42</sup> These four officers—brigadiers and sous-brigadiers—all had been in the police for more than 20 years, and were over 45 years old in 1939. According to Nadaud, they were "dead weight" for the police because they had failed to "keep up their physical condition" and were "in a state neighboring senility." As a result, they had lost all "moral authority." Nadaud felt that three of the four had provided "passable" service so potentially warranted a partial pension. He awaited the governor's approval to dismiss the agents as soon as possible.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> CAOM, GGI 65476, Nadaud, "Gouvernement de la Cochinchine, Service de la Sûreté, Rapport d'ensemble en vue de la preparation du "LIVRE VERT" de 1929, Periode Julliet 1928 – Juin 1929." Saigon, June 10, 1929. See also: TTLT II Goucoch IIB.56/112, Pièces divers relatives au personnel de police, 1919-1929.

<sup>41</sup> CAOM, FM, EE/II/1677/17, Indo Chine Police municipal, Haiphong, Dossier of Nicolăi, Pierre, Paul, 1925; Letter from Maire J. Krautheimer to RST Hanoi, "Objet: Retraites police urbaine," Haiphong, June 10, 1924.

<sup>42</sup> TTLT II, Phủ Thống Đốc Nam Kỳ, C 01-223: "ông Thiên, cảnh sát vùng Sài Gòn - Chợ Lớn nằm nhà thương để thăm định về sức khỏe năm 1939;" Georges Nadaud, Contrôleur Général de le Sûreté Générale Note to Goucoch, "Personnel Indigène Actif de la Police de l'Indochine, Police urbaines, M.M. Le Van Minh (brigadier de 2eme classe), Vo Van So, (Sous-brigadier de 1ere classe), Vo Van Kinh, Duong Van Thien (sous-brigadiers de 2eme classe)" Saigon, October 14, 1938.



The practice of recruiting police agents from former conscripts was a deliberate move for both French and Vietnamese policemen. As with the Europeans, the police leadership hoped employing Vietnamese with military backgrounds would help instill a sense of discipline and create uniformity in the police service. For instance, in 1906 Hanoi Commissaire Central Kersselaer proposed to the Prosecutor that the recent rise in crime be addressed by recruiting 250 additional Vietnamese from former *tirailleurs* (colonial soldiers) into the police because "these former soldiers, experienced in European discipline, have a better appearance and their backgrounds are certain."<sup>43</sup> Hierarchy was also supposed to make them more obedient and bring tighter French supervision to the police.

The Tonkin police agent guidebook stressed the importance of adopting a military-style hierarchy: "Agents, for the most part former soldiers, should act like in a regiment... They should avoid familiarity with officers and obey orders even if they feel them unjust, except to bring them later to the superior chief."<sup>44</sup> There were efforts to militarize the native cadre. In 1927, Haiphong Mayor Eckert went so far as to propose transforming the cadre into a sort of "native gendarmerie," and improve their pay, training, discipline, and appearance, in order to "bring them into line."<sup>45</sup>

### **Naturalized and *Métis* Agents: Maurice and Jean Jacques Maitam**

Less is known about naturalized French-Vietnamese and *métis* police agents beyond the fact that they were a permanent and invaluable cohort in the police. They were employed in the European cadre, but their intermediary position gave them a lot in common with those in the

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<sup>43</sup> TTLT I, RST 034196, "Au sujet du nombre des agents de police indigène à Hanoi 1905-1906," Le Commissaire Central p.i. au Tonkin à Monsieur le Procureur de la République à Hanoi, Hanoi, February 2, 1906

<sup>44</sup> *Manuel de Police à l'usage des Agents de Police du Tonkin* (Hanoi-Haiphong: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1909), 1-2.

<sup>45</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine de Hanoi et Haiphong de la Sûreté du Tonkin 1926-29;" L. F. Eckert, Administrateur-Maire to RST, "Réorganisation de la Police urbaine" Hanoi. Haiphong, September 13, 1927.

Vietnamese cadre. In July 1917, the Cholon police employed 24 Europeans, of which at least two were *métis* or naturalized Vietnamese: Ngo Van Duc and La Van Manh.<sup>46</sup> The 1931 inspector exam also included in its roster of 32 French applicants a number of *métis* and Vietnamese. Lucian Beaugendre was born in 1911 in Cochinchina to a Vietnamese mother and a French father from Réunion. Paul Marin was born in 1905 in Saigon to a Vietnamese mother and a French father. He was listed as unemployed when he applied for the police. Henri Pelitier was born in 1907 in Laos (Pak-Hin-Buon) to a woman named Sao Tone. Although he father had not legally recognized him, he was "presumed to be of the France race" and he was therefore recognized in his file as a French citizen.<sup>47</sup> The list of applicants also included a naturalized Frenchman named Vo Anh Truong, who was born in Saigon in 1908 to a Vietnamese colonial soldier. Candidate Ho Van Cam dit Henri from Can Tho had applied for and received citizenship in 1928. He was born in 1897 and was the oldest applicant by a significant margin at the age of 35, indicating long military service. He was married in 1931 and had 4 children.

There is extensive biographical data on one of the most famous naturalized Vietnamese in the police, inspector Maurice Maitam and his *métis* son, Jean Jacques Maitam.<sup>48</sup> Their story, which is highly exceptional, shows that just as there were socioeconomic divides within the white cohort, there were as well among the non-Europeans. Maitam had a privileged background as the son of a Catholic mandarin and also became, in his own right, an extremely wealthy businessman. Two sons followed in his footsteps and went on to work for the colonial police.

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<sup>46</sup> CAOM, GGI 30766, Dossier personnel M. Ferreri; Gouverneur (Cabinet) "Reponse a votre note n. 2625 du 9 juillet courant," July 12, 1917.

<sup>47</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/259, "Dossiers des Candidats au concours pour l'emploi d'inspecteur stagiaire de la Police de Sûreté (Session de Septembre 1931)" addressed to the Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, January 13, 1932. In 1932, at the time of his application to become a police inspector he was already employed in the police as an *agent journalier du service de la Sûreté*. He had been recruited into the 11e RIC in Pondicherry.

<sup>48</sup> CAOM, GGI Series C, 680, Personnel file, Maitam (Maurice); Chef du Service de la Surete du Tonkin Gilles to the RST, "A.s. Titularisation du Sous-brigadier stagiaire MAI-TAM," Hanoi, February 21, 1925; Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Hanoi, June 1938.

The Viet Minh assassinated Maurice Maitam in 1945, but his son Jean-Jacque would continue working for the French police in Indochina through 1954. The son also wrote an autobiography, and although from a later period, their story is relevant to the question of intermediaries.

Maurice Maitam was born August 23, 1894 in Kien An, Tonkin.<sup>49</sup> His father was Mai Trung Cat, a Tong Doc (governor) of Bac Ninh and one of Vietnam's last mandarins. Mai Trung Cat's position allowed him to send Maurice to study in France at the age of 7, in 1894. Maurice was raised Catholic. Although he did not do well in his studies in France, and failed to earn a *baccalauréat*, he found success via the military, enlisting when war broke out in 1914.<sup>50</sup> He was a graduate of the *lycée d'Alger* in 1915 and also served in the foreign legion where he was injured in World War I near Verdun. Maitam returned to the colony as a sergeant and was again injured in an operation in Moncay. He was awarded medals for his service and became a French citizen. In 1919, he married Marie-Louise Olleac (the *métis* daughter of a Vietnamese woman and Auguste Alexandre Olleac, a Frenchman who worked in commercial enterprises in the colony) and the couple had nine children. According to his son, Maurice's father (Jean Jacques' grandfather) disowned Maurice for marrying a *métis* woman. The couple founded four major commercial enterprises with the intent of giving one to each of their four sons. Maurice, in addition to his private enterprises, passed the exam to join the Tonkin municipal police in 1923, at the age of 29, at the rank of sous-brigadier.

In 1925, the head of the Tonkin Sûreté recommended him for promotion to full inspecteur because Maitam had "reported many arrests of dangerous criminals in the provinces

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<sup>49</sup> I draw their biographies from the son's autobiography and archival files. Jean Jacques Maitam, *A House Divided* (Tudor Pub, 1999); CAOM, GGI Series C, 680, Personnel file, Maitam (Maurice); Chef du Service de la Sûreté du Tonkin Gilles to the RST, "A.s. Titularisation du sous-brigadier stagiaire MAI-TAM," Hanoi, February 21, 1925; Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Hanoi, June 1938.

<sup>50</sup> Maitam, *A House Divided*, 13-18.

of Bac Giang and Son Tay, exhibiting good policemen qualities."<sup>51</sup> He had not been put up for promotion sooner because he and the Vietnamese agent accompanying him were both charged with corruption in Hai Duong province. He was acquitted in August 1924.<sup>52</sup> By 1936, he reached the rank of *Inspecteur Principal Hors Classe*. He retired sometime between 1938 and 1944.

In 1937, GGI Brevie expressed suspicion of Maitam's business dealings and asked the RST to look into the private life of Maitam, asking confidentially if he "have interests in transportation enterprises in Tonkin and in a construction business."<sup>53</sup> RST Faugere came to Maitam's defense and listed the years of service (military and police) Maitam had rendered. He explained that while the policeman was not involved in any business personally, Maitam's wife had been authorized to create in 1931 a limited liability company. The issue appears to have been dropped.

Of Maurice's nine children, two became policemen. His son Auguste Maitam joined the police and was working in Hanoi in 1943. His brother, Jean Jacques Maitam (born October 13, 1922), also joined the police in 1942 and wrote a memoir in 2001. After Jean Jacques failed to pass the army physical, due to childhood illness, Maurice secured him a job in the Tonkin police as an inspector.<sup>54</sup> In 1944, Jean Jacques served in the colonial military, only to be imprisoned by the Japanese during the occupation. He then returned to the police for the duration of the first Indochina war. He immigrated to France after Dien Bien Phu and later worked as a diplomat in France. He retired in Los Angeles, California.

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<sup>51</sup> CAOM, GGI Series C, 680, Personnel file, Maitam (Maurice); Chef du Service de la Sûreté du Tonkin Gilles to the RST, "A.s. Titularisation du Sous-brigadier stagiaire MAI-TAM," Hanoi February 21, 1925; Bulletin Individuel de Notes, Hanoi, June 1938.

<sup>52</sup> In February 1925, Maitam was promoted to inspecteur of the second class, then to inspecteur de 1ere class in 1926, and so on.

<sup>53</sup> CAOM, RSTNF 4473, "Renseignements sur. M. Mai-Tam."

<sup>54</sup> Maitam, *A House Divided*, 29. For his run-in with the Kempeitai, See also: CAOM, RSTNF 7081, "Activité de la Gendarmerie Japonaise, Affaire MAI-TAM, inspecteur de la Sûreté;" Letter from the RST Chauvet to GGI, Dalat-Hanoi, September 6, 1944.

Although from a later period, Jean Jacques' recollection of his early days in the police indicate that he took great pride in his position. When he went out, he wrote, "I play the part of the handsome, dashing, young police inspecteur."<sup>55</sup> His sense of inbetween-ness is also strong. Race and a feeling of only half-belonging feature prominently in his narrative.<sup>56</sup> He was harassed, according to his memoir, for being a "half-breed," a term he uses repeatedly, and some of his earliest memories are of being taunted by other children for being mixed race.<sup>57</sup> Attuned to the racial hierarchy in the police, he learned how to balance his white colleagues' expectations—who saw him as Vietnamese and therefore qualified for undercover work—and Vietnamese informants (and enemies), for whom his French heritage made him a target.

Jean Jacques' descriptions of his work in the period 1942-1944 illustrates the importance of informants for colonial police work and the blurring of legal and illegal practices. He prided himself in have a reputation for problem solving through recruiting and managing informants. On one occasion from the post-1945 period, he had to pay informants by tipping them off to an unguarded warehouse of stolen goods. He also described how he blackmailed gangs to cut down on pick pocketing in 1942, ordering their leaders to return any wallet with over 100 piastres and in return the gangs would be left alone. While trying to bust a gambling ring, he inadvertently discovered that his *commissaire*, Robert Tisseyre, was protecting the gambling den and had been tipping them off to Jean Jacques' raids. He says upon figuring this out in 1942 he immediately stopped pursuing that particular gambling ring.

Both he and his father were colonial elites, so are not representative of *métis* in the police, but their narratives highlight race as a major factor in their relationships with their colleagues, and there is a real sense of in-betweenness in Jean-Jacque's story. It also points to accepted

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<sup>55</sup> Maitam, 38.

<sup>56</sup> Maitam, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

corruption and casual brutality (some of which disgusted him) and the manipulating and breaking of laws to suit police purposes. It also provides some insight into what it meant for Jean Jacques to work in the police. He grew up hearing his father's stories and imagined himself as the fictional Belgium police inspector Poirot. He was proud to wear the uniform. He eventually became disillusioned with police work but remained employed in the French intelligence service until the end of the war in 1954.

### **"The places are familiar to him, he knows the people:" Why Employ Vietnamese Agents**

On July 18, 1888, the front-page story of *Le Courrier de Saigon* celebrated the capture of several men involved in a recent pirate raid in Sa Dec province. Two weeks earlier, around twenty armed bandits had pillaged Chinese shops at the Sai Vung market, "taking advantage of the absence of a single European."<sup>58</sup> The attackers shot and wounded guards and village notables who had tried to resist them and at least one victim later died from his injuries. The suspects were now in custody, however, and the French newspaper editor credited the arrests to Quan Binh, a Vietnamese police guard (*quan an de milice*) leading the investigation.<sup>59</sup> Binh and his eight Vietnamese subordinates had taken the initiative and interviewed witnesses and others with knowledge of the attack. Information surfaced which took Binh and his men, armed with rifles, to neighboring Can Tho where they located many of the stolen goods. Arrests followed, including that of the band leader in Rach Gia province.

The French newspaper editor, signed only "J. B. D.," contended that while Binh showed a clear aptitude for police work, the success of his investigation could be best explained by his local knowledge and community connections, or, in short, to his being Vietnamese. "Quan Binh

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<sup>58</sup> J.D.B., "La Piraterie Dans l'Ouest de la Cochinchine, La Justice Criminelle dans les Colonies," *Le Courrier de Saigon*, July 7, 1894.

<sup>59</sup> Quan was roughly the rank of Sergeant.

knows the country thoroughly; the places are familiar to him, he knows the people."<sup>60</sup> As a member of the community, he was more approachable than a French inspector, and Binh could reach out directly to victims and witnesses. "Quan Binh was well informed; from all sides people who would never dare enter a courthouse or an inspector's office came to him, and without intermediary, spoke to him spontaneously."<sup>61</sup>

Quan Binh worked in the rural police, but his success underscores the advantages of employing Vietnamese in colonial security services in general. Intermediaries provided access to local knowledge, were much cheaper to employ, and proved more readily recruited than European agents. Familiarity with the country, language skills, and personal ties gave intermediaries access to places inaccessible to Europeans. Many French believed that Vietnamese were better suited for work in the tropical climate, namely for the low prestige and physically exhausting work of street patrolling.<sup>62</sup> These factors pushed the scales in favor of employing Vietnamese agents, which was more the result of pragmatism than deliberate policy.

### **Role in Intelligence Gathering and "Local Knowledge"**

When newspapers elaborated in their reports on successful police work, the presence of Vietnamese intermediaries is usually evident. For instance, in 1904, *L'Avenir du Tonkin* reported "with pleasure" the arrest of a suspected murderer in Haiphong. A Vietnamese man had been stabbed near Lang Son several months prior, but "One searched in vain everywhere" for the attacker. Nonetheless, French agent Moreau learned "through personal information" (an informer) that the suspect was living near Haiphong. Moreau then used his "native auxiliary," an unnamed

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> J.D.B., "L'acte de Piraterie de Laivung Arrondissement de Sadec Arrestation des Coupables La Piraterie Dans l'Ouest de la Cochinchine, La Justice Criminelle dans les Colonies," *Le Courrier de Saigon*, July 18, 1894, 1.

<sup>62</sup> The believed association between tropical climate and disease and death for Europeans led the French to such projects as building a hill station and sanatorium in Dalat, discussed in Eric Jennings, *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

Vietnamese agent, to go undercover and befriend the suspect. The Vietnamese agent was able to lure the man to the city brothel where Moreau made the arrest. Recognizing his contribution, the newspaper concluded "it would be good to reward the native agent a little!" At least one, likely two, intermediaries were necessary to make the arrest possible.<sup>63</sup>

Vietnamese agents were especially needed for intelligence and surveillance work. Saigon's Central *Commissaire* Tourillon was among those who believed that most police employees in Vietnam necessarily needed to be Vietnamese. In 1880, he wrote that local recruits were vital to the French as interpreters and for their knowledge of the *moeurs* (customs) of the country. "To make up the police, we need local men (*hommes du pays*), Europeans cannot be employed except to give the annamites [Vietnamese] for which they are responsible protection from force..." In addition to protecting them physically, the French also needed to defend these agents against accusations of abuses "which they would be the target if they acted alone in carrying out the orders of justice."<sup>64</sup>

Tourillon depended on his Vietnamese agents and their informers to provide intelligence on a wide range of topics interesting the colonial government. Historian Martin Thomas illustrates how World War I-era developments led to the emergence of "intelligence states" in colonies in Africa and the Middle East in the 1920s in which "the French and British authorities from Morocco to Iraq relied on this broad array of incoming information to provide advance warning of any threat to imperial authority."<sup>65</sup> He describes intelligence as a "force multiplier" and contributing to a more selective, nuanced form of policing.<sup>66</sup> In the case of French

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<sup>63</sup> "Chronique Locale," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, September 28, 1904.

<sup>64</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IB25/135(1), Commissaire de Police Tourillon "Police de Saigon: projet de réorganisation du service" Saigon, April 13, 1880; "Rapport au Conseil Coloniale, Police. Historique, Situation, Besoins," Le commissaire de police, chef du service Tourillon, Saigon, August 12, 1881.

<sup>65</sup> Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*



Indochina, the desire for and use of intelligence as a means of state control predated World War I, as Tourillon's numerous reports illustrate. Political updates, monthly or quarterly, included details like poor morale, crop failures, natural disasters, and other events that might pose a danger to the colonial state. The desire for intelligence, information, gossip, and rumor were relevant to colonial rule.

For Tourillon, Asian subordinates were his main sources of intelligence, which put them front and center in the work of colonial maintenance. In 1887, the Cabinet Chief in Saigon inquired how precisely Tourillon collected his information, specifically on the recent political uprising in neighboring Cambodia that extended into the Vietnamese (Cochinchina) side of the border. Tourillon explained that his sources were word of mouth, which he considered the best ways to obtain information. In addition to updates from a few Europeans, his intelligence came primarily from "Chinese and Annamites arriving from the interior [who] bring rumors prevalent among the Asiatic populations of Tay Ninh, Tanan, Chaudoc, and even Soctrang." As to the value of rumors, he wrote his superior: "you know better than I...this is our only means to learn more about something, that the most useful intelligence is gathered in this fashion... ." <sup>67</sup> Rumors "should not be ignored, because they typically sum up the population's feelings."

The idea of Vietnamese agents as uniquely qualified to gather local intelligence is a recurring theme. In 1895, a Hanoi *commissaire* recalled how a "native brigadier from the Hanoi police" who had been sent on a special mission to Phu Lang Thuong village provided "valuable intelligence... that served later during the arrest of the Chinese [suspects] in this area." <sup>68</sup> Based on positive experiences like these, he recommended the creation of a "brigade de Sûreté," a state

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<sup>67</sup> CAOM, GGI 11612, Tourillon, Commissaire Central, to Chef du Cabinet du Gouvernement, July 6, 1887.

<sup>68</sup> TTLT I, RST 076405, "Proposition du résident de Ninh Binh sur la création d'un service de sûreté générale 1906;" Le Commissaire de police de la ville de Hanoi à Monsieur le Secrétaire général de l'Indochine, Hanoi, Hanoi September 25, 1895.

police comprised primarily of Vietnamese agents to be deployed as needed in the countryside. While under the supervision of "a few" Europeans, this police would—he proposed—be predominantly Vietnamese and would have wide jurisdiction and operate apart from the Hanoi police. This kind of police would not emerge as a separate institution until World War I, but the *commissaire's* recommendations foreshadowed the important role local intermediaries would play in political policing.

There were many important police functions European agents simply could not perform, either because of their ignorance of the language or their evident foreignness. Vietnamese agents were absolutely required for undercover policing in Vietnam. Tourillon's agents and their informants attended dinner parties with political suspects, infiltrated anti-French groups, and tailed suspicious persons. Their unique aptitude for this kind of work is one of the reasons why the colonial state employed so many Vietnamese agents from an early date. In a colonial hierarchy ordered by race, invisible police work was one area where the French agents were at a clear disadvantage. During a 1923 meeting of a Cochinchina police reorganization commission, the members mostly agreed that to have an effective *Sûreté* in the provinces, anonymity (and being Vietnamese) was paramount.<sup>69</sup> The reluctance to organize a *Sûreté* prior to World War I can also be understood as stemming from an unwillingness to empower intermediaries who could in turn abuse their positions.

The intermediary's familiarity with, as the phrase went, "the people and their customs," was a prerequisite for police work not only in cases of covert policing. It was also evident in cases of "visible policing" like Quan Binh's, whose relationship and reputation with the local community made him more approachable by people who otherwise steered clear of French

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<sup>69</sup> TTLT II, IA22/052(1), "Création d'un service de *Sûreté* Provinciale en Cochinchine 1923," Gouvernement de la Cochinchine, "Procès-verbaux de la Commission d'études des mesures de police propres à renforcer la sécurité publique en Cochinchine (séances des 20 août, 5 et 26 septembre et 3 octobre 1923)."

police inspectors. This kind of local knowledge was invaluable. For their work during the February 15, 1913 attack on Saigon, Brigadier Chau A Duong and agent Lam Van Cu were official recognized. Duong assisted in locating the perpetrators of the plot and undertook "numerous translations of documents in Chinese characters seized at the homes of those involved."<sup>70</sup> He also "established beyond a doubt the participation of many in the revolt namely that of Ba Thing, and the complicity of other natives currently pursued." For this he was recommended for a medal. Agent Lam Van Cu was officially recognized for his role in searching boats in the port during the attack, showing great "initiative and intelligence" in arresting three Vietnamese conspirators guarding weapons on the boats. He had been in the police since 1913.

Intermediaries were better placed to navigate colonial rule in many ways. Trung, a Vietnamese member of Saigon's Colonial Council, argued in 1910 against using French gendarmes in lieu of local recruits in the provinces because they were too detached from the community. French gendarmes did not "respect the customs of the native villages" and they "show, in my opinion, excessive zeal."<sup>71</sup> A worker who left his cart for even a moment of rest, for example, might find himself slapped with an enormous fine.<sup>72</sup>

According to Long Xuyen's French administrator Valentin, whatever their personal merits, Europeans would always be handicapped in the provinces.<sup>73</sup> In 1908, Valentin wrote the Cochinchina Governor objecting to a gendarmerie post in his province. The previous year

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<sup>70</sup> CAOM, GGI 30870, Personnel dossier, Lentali, Charles. "Police Municipale, Propositions de récompense en faveur du personnel Européen et indigène qui s'est distingué par son courage, son zèle et son activité dans le répression du mouvement insurrectionnel du Février 1916." Commissaire Central Lecoeur, Saigon, March, 8 1916.

<sup>71</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB24/041, "Gendarmerie: Création des nouveaux postes 1908-12," Conseil Colonial, Session Ordinaire 1910, Séance du 29 septembre 1910. Extrait: 246, "Question de M. le conseiller Trung sur la Gendarmerie."

<sup>72</sup> For more on the gulf between Vietnamese and French ideas about justice, crime, and punishment see: James Barnhart, "Violence and the civilizing mission: Native justice in French colonial Vietnam, 1858-1914" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1999).

<sup>73</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB24/041, "Gendarmerie: Création des nouveaux postes 1908-12," M. F. Valentin, Administrateur de Longxuyen à Monsieur le Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Longxuyen, November 27, 1908.

Valentin appointed a Vietnamese functionary (*tri phu*) to an important post in Thot Not, a busy market and meeting place, and Valentin objected to the new plan to replace this position with a Frenchman because "I continue to believe that a native functionary will be better placed in this spot than a French gendarme." While the *tri phu* was not strictly a policeman, he dealt generally with "Vietnamese affairs" which included keeping the peace with the support of local notables. Valentin continued: "A subaltern French functionary, likely ignorant about the country, would not be able to achieve similar results [as a Vietnamese functionary]."<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, a Vietnamese appointee could, "if he is serious and experienced...contribute powerfully to the economic development of this region." The preference for employing local intermediaries for security jobs was however far from unanimous.

### **Supporting European Agents**

The police also needed Vietnamese agents to act in a supporting role to their European superiors. As Saigon Councilor Moyaux wrote in the *L'Opinion* in 1913: "No matter the devotion of zeal of the European agents, their efforts do not produce perfect results unless they are seconded by good native agents."<sup>75</sup> Apart from a handful of trained interpreters assigned to the police stations, in the streets and smaller police posts Vietnamese agents served as casual, untrained interpreters to the best of their abilities. As described in chapter 1, very few French policemen learned Vietnamese prior to 1920. As late as 1923, Cholon's *Commissaire* Duval could still complain that his European agents working alone would rather overlook a blatant crime than risk speaking Vietnamese poorly, and being laughed at.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> E. Moyaux, "Le mal dont souffre la police," *L'Opinion*, October 22-23, 1913.

<sup>76</sup> TTLT I, Fonds de la Maire de Hanoi, 002459, "Réorganisation du service de la police urbaine de la ville de Cholon [sic], 1923." Commissaire Central de Police de la Ville de Cholon Duval à Monsieur le Chef de la Sûreté, Saigon. Cholon, August 3, 1923.

Based on his many years of colonial police experience, Duval (cited in chapter 1) wrote that to get the most out of Vietnamese and French agents they must be made to work together. European agents in service alone in their sector too often elected not to get involved in crimes. When left alone, meanwhile, the Vietnamese agents would not themselves intervene in part because they were insufficiently armed and vulnerable to retaliation. Vietnamese agents carried only a sword (*sabre-baionnette*) while the criminals, Duval wrote, "are almost always armed with firearms." Duval was therefore in favor of arming Vietnamese agents with guns. He found that teams of both Vietnamese and French agents, by contrast, produced good results: "Only the bicycle brigades, which numbered 4, did good work, for the reason that the European agent was accompanied by a native agent serving as his interpreter."<sup>77</sup> Duval wrote that he had recently closed two police posts for the reason that the chiefs of the posts spoke no Vietnamese and only had a clerk or messenger (*planton*) to use as an interpreter. Reports had been "rarely correct" and the person filing the complaint invariably had to be referred to the *commissariat*. Even under Duval's new system, European police agents continued to rely on bilingual Vietnamese agents to make themselves understood. As support staff, native agents were vital to the functioning of the police, and no colonial police could afford not to employ them.

### **Economics of Intermediaries**

Vietnamese agents were also literally more affordable. Arguably, the largest factor driving their recruitment was economic, and as such, was primarily pragmatic. While Zinoman juxtaposes the budget of the prisons with that of the police to illustrate the neglect of the prisons, prior to the 1920s, the police did not have overly generous budgets, at least where salaries were concerned. Financial restrictions kept the police numbers small, made recruitment of qualified

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

personnel difficult, and—most importantly for this study—typically forced the question of who to employ in favor of cheaper Vietnamese agents.

To reiterate, employing one European agent cost more than the combined salaries of eight Vietnamese agents of the same rank, and the European would work fewer hours per week. In 1912, Haiphong spent three and half times more piastres on European personnel salaries than on Vietnamese personnel salaries even though there were two to three times as many Vietnamese employees as Europeans.<sup>78</sup> These figures do not take into account the disparity in benefits, such as pensions or administrative leave. Mayors and police *commissaires* with personnel shortages unsurprisingly tended to choose hiring more Vietnamese agents over fewer European ones, skewing the ratio of European to Vietnamese in favor of the later.

The following three examples, two from Hanoi and one from Haiphong, suggest how economic pressures forced the issue of hiring in favor of Vietnamese agents. In February 1906, Hanoi's Central Commissaire Kersselaer proposed an urgent personnel increase in his police to deal with an increase in thefts and other crime in the city. He proposed a 250% increase in the Hanoi police's native cadre, increasing this personnel from 100 to 350 agents, while keeping the European cadre fixed at 75 men. Hanoi needed more men on the streets and simply could not afford Europeans: "the municipal budget does not have the resources necessary to provide the city of Hanoi with a European staff commiserate with its importance. One could therefore try a system [of street surveillance] organized with natives."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> In 1912, Haiphong spent 52,586 piastres on European police salaries, and 14,712 piastres on Vietnamese police salaries. Cited in *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, Oct. 9, 1912. In 1912, Haiphong spent 81,352.66 Piastres on the police including: 47,543.48 piastres for European personnel; 5,043.48 European personnel for the police de la rade; 13,056 piastres for Vietnamese personnel; 1,656 personnel for the police de la rade; 12,503.70 depenses accessoires de personnel; 1,550 materiel.; Total municipal budget/income: 366,395 piastres. In other words, 22.2% city budget was spent on police (municipal services only).

<sup>79</sup> TTLT I, RST 034196, "Au sujet du nombre des agents de police indigène à Hanoi 1905-1906;" Le Commissaire Central p.i. [par intérim] au Tonkin à Monsieur le Procureur de la République à Hanoi, February 2, 1906.

The quality of these agents would need to be improved however. At least 2/3rds of the agents would need to be recruited from the colonial military, and they would need to be garrisoned "to ensure good order, discipline, and regularity in the service" as well as tight supervision.<sup>80</sup> He envisioned brigades of a 3:1 native to European ratio. An earlier administrator interested in reform had also tied the idea of discipline to that of garrisoning the Vietnamese agents. In 1906, Gautret wrote of Hanoi's Vietnamese agents that "It is almost impossible to obtain from them conformity (*régularité*) and good dress because they are lodged in their own homes, and they only come to the *commissariat* to carry our street service. ... The best system would be to lodge the native personnel in a garrison or on the premises of the *commissariats*, in this way the agents will be in the hand of their chief and at their immediate disposal."<sup>81</sup>

In 1908, Hanoi Police *commissaire* Brault again proposed an overdue personnel increase, specifically in the PAJ.<sup>82</sup> He currently employed 23 Europeans and 36 natives in the PAJ, and he proposed increasing these numbers to 60 Europeans and 100 natives for a total of 160 policemen, figures which did not include the municipal police. His proposal revealed a lack of Europeans, meaning many Vietnamese agents were already working alone or with sporadic supervision: "The number of European agents is notoriously insufficient; with the returns to France, the ill, the detached [to another service], the workforce at all times on the roads becomes pathetic. There are, in Hanoi, 85 kilometers of major streets and you only have 8 European agents at most continually on the streets; it is not there surprising that one does not often run into agents..."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> CAOM, GGI, 7779. *Projet de réorganisation de la police de Sûreté générale en Indochine (Mission de M. Gautret)*, 1905-06.

<sup>82</sup> TTLT I, RST 21482, "Organisation de la PAJ au Tonkin et l'affaire de Brault, commissaire centrale 1908," *Le Commissaire Central au Tonkin à RST, Hanoi*, "A.S. de la Police administrative et judiciaire," May 31, 1908.

<sup>83</sup> TTLT I, RST 34200 "Au sujet de la réorganisation des polices municipales de Hanoi et Haiphong 1912-1913," *Le Commissaire Central de Police au Tonkin à Monsieur l'Administrateur Maire de la Ville de Hanoi, Hanoi*, September 12, 1912. "Project d'Arrêté, Réorganisation des Polices Municipales d'Hanoi et d'Haiphong."

Brault conceded that the city could probably only afford, at best, to hire Vietnamese agents. "If the proposals cannot for budgetary reason be accepted at the time, I think however that it is essential, in waiting for the next budget, to proceed with urgency with an increase in the number of natives." Increasing only the number of cheaper Vietnamese agents and not the Europeans would have raised the percentage in the PAJ from 61% to 86% Vietnamese.<sup>84</sup>

Many years later in Haiphong, mayor Eckert echoed these proposals when he urged police reforms of his city's native cadre reminiscent of the Hanoi police's, including calls for garrisoning them, improving their training, and tightening recruitment restrictions. Money was also a major factor in his 1929 proposal, as Eckert argued that improving the discipline and appearance of the Vietnamese cadre would be the best way to improve overall the quality of his city's police "without too great expense." He could not afford hiring more European agents, but Vietnamese agents might suffice, he wrote, if only they were better trained and disciplined.<sup>85</sup> Mayor Eckert's solution was to take "native agents," as a whole, "in hand," and to transform the Vietnamese cadre into an essentially military organization under tight French supervision. As was typical of police reform, however, the mayor's vision was limited by his meager budget. The tendency in all of these cases was to employ native agents over European ones, skewing their numbers and forcing the police to rely more and more on the native cadre.

### **Labor Availability, Climate, and Health**

Vietnamese agents came from a much larger labor pool than French policemen, which was a major advantage to recruitment. As Tobias Rettig writes for the Indochina military, France's reliance on local auxiliaries stemmed also from the lack of available French recruits:

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<sup>84</sup> The city eventually adopted a plan by Hanoi commissaire Kersselaer in 1910 that replaced the municipal police's Vietnamese cadre with a 200 agent Vietnamese militia garrisoned in the city.

<sup>85</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine de Hanoi et Haiphong de la Sûreté du Tonkin 1926-29;" L. F. Eckert, Administrateur-Maire to RST, Hanoi, "Réorganisation de la Police urbaine," Haiphong, September 13, 1927.



"the pool of local French men was far too small to create a 'settler-army.'"<sup>86</sup> As he further explains, recruiting from the metropole was too difficult and too costly, given the distance of travel to the colony. Some administrators also felt that white men should not hold menial, low level jobs. Eckert, cited above, explicitly wrote that he preferred to rely on Vietnamese agents for street-work to take the pressure off the police's minority European agents because such work damaged "the prestige of French authority."<sup>87</sup> Prestige again became the guiding logic behind the employment and treatment of Europeans in the police.

The climate also played a role in keeping European police off the streets. There was a popular notion at the time that tropical climate was detrimental to European health and that it was dangerous for Frenchmen to walk the Saigon streets during the hottest parts of the day. Racial assumptions among the French meanwhile held that Vietnamese and Cambodians were less vulnerable to tropical diseases and tropical climate. Eckert wrote, as did many others, that relying on "the European element" for street policing damaged their health due to the hot and humid climate, another reason he preferred employing Vietnamese in Haiphong.<sup>88</sup> European police were reported scarce during the hottest parts of the day. In 1905, *L'Avenir du Tonkin* wrote an article complaining about the practice of policemen taking "siestas" from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., effectively closing the police station or leaving it with just one agent.<sup>89</sup> While this was practiced in all the colonial offices, the article contended that the police was among those "which demands continual activity." In 1911, the recently appointed Central Commissaire Lecoeur sought to amend the lack of Europeans on the Saigon streets during midday. He wrote the Governor of

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<sup>86</sup> Tobias Rettig, "French military policies in the aftermath of the Yên Bay mutiny, 1930: old security dilemmas return to the surface," *South East Asia Research* 10, 3, (November 2002), 312.

<sup>87</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine de Hanoi et Haiphong de la Sûreté du Tonkin 1926-29;" Monsieur L. F. Eckert, Administrateur-Maire à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin Hanoi, "Objet: Réorganisation de la police urbaine." Haiphong, September 13, 1927.

<sup>88</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine," L. F. Eckert. See also: Jennings, *Imperial Heights*.

<sup>89</sup> *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, January 20, 1905, 2.

Cochinchina that contrary to popular belief, working outside in the heat was not dangerous to European health. Lecoecur asked that the police schedule therefore be modified so there was always a European on duty. Under the present system, he wrote, the streets "lacked surveillance" between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. and the few Vietnamese agents on duty then were already stretched thin with other obligations.<sup>90</sup>

A nearly identical arrangement existed in neighboring Cholon. In 1923 *commissaire* Duval wrote that his European agents abstained from the midday shift for "fear of heatstroke." When he first took his position as commissaire in Cholon, all European agents were off duty 5 a.m. 6:30 a.m., 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and 6:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. during which "The city was at the mercy of criminals for 9 and half hours because the native agents, at this time on guard at fixed posts, did not see anything that happened outside the posts they were assigned." Duval attempted to change this policy to put Europeans on street or active duty outside the police stations from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., but *L'amicale de la police* (a union-like police association) and the local French newspapers voiced their opposition. As Duval quipped in resignation: "Going outside during their *siesta* time seemed to them impossible." Duval was forced to concede that Europeans could return indoors by 11 a.m., in the end only a small victory for the *commissaire*.

Apart from "siesta time," Frenchmen were disinclined to go outdoors in the heat and rain. Hanoi's mayor wrote to his superior in 1927 that an expanded police post system had failed in Saigon for this reason. Police posts, meant to supplement each district's main commissariat, were under the direction of "a European agent" and a "varying number of native agents depending on the neighborhood's importance." The agent, nonetheless, preferred to stay indoors "under the ventilators and never go out into the street." This system was faring better in Hanoi, he reported,

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<sup>90</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB25/054(2), Lecoecur, Commissaire Central p.i. [par intérim] to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, March 15, 1911.

in part because of more rigorous screening of the French personnel.<sup>91</sup> Another source indicates that some French bureaucrats were content to let subordinates carry out their work for them. Felix Borde wrote of his time in the colony, from 1888 to 1898, that "One hardly ever saw them [the functionaries] work, if not to pick at their nails or read the newspaper, we don't want to say that they don't do their job, but we do want to mention that they have at their disposal a good number of interpreters who do most of the work for each of them."<sup>92</sup>

The colonial police would not have functioned without Vietnamese agents. They were needed to go undercover and provide intelligence, support their European superiors as interpreters, fill empty ranks as a cheaper and more readily available alternative to French agents, and carry out street policing that that French policemen preferred not to do due to concerns with health, prestige, and climate. Together, these pressures led to the employment of Vietnamese as police agents in large numbers. While in the French colonial police system intermediaries were supposed to be accompanied at all times by a French superior—thus offsetting their independence and keeping them "in hand"—this supervision was not always present in practice.

If the factors leading to Vietnamese recruitment were pragmatic, the arguments against relying on the Vietnamese were guided by prejudice and French fears of intermediary abuse, corruption, and collusion. Endorsements of Vietnamese agents were therefore qualified with conditions for European supervision and more restrictions on their independence. The next section looks at the counter-impulse to disempower agents and contain their influence.

### **Against Employing Intermediaries: "A question of life or death"**

The administration remained profoundly ambivalent about employing large numbers of Vietnamese in the police and other security services. J.D.B.'s endorsement of Quan Binh stands

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<sup>91</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine de Hanoi et Haiphong de la Sûreté du Tonkin 1926-29;" Rapport to RST, Hanoi, Hanoi, September 23, 1927.

<sup>92</sup> De Gantès, "Administrer une colonie," 52.

in contrast to other French officials who held that arming colonial subjects, and allowing them independence in security work, was dangerous for both the French and Vietnamese civilians.<sup>93</sup> In 1904, Baria province administrator Moreau questioned the loyalty of Vietnamese conscripts and civilians and warned his superiors that relying too much on the colonized for defense risked alerting them to the fact that French rule could not exist without their cooperation.

It is absolutely indispensable that the Annamite [Vietnamese] does not have the notion that we need to depend on him. ... The Annamite must not, under risk of catastrophe, be permitted to suspect for an instant that we do not have the means to fulfill this task [economic prosperity and material defense], or that we depend on him to maintain our place. ... It is a question of life or death.<sup>94</sup>

Moreau's observation laid bare what was potentially at stake and the real fears that surrounded dependence on intermediaries. This fear had material consequences. The French denied guns to Vietnamese policemen—or in the case of the rural police to which Binh belonged, provided them with minimal, outdated rifles. They also resorted to collective punishment in times of crisis.<sup>95</sup>

French thinking about Vietnamese agents was heavily influenced by contemporary racial assumptions about Vietnamese, many of which were, as prejudices often are, contradictory.<sup>96</sup> In French newspapers, reports, and memoirs, there were two main racial caricatures at work: Vietnamese police agents were portrayed as alternatively humorous and childish on the one hand, and dangerous and duplicitous on the other. This extreme innocent/guilty stereotyping led to a similarly bipolar approach to treating Vietnamese police agents: the French casually belittled and poked fun at their contribution and uniforms, and at the same time sometimes feared them and blamed their "mentality" for police abuses. The two portrayals coexisted—in times of calm,

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<sup>93</sup> CAOM GGI 10259, "Rapport de l'administrateur de Baria sur les modifications à apporter." L'administrateur de Baria to Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Baria, July 15, 1879.

<sup>94</sup> CAOM, GGI 25910, M. Moreau, Administrateur de Rach Gia, to Goucoch, Saigon, Rach Gia, January 26, 1904.

<sup>95</sup> A. Belland, *Police de Saïgon. Guide des agents de police de la ville de Saïgon* (Saïgon: Impr. de Claude, 1897). The civil guard, a police-military hybrid of which Quan Binh was a member, were given antiquated guns.

<sup>96</sup> Michael G. Vann, "The Good, the Bad, and The Ugly: Variation and Difference in French Racial Thinking in Colonial Vietnam" in *The Color of Liberty: The History of Race in France*, eds. Tyler Stovall and Sue Peabody (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 188.

a Vietnamese agent might seem to a Frenchman amusing or absurd, in times of crisis, something else entirely. Leadership in the administration therefore episodically sought to tighten their supervision and discipline, and was strongly disinclined to arm them or train them.

### **Agents "Amusing in the Extreme"**

On an individual level, French commissaires like Duval could treat Vietnamese agents with discretion based on their individual abilities. But colonial policymakers thought of this cohort as an abstract whole with certain immutable characteristics and shortcomings in their race, culture, and *mentalité*. Both Indian and Vietnamese policemen for instance were described by superiors as overly passive and meek. The French did not generally view the Vietnamese, Chinese, Indians, or Cambodians as martial races, particularly when compared to African colonial troops. This did not mean that the state did not manipulate racial tensions through divide and rule tactics, singling out certain groups over others for recruitment in the colonial army. Sarah Womack has shown that the French recruited Vietnamese troops to put down the 1885-1886 Cambodian insurrection out of fear of Khmer racial solidarity with the rebels. Nonetheless, Indochina's administrators did not consider Asians in general especially well-suited to police or military work. (This is in spite of the brutal wars of conquest and ongoing need for pacification.)

In 1904, Baria administrator Moreau, cited above for his fear of overdependence on intermediaries, also complained that the Vietnamese did not, as a race, make good colonial soldiers. About the colonial military, Moreau wrote:

We can generally count on the excellent results obtained from our black troops, *tirailleurs sénégalais*, soudanais, sakalaves...But what a mistake to lump together nevertheless our African auxiliaries with the little [petit] tirailleurs annamites; what essential differences in the mentality of the two races, and what disillusion we expose ourselves to, if we force together into the same ranks souls as different as those of the black and the Asian! The black, for whom war is the best job in the world, loves the fight, the fracas of battle, the plunder as well, and in any case in his element, and under the supervision of French officers, we have worked miracles [prodiges]. ... But the

Annamite! The annamite, for whom the job of soldier is the most vile that a free man can be subjected to, do not have the same reasons to love war and one cannot expect of him the same results. ... It is not for him that he can speak of the honor of carrying arms for his country: this concept for him is very strange.

Moreau argued instead for employing a more mercenary-like force of Vietnamese soldiers. He was correct that employment in the army had not been historically prestigious in pre-colonial Vietnam and the French continued a conscription system already put in place by emperors before them.<sup>97</sup> Moreau's assessment that they were not soldiers by nature was however based on specific racial assumptions: their alleged inferior physicality (*petit*) and their *mentalité* (lack of "honor"). In French descriptions of Vietnamese agents the same sort of thinking resurfaces.

Saigon's Mayor Chesne wrote in 1910 of the Vietnamese policemen that "the assistance of the *annamese* agent was zero, if not damaging." He recommended reducing the number of Vietnamese agents in favor of fewer overall agents. Chesne wrote: "both the incapacity and the inaptitude of the large part of native agents have been recognized."<sup>98</sup> Again, he tied it back into immutable racial characteristics or a difference in *mentalité*: "The professional inaptitude of our annamite agents, their mentality open to compromises, *their oriental conception of their professional duties*, makes for very mediocre auxiliaries not able to provide but a little service."<sup>99</sup> Commissaire Lecoeur also had a dim view of their contribution, writing in a 1910 report that Vietnamese agents were "completely useless in the street."<sup>100</sup> Lecoeur concluded harshly that

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<sup>97</sup> Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ch'ing Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Henri Eckert, "Les militaires indochinois au service de la France (1859-1939)" (PhD diss., Lille: Université de Lille III, 1998), 194.

<sup>98</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222, "Fusion des polices;" Président de la Commission Municipale Chesne, "Fusion des polices," n.d., but in same file with Lecoeur's 1910 report.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

<sup>100</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222. "Fusion des polices;" Rapport du Commissaire Central p.i. Lecoeur to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, "Sur les réformes à apporter aux divers services de police chargés d'assurer l'ordre et la sécurité publique," Saigon, November 1910.

"the incapable and the corrupt" Vietnamese agents needed to be "ruthlessly sent...back to their rice fields or their previous employment."<sup>101</sup>

Vietnamese agents were poked fun at for their reputed ineffectiveness and appearance, including attempts to mimic French policemen. As cited in the last chapter, in 1872, French zoologist Murice observed in his travelogue policemen coming and going from a police post in Saigon, writing that Asian policemen, "had the appearance of bully boys which was amusing in the extreme."<sup>102</sup> To say that Vietnamese or other Asian agents were "amusing in the extreme" because they were wearing European police uniforms suggests something akin to Homi Bhabha's work on "mimicry."<sup>103</sup> On the one hand, they were assigned uniforms by the French colonial government, but in wearing these uniforms perhaps too closely (if inexactly) approximated their French counterparts. This was a potentially discomfoting experience for the French observer then diffused through laughter, or sometimes, as seen in chapter 3, violence.

The bumbling police agent in ill-fitting clothes fits with other racial "types" present in French colonial print culture which were likewise non-threatening: the simple rice peasant, honest but gullible; the house boy—a body servant and the first suspect in any theft; and the *congai*, or Vietnamese concubine or mistress. These types also essentially reduce identity to his or her labor, as measured by their usefulness to the French colonial economy of privilege. A policeman's place in this economy was less clear, and potentially more threatening.

### **"Throw us into the sea:" Fear of betrayal and abuse**

Co-existing alongside this image of the Vietnamese police agent as harmless if humorous was a darker possibility. Vietnamese agents could also be savvy, dangerous, and duplicitous. Too

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> A. Murice, *People and Wildlife in and Around Saigon: 1872-1873*, trans. Walter E. J. Tips (Bangkok: White Lotus Co Ltd, 1999), 8.

<sup>103</sup> "Of Mimicry and Man," in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 123.

much reliance on them also had the potential to expose a fundamental weakness: colonizers were vastly outnumbered. In a 1912 speech following the recent murders of two Europeans in Tonkin, colonial deputy de Monpezat, spoke before a crowd of 1,100 in Hanoi on security in the colony.<sup>104</sup> In response to a proposal by General Pennequin to form a "Vietnamese army"—to put Vietnamese in positions of authority and make them more effective—de Monpezat declared that the first action of these officers would be "to throw us into the sea." And anyone who was not so driven to defend and die for his country would not, in de Monpezat's estimation, make a good officer.<sup>105</sup> This met with great applause, according to the newspaper, revealing a larger anxiety surrounding the question of employing intermediaries in security services, and especially the military. This fundamental problem resurfaced again and again.

Administrators were also afraid that Vietnamese agents would abuse their position at the expense of other colonial subjects, which would in turn create greater antipathy towards the state. In 1906, the RST wrote the GGI that he opposed creating a Sûreté police in part because of the potential of abuse. "Secret agents" sent out by the police to the provinces, he wrote, were already known for their corruption. "It is presumable that the native agents of the Sûreté Générale the will commit the same abuses and ones even more dangerous for the inhabitants."<sup>106</sup> In 1911, a Hanoi resident wrote in *L'Avenir du Tonkin* against a new Hanoi law militarizing the Vietnamese police, which "will not stop them from continuing to play mandarin with the population. All *annamites* possessing an ounce of authority are always inclined to abuse it, the militia, in the provinces, like the others." Changing their "uniform," he wrote, would not change "their

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<sup>104</sup> "La Conférence de M. de Monpezat," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, (Supplément de l'Avenir du Tonkin), July 5, 1912.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> TTLT I, RST 076405, "Proposition du résident de Ninh Binh sur la création d'un service de sûreté général 1906;" RST to GGI, "Objet: a.s. [au sujet] de menées séditionnaires au Tonkin et dans le Nord de l'Annam et de la création d'une sûreté générale." Hanoi, May 22, 1905.



*mentalité*."<sup>107</sup> Language was key to overcoming this problem. He concluded that "the day we want to create, in Tonkin, a good and useful police, it will be sufficient to require from French agents knowledge of Vietnamese or Chinese, and to pay them sufficient bonuses to encourage them to engage in this hard study."<sup>108</sup>

Following a major uprising in the south in January and February 1916, the French government sent colonial inspector Saurin to study security reforms. He wrote a damning report on the failings of existing police organization in the colony, remarking that the local "embryonic" Sûreté, such as it existed on a municipal basis in Cholon and Saigon, "found itself completely incapable of fulfilling its preventative role. Regarding the investigation of guilty parties, it found itself equally helpless [*désarmée*]."<sup>109</sup> He recommended the creation of a state Sûreté but had major misgivings about using Vietnamese intermediaries. Although in the end he endorsed such a service, he wrote that he worried that these agents would only abuse their position at the expense of other Vietnamese subjects.

The Sûreté police (investigations, shadowing, etc...) can obviously be done only by the natives, the Europeans being restricted solely to management. But the venality of the annamites and the *difficulty of their effective supervision* in such matters would inevitably lead to intolerable abuses. Experience has shown since a long time the blackmail and corrupt practices of all kinds committed by the subaltern native agents. A police of this sort would raise more hate against the French administration than it would prevent crime.<sup>110</sup>

Without offering a solution, Saurin was adamant that all Frenchmen employed in the Sûreté need to speak the local language with total fluency.<sup>111</sup> He also felt that the leadership needed to have a "deep understanding" of local "customs and administration." For this reason, he recommended

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<sup>107</sup> H. de la Sauzaye, "La Désorganisation de la Police," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, May 12, 1911, 1.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> CAOM, GGI 7598, "Rapport de l'inspection des colonies sur l'organisation de la police de sûreté en Cochinchine, 1916;" Inspecteur de Colonies Saurin, "Faits constatés par la vérification et observations de l'inspecteur de 1ere classe des colonies: Organisation de la police de sûreté en cochinchine," Saigon, October 24, 1916.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>111</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IIB.56/222, "Fusion des polices" Newspaper clipping: Pégy, "Opinions Libres, Police de Sûreté," *L'Opinion*, November 7, 1913.

recruiting French personnel exclusively among resident Frenchmen in the colony (and not from the metropole). As Saurin's recommendation reflects, the question of language was at the crux of the question of colonial power in the police.

That Vietnamese agents could not be really trusted is a recurring theme. *L'Avenir du Tonkin* wrote in 1903 about a problem with Hanoi's Sûreté service, specifically, that the European in charge was "badly assisted" by his "native auxiliaries." When faced with bringing a Vietnamese compatriot to justice, the Vietnamese police agents "claim not to have found anything." As a result, the European agent had, figuratively speaking, his "hands and feet tied." The article warned: "Unless we take them in hand, the natives escape us." In 1912, Albert Lamblot wrote in *L'Avenir du Tonkin* that in order for Sarraut's proposal to create a political police to work, the men in charge had to "unique knowledge" of the country.<sup>112</sup> He referenced as evidence the failed attempt by Lallier to start a Tonkin Sûreté (chapter 1): Lallier's ignorance of the "mentality" of his Vietnamese agents and his trust of them did him in, according to this article. For leaders of a renewed attempt at establishing a Sûreté, fluency in Vietnamese and local experience with "yellow men" was necessary "so as to be able to follow the investigations of their native agents and never be at the mercy of venal and clever interpreters."<sup>113</sup>

Connected to the fear of abuse was the fear of open betrayal, which led to a general prohibition of guns for Vietnamese police agents and soldiers. In 1879, Baria's provincial administrator warned against arming the Vietnamese militia (what would become the *garde civil*) with rifles: "There would be danger, in my opinion, in giving the *milice* the 'fusil gras' [a service rifle]. A single defection...would throw the colony into deep trouble."<sup>114</sup> Although he saw the utility in the all-native militia, he warned that "we will have to be fearful of defections" as soon

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<sup>112</sup> Albert Lamblot, "Sûreté Générale," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, Oct. 12, 1912, 1.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> CAOM, GGI 10259, L'administrateur de Baria to Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Baria, July 15, 1879.

as "the *miliciens* realize that the Europeans troops are no longer so numerous."<sup>115</sup> A similar logic of suspected disloyalty and denial of guns followed for the police. The 1897 Saigon police handbook (authored by commissaire Belland) specifies that "it is forbidden for all Asians, in the colony, to possess firearms or carry any weapon on his person, if he is not equipped with a gun permit." For the police, the handbook went on, European officers and agents could carry revolvers, but "asiatique" agents were allowed only a sword or bayonet. At times, as the French leadership observed, Vietnamese police agents would not intervene in thefts and other attacks because criminals (unlike the police) were often armed.

Arguing against the status quo, in 1923 Duval asked his police superior in Saigon to provide his 107 Vietnamese agents with guns to combat bandits who were themselves he found almost always armed. Among his requests were "to provide the native agents with revolvers...and make them learn to shoot."<sup>116</sup> It is not evident from the file if Duval's request was approved, although instances of Vietnamese agents shooting in the line of duty start appearing in the late 1920s.

The same characteristics that made Vietnamese agents useful could also make them a potential threat. A Vietnamese agent working in his hometown would have exceptional knowledge of its people and places, but his impartiality would also be compromised. The idea of impartiality and distance from the policed is one of the main features that set the European police apart as a modern institution. Beginning in the early eighteenth century in France, the state appointed *commissaires* in provinces far from their hometowns and then moved them around to

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> TTLT I, Fonds de la Mairie de Hanoi, 002459, "Réorganisation du service de la police urbaine de la ville de Cholon [sic], 1923," Commissaire Central de Police de la Ville de Cholon Duval to Chef de la Sûreté, Saigon. Cholon, August 3, 1923.

keep them from forming local ties.<sup>117</sup> This bureaucratic detachment was meant to increase the power of the central government in Paris and to prevent corruption and collusion. It was seen as more fair for a dispassionate outsider to arbitrate disputes. There was a trade off, a sort of anti-local knowledge bargain—in nineteenth century France regional languages and dialects made it difficult for outsiders to police and commissaires would often be foreigners in their cities.

In Vietnam there were also periodic efforts to uproot local agents. In 1929, the *commissaire* in charge of the mobile brigades, Poillot, wrote the head of police in Cochinchina, Nadaud about "the necessity of not leaving for too long in service, in the same posts, some of our native agents."<sup>118</sup> Writing of a particular police agent, he recounted how he had moved Brigadier Nguyen Van So from his post in Thudamot, his province of origin, to Mytho because he "was too obedient to suggestions from members of his family." The problem was even greater in Rach Gia: "I felt it necessary...to 'refresh' this brigade in changing, at least, half of its personnel."<sup>119</sup> But this was always a trade off, and as the Quan Binh story suggests, local ties had their uses.

## Conclusion

The leadership was all too aware that the actions of Vietnamese police agents had the potential to both enhance and limit the police's reach. Policymakers continually struggled to balance the need for local intermediaries with fears about potential disloyalty. In the end, the administration's approach to employing intermediaries was driven by practical necessity, and colored by ambivalence and fear. The question of employing Vietnamese agents in the sensitive areas of police and defense was an ongoing policy conundrum that went to the heart of colonial

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<sup>117</sup> John Merriman, *Police Stories: Building the French State, 1815-1851* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>118</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/112, "Pièces divers relatives au personnel de police 1919-1929;" Le Commissaire spécial chargé des brigades mobiles, Poillot, to Chef du Service de la Sûreté [Nadaud, based on reply] "Nécessité de mutations semi-annuelles, parmi le personnel indigène des brigades mobiles." Saigon, November 19, 1929.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

power. If Vietnamese agents were an essential resource for the colonial state, they were one that needed to be handled with caution.

At the same time, disparagement of the contribution of Vietnamese police agents cannot have helped their recruitment or retention, or ensured extraordinary loyalties. Keeping them at arm's length, blocking their advancement beyond the native cadre, and openly disparaging their contribution to the police likely only further contributed to turnover and corruption. And if the French superiors did not take the contributions of Vietnamese agents seriously, neither would French residents. The fact remained that while colonial state and its politicians made the laws, it was largely left up to police agents—most of whom were Vietnamese—to interpret and enforce them. As explored in the next chapter, their in-between position, and their unique access to local knowledge and community networks could be enormously empowering. Some Vietnamese police agents were able to carve out some space in which to maneuver and assert agendas potentially divergent from those of the state.

## Chapter 5: The Power of the "Middle," Vietnamese Agents as Colonial Intermediaries

Vietnamese police agents in colonial uniforms were potentially powerful symbols of colonial cooperation, and their dress was intended to project unity, discipline, and order.<sup>1</sup> Vietnamese and European agents received separate uniforms, visually distinguishing the two cadres and further making visible the racial hierarchy underpinning colonial rule. Uniforms were also deeply connected to the question of prestige and authority, as explored in the context of European and Indian police personnel. Shabby uniforms, ill-fitting clothes, and other deviations were therefore not just unsightly, but a menace to French authority. A 1933 complaint from Hanoi's mayor nevertheless reveals that Vietnamese policemen in this city altered their uniforms to make them more fashionable and comfortable. What makes this incident intriguing is not just the mayor's complaint—there were frequent disparaging remarks about police appearance and they extended to European agents as well. Rather, in his reply to the mayor, the French police chief declined to risk alienating Vietnamese subordinates by enforcing the dress code.

When the new Hanoi mayor took his position in 1933, he wrote to RST Tholance asking for help in cracking down on the uniforms belonging to "the officers and guards in the Hanoi native police." The mayor complained that the Vietnamese policemen's uniforms were "little flattering, varied, and frankly commonplace." They patrolled with worn-out shoes and too-short pant legs.<sup>2</sup> The agents had also used their "imagination" in adding non-standard cloaks, coats, and headwear to shelter themselves from Hanoi's summer heat or winter chill, and in the process, the mayor teased, appeared to protect themselves from the sun "more than the Europeans." He concluded: "Thus equipped, I admit, our native agents have neither imposing presence nor style." The mayor was particularly concerned was the widespread adoption of the white, colonial pith

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<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Blundo and Joël Glasman, "Bureaucrats in Uniform," *Sociologus* 63, 1-2, (2013): 1-9.

<sup>2</sup> TTLT I, RST 78661-01, "Règlement de police administrative de la ville de Hanoi de 1923 à 1943." Hanoi Mayor to RST, Hanoi "a.s. Habillement gardes [sic] de la police de Hanoi." October, 17 1933.

helmet in lieu of the conical hat. Not only was the pith helmet not intended for Vietnamese agents, it had fallen out of style among Europeans by 1933. In the mayor's opinion, the police should therefore put a stop to the wearing of pith helmets by "*les hommes du moins*," or "lesser men," a reference to their place in the hierarchy.<sup>3</sup>

While the uniform situation represented for the mayor a case of flagrant disobedience—of Vietnamese agents overstepping their place—the police chief took a more guarded view. Paul Arnoux, the highest-ranking policeman in Hanoi, warned the mayor that the agents considered the "right to wear the helmet as a favor or a reward" and that requiring them to return to the conical hat would be "interpreted as a collective punishment."<sup>4</sup> Higher among Arnoux's priorities in the 1930s was anti-colonialism, and the police needed intermediaries to infiltrate underground organizations, collect intelligence, and manage informants. Arnoux declined making an issue of the dress code, and RST Tholance denied the mayor's request to form a commission to study the problem.<sup>5</sup> Hanoi's Vietnamese police agents could, it seems, go on wearing whichever hat they chose.

Anecdotes like these suggest that the colonizer-colonized power dynamic was not nearly as one-sided as is often assumed. Although their employment was dictated by the racial hierarchy, Vietnamese agents in the police's lowest ranks were able to wield a degree of independence by virtue of the state's dependence on them. Bilingual agents in particular had the capacity to become powerbrokers vis-à-vis both the Vietnamese public and French administration. Individuals in the police, much like their French counterparts, sought to use their position to enhance their social standing.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> TTLT I, RST 78661-01, Letter from Hanoi Mayor to RST, Hanoi "a.s. Habillement gardes [sic] de la police de Hanoi." October, 17 1933, p. 62-64. Arnoux's response is quoted in letter from Mayor to RST. Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> TTLT I, RST 78661-01, RST to l'Administrateur Maire, "Tenue des gardes de la Police de Hanoi," Hanoi, October 25, 1933, p. 65.

In dialogue with recent work on intermediaries in colonial Africa by Nancy Rose Hunt, Emily Osborn, and others, this chapter re-frames Indochina's Vietnamese policemen as "middle figures."<sup>6</sup> It argues that certain Vietnamese agents were able to operate within a narrow and limited but relatively autonomous space outside of French control. The "power of the middle" manifested along a spectrum of possibilities, as some agents used their in-between position to engage in collusion, while others sympathized with their prisoners. Corruption and extortion also flourished. What is clear is that Vietnamese police agents were in a unique position to adapt and accommodate colonial rule(s) at the ground level, as well as exploit their position of authority. The everyday colonial experience was thus shaped not just by colonial policy in the metropole, or even by European administrators in the colony. Rather, those at the lowest levels of colonial rule had an inordinate influence over how the colonial police behaved and was perceived, and shaped to a large extent what the police service actually did on a day-to-day basis.

### **The Question of "Collaboration" in Vietnam's Colonial Services**

While Vietnamese agents in the police have been overlooked in the literature, historians working on Vietnam's other services have been more inclined to look at the foot soldiers of French rule. These studies provide context for colonial employment and opportunities for comparison. They also illustrate, combined with the present study, clear trends in the various colonial services, all of which employed a comparable racial hierarchy, and suggests that the "power of the middle" was a larger phenomenon of colonialism.

French laws, rulings, and punishments were invariably filtered by low-level translators and functionaries, the most visible indication of which was corruption. James Barnhart writes that the colonial justice system suffered from enduring corruption problems with Vietnamese

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<sup>6</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1999). Emily Lynn Osborn, "'Circle of Iron': African Colonial Employees and the Interpretation of Colonial Rule in French West Africa," *The Journal of African History* 44, 1 (2003): 29-50.



intermediaries in the courts. Citing one case from the 1870s, Barnhart writes of an overworked French Inspector "obliged to delegate much of his work to Vietnamese functionaries" who in turn "proceeded to ransack the populace to their own profit, in the name of the French administration."<sup>7</sup> Functionaries were especially dangerous, according to Barnhart, in the first few decades when very few Frenchmen in the colony (and even fewer among the magistrates) spoke Vietnamese.<sup>8</sup> That they were considered dangerous attests to the power of the middle; even though the French understood the problem there remained little alternative. Too few Frenchmen learned Vietnamese, and they needed intermediaries as linguistic and cultural go-betweens.

Extortion was among the most common ways intermediaries benefited from their position, but there were other ways to profit. Zinoman's descriptions of corruption among low-level prison guards appear alongside numerous instances of prisoner-guard collusion, suggesting a spectrum of possibilities in the relationship between guard and guarded. Vietnamese guards and prisoners came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, as Zinoman writes, so "a host of informal relations—some collusive and some predatory—developed between surveillants and inmates."<sup>9</sup> Their shared culture and language became especially evident during the Tet holiday (New Year), an extended celebration during which prisoner-guard fraternization and numbers of successful escape attempts increased.<sup>10</sup> The interior world of the Vietnamese guard and Vietnamese prisoner was one that "European officials could never penetrate or control."<sup>11</sup> In a similar fashion, this cultural/social/linguistic distance between the French police leadership and both their agents and colonial society meant that agents often had more in common with the

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<sup>7</sup> James Barnhart, "Violence and the civilizing mission: Native justice in French colonial Vietnam, 1858-1914" (PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 1999), 339.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Zinoman, *Colonial Bastille*.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 73. Inmates could bribe guards for "special supplies form their families, including clothes, medicine, and opium," or become victims of extortion and violence.

policed than with their superiors. And this arrangement (along with the general ignorance of the Vietnamese language among French policemen) generally empowered intermediaries and contributed to the problems of corruption and collusion.

More recently, in his 2006 study on the colonial alcohol monopoly in Tonkin, Gerard Sages shows how Vietnamese customs and state monopoly agents engaged in a range of corruption, including profit sharing with smuggler groups. He writes of the agents:

Denied proper remuneration by a skinflint state, Vietnamese employees of the *regie* [colonial monopoly] not unreasonably exploited the opportunities that stemmed from their intermediary position. Ultimately, it was these thousands upon thousands of abuses, some petty, some staggering, that constituted the alcohol monopoly in the lived experience of ordinary Vietnamese.<sup>12</sup>

These studies suggest that there were larger structural problem with the colonial state which created conditions for abuse. In her work on colonial interpreters in Vietnam, Eileen Vo comes to a similar conclusion about their often unchecked (and in the literature, underappreciated) influence and capacity for abuse.<sup>13</sup> Arguably, these tendencies were exacerbated in the police because of this institution's vague mandate to use force to preserve order.

### **"Middles" in the Police: Interpretation and translation**

Historian Ronald Robinson illustrates the importance of indigenous elites to mediating European rule.<sup>14</sup> Colonial dominance could not be maintained by violence alone, but had to be built on alliances, negotiation, compromise, and quid-pro-quo arrangements. This sort of accommodation-seeking with the new rulers extended to the lowest levels of the bureaucracy as well, as recent scholarship explores. The murky middle ground between colonizer and colonized,

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<sup>12</sup> Sages, "Contraband, capital, and the colonial state," xxv.

<sup>13</sup> Eileen Vo, "The Politics of Translation; the Ambivalent role of Interpreters and Translators in Colonial Vietnam," paper presented at the EFEO (École française d'Extrême-Orient), Paris, France, June 10, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration," in *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, eds. E.R.J. Owen and R.B. Sutcliffe (London: Longman, 1972), 117-142.

where individual interests aligned however tenuously and inequitably to further cooperation, formed the foundation of the colonial state.

Literature on "colonial middle figures" was pioneered by historians of colonial Africa looking to break out of an outmoded colonizer vs. colonized framework for thinking about colonial encounters. In her study on the medicalization of childbirth in colonial Zaire, Nancy Rose Hunt re-conceptualizes colonial intermediaries as middle figures, or "middles," arguing that they were pivotal to facilitating colonial exchanges. Hunt's insight is that the importance of the "middles" stemmed from their role in the "processes of translation in a colonial therapeutic economy"<sup>15</sup> which allowed them to become the "central midwives of colonial mutations."<sup>16</sup> The process of translation carries with it changes: additions, omissions, and transmutations. And far from empty vessels of colonial rule, "middles" brought their own assumptions, (mis)understandings, and agendas to the translation process.

Many "middles" unsurprisingly exploited this position of relative power for personal gain. Hunt leaves the question of personal motives relatively open, but another scholar of more explicitly illustrates how those "serving in the colonial interface" could manipulate this quintessentially colonial power arrangement. In her work on low-level functionaries in French West Africa, Emily Osborn shows that intermediaries exercised a not-insignificant degree of power independently of the French. As she writes, "The unofficial corridors of power that sprouted out of the nascent colonial bureaucracy in the early colonial period point to the significance of those low-level colonial employees who possessed the linguistic capabilities,

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<sup>15</sup> Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon*. See also, on the importance of middle figures in colonial administration in Africa: Benjamin N. Lawrence, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, eds., *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon*, 12.

symbolic trappings and cultural know-how to mediate colonial rule."<sup>17</sup> While most work on collaboration prior to Hunt and Osborne looked at how colonial rule reinforced existing power structures and bolstered the power of elites, these historians suggest that it also created new power structures and opportunities for local recruits with otherwise low social standing.<sup>18</sup>

Applying these insights about the role of middles as translators, both literately as interpreters but also as filters of knowledge, further illustrates what gave intermediary police agents leverage. Vietnamese agents were of course translators in the most ordinary sense. Their Francophone police superiors did not, by and large, learn Vietnamese, but rather used Vietnamese agents informally to communicate. The police employed only a few professionally trained interpreters, often only two or three per city, so Vietnamese agents with any knowledge of French served in this capacity. French agents were often at the mercy of their subordinates, and had to act or not act based on their information, as in the following incident.

Huynh Manh, a Chinese grocery store owner in Saigon filed a complaint against French police agent of the 2nd class Ployer in May 1907 for assault and battery (*coups et blessures volontaires*) after Ployer, who did not speak Vietnamese, wrongfully imprisoned and beat Huynh Manh based on the intelligence of a Vietnamese agent.<sup>19</sup> Ployer was disciplined and docked four days pay for the incident. Huynh Manh had been closing up shop and tallying receipts when a native agent of the 4th class, 34-year-old Nguyen Van Cao, peeked into the shop. Asked if he wanted to buy anything, the agent said no and left. The shop's assistants reported that agent was

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<sup>17</sup> Osborn, "Circle of Iron," 30.

<sup>18</sup> Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism."

<sup>19</sup> CAOM, GGI 35517, Punitons retirés du dossier Ployer (police) par application de la loi d'amnistie du 3 Janvier 1925; Commissaire Belland to Saigon Mayor, May 22, 1907; Report from Commissaire Maroselli to Commissaire central, May 18, 1907; Maroselli, Pierre-Jean, "Procès-verbal constatant: Violence et voies de fait du personnel d'un chinois," May 16, 1907; Huynh Mang to the Procureur de la République à Saigon, May 15, 1907. Doctor's report for Huynh Mang from Dejean de la Batie, Saigon, May 13, 1907.

not in uniform and furthermore, unprovoked, had threatened to break Huynh Manh's head (*lui casser la tête*). Another witness in the shop reported a threat to grab him by his braid.

Cao returned to the police station where he informed Ployer, the head of the post, that Huynh Manh was carrying out illegal gambling, specifically organizing a lottery. Cao also told Ployer that Huynh Manh had insulted Cao and threatened him with a *coupe coupe*, a machete-like knife. Fifteen minutes later Cao returned to the shop with Ployer, who immediately grabbed Huynh Manh by his braid and beat him. In a cell back at the police station, Ployer hung Huynh Manh by his braid on a roof beam in such a way that his feet were barely touching the floor, and beat him some more. During his interrogation, Ployer accused him of being a "vagabond" and gambling, but the questioning went nowhere, and Ployer finally let Huynh Manh go. Meanwhile, the station's Vietnamese agents, who served as Ployer's translators, argued continually with the Chinese man, exchanging insults Ployer could not understand. According to the later investigation, Huynh Manh insulted Cao's parents: "Deo me cha may," or "F— your parents."<sup>20</sup>

Huynh Manh filed a complaint and obtained a medical certificate attesting to his injuries. In his complaint he wrote that "we have been victims of these actions more than once" but "did not dare going to higher authorities out of fear of reprisals." Ployer—but not Cao—was punished. While the file does not reveal the back-story between Cao and Huynh Manh, the threats and rapid escalation between them indicates that there must have been more to the incident, of which Ployer may have been ignorant. As a businessman Huynh Manh, notably, was far wealthier than either Ployer or Cao, as in addition to the grocery store he also owned a sawmill. As chapter 6 explores, the Chinese business community was able to use their influence and organization to counter discriminatory policies and groundless police attacks like the ones Huynh Manh suffered, adding another destabilizing facet to the colonial power dynamic.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

General ignorance of the local language alone had the potential to empower bilingual intermediaries, as even the highest ranked French *commissaire's* understanding of a crime was typically filtered through the knowledge provided by Vietnamese middles. Even when a French policeman stood beside his subordinate in the street, the Frenchman typically had to look to—and wait on—the Vietnamese agent to communicate, to interpret, and to explain, before deciding how to proceed. Agents deployed on the streets furthermore found themselves engaged in ad hoc translations of colonialism itself—interpreting and enforcing its laws, and in the process instructing the uninitiated on its unfamiliar practices and expectations.

**"He does what he wants:" The supervision problem**

The police's racial hierarchy was predicated on both the unwavering subordination and supervision of Vietnamese agents. The Tonkin police handbook included instructions for Europeans in how to treat native police agents, which included instructing them in "honesty" and keeping them from abusing their position, but also to keep a certain professional distance:

European agents should educate their native colleagues in their service, and instill in them sentiments of honesty, diligence and precision by which they themselves must be motivated. During their service, they should strive to kindle their awareness and teach them to exercise proper supervision. They must forbid native agents from all kinds of brutality towards their compatriots. They shall refrain from any compromise or familiarity with native agents, who by their actions and behavior they must inspire respect.<sup>21</sup>

In practice, whatever the official policy might be, Vietnamese agents were not always under the watchful eye of a superior. In 1910, Lecoer recommended against assigning Vietnamese agents on missions outside Saigon for the reason that he found it difficult to monitor their actions. "Everyone knows, in the police, that our native agents especially love being sent to the

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<sup>21</sup> *Manuel de Police à l'usage des Agents de Police du Tonkin* (Hanoi-Haiphong: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1909).

provinces, where almost completely alone, without European agents, they act as they like..."<sup>22</sup>

The French were all too aware that while the interests of their Vietnamese employees sometimes dovetailed with colonial aims, they could just as easily conflict with, and undermine, their objectives. The desire to bring the Vietnamese cadre under tighter supervision was a recurring theme in administrative correspondence, further shedding light on the existence of a sovereign space in the police that to some extent eluded the French administration.

Also in 1910, in the Haiphong news column, *L'Avenir du Tonkin* wrote in opposition to a plan to garrison the native cadre because "It would have been preferable, in our view, to reduce the number of native police and increase that of the French police," under the condition that French agents learn Vietnamese. The newspaper summed up the problem: "We have two polices, French and native, who are incapable of telling us what is going on in the native world, the first because it does not know the language and the second because without supervision, knowing that no one can understand him, he does what he wants..."<sup>23</sup>

In Bac Lieu province, administrator Krautheimer expressed a similar frustration when he wrote in 1908 the perceived inaction of the local communal police which forced him to "constantly intervene."<sup>24</sup> Traffic laws were ignored, gambling proliferated, and vagabonds (a catchall phrase) hung out at the market, unperturbed. Krautheimer, who would become governor of Cochinchina in the 1930s, wrote that short of "personally exercising a constant surveillance and becoming a gendarme myself, I am obliged to recognize that as soon as I am no longer there the rules revert back to as before." Hiring Vietnamese agents and putting them in uniforms was

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<sup>22</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/222. "Fusion des polices;" Rapport du Commissaire Central p.i. Lecoer à le Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine sur les réformes à apporter aux divers services de police chargés d'assurer l'ordre et la sécurité publique," Saigon, November 1910.

<sup>23</sup> "Le Personnel Indigène de la Police," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, January 25, 1910, 2.

<sup>24</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB24/041, Gendarmerie: Création des nouveaux postes; Krautheimer, Administrateur de Baclieu, to Monsieur le Lieutenant-gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, "Installation d'une brigade de Gendarmerie à Baclieu," Baclieu, September 10, 1908.

one thing, getting them to act as the colonial state wanted them to was something else entirely. (And getting them to wear the uniform was not a sure thing either).

### ***Métis* and Naturalized Vietnamese as Middles: The Duc Hanh conspiracy**

Naturalized Frenchmen and *métis*, both employed in the European cadre, were consummate middles. They were invaluable to the police because they were bilingual (French fluency being a chief criteria for citizenship) and savvy in the cultural and social norms of both societies. This cohort was well placed to exercise the power of the middle, as illustrated by the case from 1883. Under pressure by his superiors to produce information on a suspected anti-French plot, sous-brigadier and naturalized Frenchman Duc Hanh fabricated evidence and implicated innocent persons in an invented conspiracy.<sup>25</sup> He likewise bribed and threatened his accomplices, who did not come forward at least in part because they did not speak French and also out of fear over Duc Hanh's status as a policeman. The plot got as far as it did in large part because the two sides (Tourillon and Duc Hanh's informants) could not communicate directly with each other and needed him as a go-between. By the time this scandal was over, Duc Hanh would find himself facing legal prosecution in Vietnam's French courts.

In 1883, when the police employed Duc Hanh, French armed forces were still engaged in the conquest of the remaining Vietnamese territories—what would become the protectorates of Annam (central Vietnam) and Tonkin (northern Vietnam). The Emperor and the Hue court maintained a consulate in Saigon that the local police watched with great interest. Using spies, informants, and intercepted communications, As a French citizen, Tourillon trusted Duc Hanh to head the political unit within the police, and to maintain a network of spies within the consulate.

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<sup>25</sup> CAOM, GGI 11550, "Rapports de police sur les agissements des consuls annamites à Saigon, 1883;" Rapport au Gouverneur, Direction de l'Intérieur, Cabinet du Directeur, Saigon, August 10, 1883.



In July 1883, however, Tourillon discovered that Duc Hanh had deliberately misled him with counterfeit documents claiming the existence of an anti-French insurrection plot.<sup>26</sup> It came out over the course of the investigation that the previous year, Duc Hanh had recruited as an informant Nguyen Van Huong, a tailor who sometimes worked at the consulate. Limited in his access to the consulate, Huong in turn recruited a soldier named Chop who worked there on a regular basis, promising him four piastres a month in exchange for information. Between them, Huong and Chop gave the police an ear inside the consulate, and even managed to steal a red-painted bamboo tube marked "ministry of war." Duc Hanh received a bonus and praise from his superiors for this accomplishment, and he, in turn, promised Huong "a great sum" should Huong and Chop steal more incriminating consulate documents.<sup>27</sup>

According to tailor Huong's version of the story, later recorded under some duress, the consulate then burned most of the documents after the Hue ambassador left Saigon, and Huong was only able to save a few "semi-burned" letters.<sup>28</sup> But Duc Hanh had become obsessed with producing the letters and coerced Huong to help him forge new documents using a draft or form letter Chop had secured earlier. Huong, who claimed Duc Hanh threatened him if he refused to cooperate, reproduced the official seals on the letters. At Duc Hanh's request, Huong also involved two additional conspirators, Tho and A Kiem, to write the fake letters. The letters were dictated by Duc Hanh, who provided him with a list of ten Chinese men to include in the plot as rebel leaders and, according to Huong, threatened Tho with prison if he did not comply.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Rapport de Police," Commissaire central de police Tourillon, Saigon, June 23, 1883; Rapport de Police, Commissaire central de police Tourillon, Saigon, June 14, 1883; Rapport de Police, Commissaire central de police Tourillon, Saigon, June 16, 1883; Rapport de Police, Commissaire central de police Tourillon, Saigon, May 31, 1883; Commissaire central de police Tourillon to Directeur de l'Interieur, Saigon August 8, 1883; Rapport au Gouverneur, Direction de l'Interieur, Cabinet du Directeur, Saigon, August 10, 1883.

<sup>27</sup> CAOM, GGI 11550, "Rapports de police sur les agissements des consuls annamites à Saigon, 1883." Letter from Commissaire central de police Tourillon to le Directeur de l'Interieur, Saigon August 8, 1883.

<sup>28</sup> CAOM, GGI 11550, "Rapports de police sur les agissements des consuls annamites à Saigon, 1883." "Declaration de Nguyen Van Huong," n.d.

The Director of the Interior ordered searches of the homes of those implicated in the letters, which nonetheless "produced no results." Tourillon also arrested and interrogated a number of influential persons incriminated by the documents. Those arrested nonetheless convincingly insisted on their innocence, and when presented with the "seized" letters, one of the Chinese captives expressed doubts about their authenticity. Without further proof, and with growing doubts, the director of the interior instructed Tourillon to release the suspects and carry out a more thorough investigation.

The plot quickly unraveled. After interrogating Chop and Huong, *Commissaire* Tourillon discovered "small divergence in the two accounts." After further interrogation Huong, the tailor who became a reluctant spy, broke down and confessed that "unable to produce the papers which had been asked of him he decided to fabricate them with the help of a draft taken from the consulate." Huong pleaded for leniency and he claimed that his ignorance of French prevented him from exposing Duc Hanh, and that he had gone along with the scheme because he feared losing his income. Confronted by Tourillon, Duc Hanh also confessed, but blamed it on the pressure he was under from his police superiors to produce a list of plot leaders, which he was asked about "every day." Since he was unable to secure such a list, and feared reproach, Duc Hanh wrote in his statement that he went along with what he described as originally Huong's scheme. He also claimed, as Tourillon wrote, that "he did not realize...the enormity of his action and he did not believe" that it would have "such serious consequences."<sup>29</sup> In his statement, he apologized for letting the situation get out of control, and claimed to have feared repercussions over failing to satisfy Tourillon's demands.<sup>30</sup> His superiors were not forgiving. Since Duc Hanh

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<sup>29</sup> CAOM, GGI 11550, "Rapports de police sur les agissements des consuls annamites à Saigon, 1883." Letter from Commissaire central de police Tourillon to le Directeur de l'Interieur, Saigon August 8, 1883.

<sup>30</sup> CAOM, GGI 11550, "Rapports de police sur les agissements des consuls annamites à Saigon, 1883;" "Declaration de Nguyen Duc Hanh," addressed to Tourillon, Saigon, August 7, 1883.

was a French citizen he could not be disciplined through administrative measures, and the director of the interior recommended that he be submitted to the French courts.<sup>31</sup>

Duc Hanh's scheme cost him his job, and likely resulted in a prison sentence. Such incidents contributed to the ambivalence the French felt towards collaborators in the police. He had nonetheless gained access to the Vietnamese consulate, something Tourillon could not have done on his own. Cases like his show simultaneously the promise and pitfalls of France's dependence on intermediaries. The French absolutely needed agents like Duc Hanh, but were never entirely sure if they could be trusted.

### **Pushing Back: Legal codes, uniforms, and French language classes**

The power of the middle is perhaps no more visually striking than in the case of the Vietnamese police agents who could not be compelled to wear a conical hat. Hanoi's police superiors of course could have cracked down on the dress code, but at the same time they were aware that enforcing the uniform might come at a cost. The mayor's complaint also revealed a precedent to Vietnamese agents in Hanoi successfully negotiating their uniforms. The mayor referenced an earlier episode "during the first days of our occupation" in which the Vietnamese police agents fought for the right to carry "an umbrella or a white and green parasol." When the *commissaire* relented, "they carried [it] in all seasons, during the day and the night."<sup>32</sup>

This sort of pushing back, which ranged from directly appealing to the commissaires for special dispensation, to quietly and gradually altering their appearance, represents a more widely manifested phenomenon. On one level, this incident makes visible the tangible limits of French

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<sup>31</sup> CAOM, GGI 11550, "Rapports de police sur les agissements des consuls annamites à Saigon, 1883;" Rapport au Gouverneur, Direction de l'Interieur, Cabinet du Directeur, Saigon, August 10, 1883.

<sup>32</sup> TTLT I, RST 78661-01, "Règlement de police administrative de la ville de Hanoi de 1923 à 1943." Letter from Hanoi Mayor to RST, Hanoi "a.s. Habillement gardes [sic] de la police de Hanoi." October, 17 1933, p. 62-64.

control over even their own employees. On another, it shows how individuals worked within the police, negotiating and shaping it from within.

Vietnamese "middles" worked at the bottom of a colonial bureaucracy that openly considered them racially inferior. Long hours working under hazardous conditions, low pay, and few benefits unsurprisingly led to high turnover and desertion—simply leaving the police, as many did, was itself a sort of statement. In 1910, the Hanoi police created a new native special police brigade, called the *brigade spéciale de Garde Indigène* in an effort to both expand militarize the city's Vietnamese agents. The idea was to make the native cadre an urban militia in terms of uniform and discipline. The new cadre would also be garrisoned, their pay would be cut, and they lost their pension rights. The 1910 law stated that all Vietnamese policemen had to move to new service or be fired. Many voted with their feet and left the police.

In response to the law, the native police cadre went, in the words of one frustrated resident, "on strike, or almost."<sup>33</sup> As he wrote in *L'Avenir du Tonkin* in May 1911, before the law took full effect, the Vietnamese agents "refuse, despite all the advantages claimed to be offered to them, to let themselves be militarized."<sup>34</sup> In the end, the city offered Vietnamese policemen who refused to enlist in the new police service severance pay of three to six months' salary, which another newspaper called "a bit of justice in a police affaire what has had for a basis, until now, only injustice and incoherence."<sup>35</sup> A member of the League for the Rights of Man wrote in to the newspaper in August 1911 about the current debate taking place over if the League should get involved on behalf of the Vietnamese agents. The League, he wrote, was very much divided over the issue of Vietnamese employee rights.<sup>36</sup> Whether the pressure to give severance pay to

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<sup>33</sup> *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, May 12, 1911, 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> "Le nouveau régime de la police indigène," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, May 11, 1911, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, August 4, 1911, 2.

the Vietnamese policemen came from the agents themselves or sympathetic French allies is not clear from the newspaper sources. It is nevertheless a surprising development.

The city ended up having to find many new recruits to staff the 200 "police-militia," most of whom came from the colonial artillery.<sup>37</sup> But the law's popularity was mixed. One French resident of Hanoi complained that these new policemen—recruited from scratch—would not have any experience with the French language. Others objected to the cost of the measure (including the garrison and the severance pay for the lost agents). When Haiphong adopted a similar measure, the city chose to garrison unmarried Vietnamese agents across from the main *commissariat*, but otherwise eliminated some of the more military features of the new service, including keeping the name "police."<sup>38</sup>

The Vietnamese cohort appears to have been even better organized internally in 1927 when it came to employment rights. The Haiphong mayor Eckert warned the RST in a report that his native police agents were both ill disciplined and resisted disciplinary sanctions. The mayor confessed that French police superiors were reluctant to undertake sanctions against them and often gave up on disciplining rather than battle subordinates (and regulations) over trivial matters. Of his Vietnamese agents he wrote:

one is struck by their lack of uniform [and] the sloppy appearance of these auxiliaries. ... As functionaries, they live under the protection of a multitude of regulations that make them almost irremovable and un-punishable [*inamovible et impunissables*] for light offenses. Discipline inevitably suffers. Their superiors are deterred by the difficulties arising from the slightest proposed sanction and are quick to reduce their demands, and I understand this too well.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, August 6, 1911, 3.

<sup>38</sup> <sup>38</sup> TTLT I, RST 37567, "Réorganisation du personnel de la police urbaine de Hanoi et Haiphong de la Sûreté du Tonkin 1926-29;" L. F. Eckert, Administrateur-Maire to RST, Hanoi, "Objet: Réorganisation de la police urbaine," Haiphong, September 13, 1927.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

What this suggests is that the agents themselves were informed about the personnel laws governing their employment—widely published in official newspapers—including discipline protocol and its legal constrictions. Uniform regulations were also not being followed either, as Eckert's complaint reveals.

In another example of frustrated colonial administrators attempting to mould the native cadre, Saigon administrators tried and failed to compel a group of Vietnamese police agents to learn French starting in 1899. Active noncompliance on the part of the agents eventually forced administrators to abandon the project in 1903. Given the benefits of bilingualism, it is perhaps surprising that some Vietnamese agents resisted attending French language classes. Nonetheless, learning French involved considerable time and energy, and some demonstrated little interest in spending their free time in a classroom. The city, meanwhile, wanted Vietnamese agents to be able to cater to the French population. In this case, agents "pushing back" involved noncooperation. This conflict also reveals that low pay limited what the French could expect from their police agents in terms of professional development.

In 1899, Cochinchina's Colonial Council heard complaints about the inability Vietnamese police agents to speak French. Council member Paris used the annual police budget review as an opportunity to raise concerns he had about the indigenous agents in the police:

The Asian agents that we have in our police constantly slip away from their most basis duties. For the most part, they do not know a word of French. In addition, when you ask them for some information, it is always the same response that you receive: *Khong co biet* [I don't know]. If a traffic accident occurs, the police agent looks on and contents himself with watching...<sup>40</sup>

The Governor agreed with the problem but responded "It is not possible from the start to recruit agents already knowing the French language, giving that their salary is too little to require any

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<sup>40</sup> Procès-verbaux, Conseil Colonial, Séance du 28 Septembre, 1899, "Chapitre III- Police administrative et judiciaire," (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1899), 91.

special knowledge." He further remarked that he had proposed evening language classes for the existing agents to Commissaire Belland. Another member suggested firing any agent who failed to learn French after a certain grace period. Again, the Governor responded pessimistically: "With a salary of 8 piastres, we cannot make recruitment of this personnel more difficult."<sup>41</sup> In 1899, *Le Courrier Saïgonnais* wrote in support of such a plan: "the indigenous agents [as Paris] astutely notes, do not know, most of them, a word of French. It can hardly under these conditions perform the services that one has a right to expect from agents of the *force publique*."<sup>42</sup>

Identical concerns were raised in 1903 when council members again submitted a petition asking that indigenous agents of the police be recruited only among those already familiar with French. Vietnamese agents should know enough of the city's streets and of the French language, the members maintained, to be able to give directions.<sup>43</sup> Pech compared the Saigon police unfavorably to British colonial subjects who, unlike the Vietnamese, he claimed had successfully learned their colonizer's tongue: "It is, in fact, regrettable that after 45 years of occupation and despite all the sacrifices made in favor of the study of French, our indigenous agents, in contrast, moreover, with that which exists in the British colonies in the Indies, Colombo, and Singapore, are, with rare exceptions, in total ignorance about the first notion of our language."<sup>44</sup> Consequently, the police were unable to respond to the needs of the francophone population, and this ignorance limited, in Pech's estimation, the "intellectual level" of the service.

The president responded that the earlier initiative had failed. French classes had been established, but after three years were cancelled for lack of results: "facing completely negative

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> "Au Conseil Colonial," *Le Courrier Saïgonnais*, September 30, 1899, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Procès-Verbaux, Conseil Colonial, Séance du 1er Août, 1903, "Voeu relatif aux conditions à exiger des candidats indigènes à un poste dans la police," (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1903).

<sup>44</sup> Procès-Verbaux, Conseil Colonial, Séance du 28 Juillet, 1903, "Au sujet de la police indigène, Rapport de la Commission, n. 7" (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1903), 56.

results and based on the opinion even of the professor, these courses were cancelled. The agents did not attend except when forced, and they had no desire to learn French. Do you think that it is necessary to try again? I do not think so... ."45 He again reminded his colleagues that recruitment of these agents was already difficult enough.

The fact that members of the French administration, including Arnoux and Eckert and the council president, were cognizant of the limits of their ability to enforce uniform regulations or attendance at language classes speaks volumes about colonial power dynamics. These incidences suggest that low-level police agents were able to push back in small ways, and even carve out some small space in which to maneuver and assert agendas divergent from those of the French. The colonial state needed Vietnamese intermediaries to govern the colony, and they struggled to recruit and retain Vietnamese agents, so could not afford to be overly selective about recruitment. Others simply quit when faced with unpopular reforms. These agents were likely aware of how difficult they were to replace and there were, as a result, clear limits to the state's ability to train or discipline the Vietnamese cadre.

These findings in turn suggests the nature and limits of state power dynamics within the colony at the street level and calls into question the degree to which the state controlled the police. As Rajnarayan Chandavarkar argues for colonial Bombay, it is too simplistic to say that the colonial police—always a homogenous group—enforced public order. He found for Bombay that an enormous gap between what colonial state planned and what colonial police could or would do accomplish. Chandavarkar also stresses the "context of the social relations of the neighborhood," as local networks and relationships facilitated effective policing.<sup>46</sup> I arrive at

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>46</sup> Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and The State in India, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).



similar conclusions for colonial Vietnam, suggesting a broader pattern of colonial policing in which state control over its own polices was slippery.

### **Posturing, Corruption, and Complicity**

Corruption and violence at the hands of Vietnam's colonial policemen is well documented. Police encounters were, as in the case of the European agents (chapter 2), often arbitrary and violent.<sup>47</sup> Writing off Vietnamese agents as corrupt nonetheless provides only a one-dimensional portrait of their role in the police and fails to explain why corruption was so rampant—the institutional circumstances which bred abuses. The "power of the middle" manifested along a spectrum of possibilities. Some agents used their in-between position to engage in mutually beneficial collusion, in the process selectively blunting or negotiating the impact of colonial rule. Others sympathized with their prisoners and offered aid and comfort.

Vietnamese "middles" were semi-empowered on the streets to act at their own discretion on behalf of the French. Such circumstances unsurprisingly attracted less scrupulous candidates to the perpetually understaffed "native cadre." In his work on colonial prisons, Peter Zinoman observes that prison guard brutality resulted from "inflated notions about the legitimate extent of their power" as well as by their own victimization.<sup>48</sup> The guards, subject to beatings by their French superiors, sometimes took out their anger on the prisoners, which further escalated the use of violence in the prisons.<sup>49</sup> Low-level policemen, likewise, had many responsibilities with little real authority or supervision.

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<sup>47</sup> Sages comes to a similar conclusion in his work on the alcohol monopoly agents. From his abstract: "The state's modernizing rhetoric disguised a pre-modern taxation system characterized by corruption, theft, and random violence." Gerard Henry Sages, "Contraband, capital, and the colonial state: the alcohol monopoly in Northern Việt Nam, 1897-1933" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> Zinoman, *Colonial Bastille*, 27.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-28.

Some Vietnamese agents sought to use their position to command respect in what was not traditionally a highly respected occupation in Vietnam.<sup>50</sup> In this sense, police abuses by Europeans and Vietnamese also stemmed from a similar concern for garnering respect. This in both cases led to the causal use of violence in addition to blatant corruption and extortion. In 1896 it came to light that a Vietnamese brigadier had been demanding that he be addressed only with the pronoun "ong," a name of respect, threatening with violence and arrest those who failed to do so.<sup>51</sup> Zinoman similarly finds cases of prison guards demanding to be called pronouns far above their station, and insulting prisoners with intimate and inferior pronouns.<sup>52</sup> The benefit in these cases was less material gain and more symbolic deference, although the two went hand in hand. Such posturing also recalls the behavior of the French agents.

In another case, a Vietnamese police agent fined a Vietnamese civilian an enormous sum simply for allegedly threatening him. In February 1912, the Governor of Cochinchina wrote to the Bac Lieu administrator with concern regarding overzealous policing in his province. The list of excessive and likely unnecessary fines included one by Vietnamese agent Nguyen Van Hoai who had fined Hua Chinh Khon four piastres for "outrages by words and threats of violence against agent Nguyen Van Hoai while exercising his functions."<sup>53</sup> (An entry-level native agent would earn eight to ten piastres a month, four piastres was a considerable sum). In cases like these, it was the police agent's word against the civilian's, and without the extraordinary intervention of the governor, low-level police agents could at their own discretion levy fines or other punishments just because they had been (or claimed to have been) insulted. The power

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<sup>50</sup> The closest pre-colonial equivalent to a policemen would be a *linh* or soldier.

<sup>51</sup> CAOM, GGI 21497, "Plainte contre la police secrète," Saigon, September 18, 1896.

<sup>52</sup> Zinoman, *Colonial Bastille*, 80-81.

<sup>53</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB24/035, "Gendarmerie: rapports mensuels des postes en Cochinchine 1913-1918." Le Gouverneur de 1re classe des Colonies, Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, to l'administrateur, Chef de province Baclieu, "A.S. du nombre excessif de contraventions dressées à Baclieu." Saigon, February 18, 1913; M. Serizier, Administrateur de Baclieu to Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Baclieu, January 11, 1913.

imbalance was potentially vast. In 1931, the chief of police in Saigon had to remind all of his Vietnamese agents that "they must show courtesy and caution while carrying out their duties" following a complaint about bad behavior of the Sûreté's "native personnel," again in Bac Lieu.<sup>54</sup> A Vietnamese agent there had caused offense while "verifying identity" in what ended up being a trivial dispute. While the agent does not seem to have gained materially from the confrontation, his actions suggest an overinflated sense of importance. Promoting an image of fear and respect undoubtedly facilitated extortion and graft, but was also a goal in itself.

There are many examples in the archive of Vietnamese agents abusing their position for personal gain. *L'Avenir du Tonkin* reported on March 21, 1913 that "police-pirates," Vietnamese members of the civil guard had been arrested in Rach Gia province.<sup>55</sup> The men had boarded a rice-carrying junk and extorted twenty piastres from the owners, threatening the boatmen with arrest. On October 8, 1913, a Vietnamese police agent in Hanoi, who was going to testify on behalf of an injured coolie, reversed his statement, siding with the Indian employer. The newspaper found the case very suspicious and suggested that the Indian had bribed the agent.<sup>56</sup> In 1940, Can Tho police suspended agent in training Le Van Tanh for extorting money from Chinese businessmen. He received 6 months in prison.<sup>57</sup> An anonymous letter from a group of Can Tho businessmen calling themselves "Une troupe commerçants" wrote that "The administration would be better respected" if it opened a new investigation to find the real people at fault, the head of police corruption. Agent Tanh, they wrote, was only the arm.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/254, Le Chef Local des Services de Police to Gouverneur de la Cochinchine (Cabinet), "Personnel indigène actif de la police de l'Indochine," Saigon, March 27, 1931.

<sup>55</sup> "Rach Gia: Les policiers-pirates," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, March 21, 1913.

<sup>56</sup> "Singulier Témoin," *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, October 8, 1913.

<sup>57</sup> TTLT II, IIA50/512(3) "Plainte contre l'agent de police Le v. Tanh, Cantho, 1940." Letter from "un group de Commerçants de Cantho" to Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Cantho, March 9, 1940; Arrêté, Cantho, L'Administrateur-Maire de la Commune-Mixte de Cantho, COLAS. March 14, 1940; Letter from une troupe commerçants Cantho to Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, May 11, 1941.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

In November 1906, *Le Courrier de Haiphong* asked the question, why did Vietnamese victims of crimes not report them to the police? Specifically, vendors in the city were recently attacked and robbed by a group of criminals. It was the third time this had happened, according to the Vietnamese merchants, but the first time the police were made aware of the problem. The newspaper wrote of the victims' reluctance to report the crime: "they will all respond that they are afraid, of going there [to the commissariat], of being harassed, bothered, or maybe even beaten by native agents. It is better to stay quiet."<sup>59</sup> In 1906, Vietnamese rural policemen in Ta Nan province accidentally drowned their prisoner while water-boarding him. The suspect had been arrested for theft and the policemen were attempting to extract a confession. The newspaper reporting on the incident, *L'Opinion*, wrote by way of explanation that "the native police love to employ" such "tortures."<sup>60</sup> Blaming intermediaries for police violence and abuse allowed French superiors to distance themselves for these actions, although the accidental death suggests that they were not as experienced as the newspaper claimed.

In 1896, a victim of police abuse in Cochinchina sent an anonymous complaint about a Vietnamese and an Indian policeman to the GGI. The letter, translated into French from the original Vietnamese, accused the police of extorting and arresting innocent people and beating them, sometimes to death, with lead pipes and clubs. The author identified the offenders as belonging to the local Sûreté. These agents, the letter claimed,

make their rounds, always armed...they go into the street, and elsewhere, looking everywhere for a story or problem [which they can use] to get money. Those who offer them money are left alone; while those who do not give anything, they always find a reason to arrest them and bring them back to the station. They beat him during the whole journey, from the point of arrest to the station.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> "Agressions," *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, November 4, 1906.

<sup>60</sup> "Interieur (de notre correspondant particulier) TANAN," *L'Opinion*, July 3, 1906.

<sup>61</sup> CAOM, GGI 21497, "Plainte contre la police secret," Saigon September 18, 1896.

The beatings would then continue at the station, the letter went on, sometime at the hand of the *commissaire* or a station chief—in either case a Frenchman—and the innocent man might then find himself in prison. Any food their families brought them would be confiscated by the agents. The two principal offenders named in the complaint were an Indian, identified later by Belland as *sous-brigadier* Douressamy, and Jean-Baptiste Ho, also a *sous-brigadier* of the 1st class and "chef de la Sûreté," either a naturalized Vietnamese or *métis*.

The GGI forwarded the complaint to Belland, who dismissed it as "pure invention."<sup>62</sup> Police agents used weapons, Belland claimed, only in cases of absolute necessity and in self-defense, such as when a criminal resisted arrest or "when they themselves are attacked by vagabonds." He concluded that: "It is evident that the secret police inconveniences very much the thieves; they are the only ones moreover who can put hands on them when having committed a crime they take refuge in the suburbs or in the [surrounding] districts." The complaint was returned to the GGI along with Belland's rebuttal, and the file appears to have been closed. In this case, the police closed ranks, with Belland standing by both his Vietnamese and Indian subordinates who had "long ago proven themselves to their *commissaire*."<sup>63</sup>

French superiors of course set the tone for the police's bribery and corruption culture. As described in chapter 2, all three of Indochina's central *commissaires*, Belland among them, were accused of serious corruption in the 1900s. In his memoir, Jean Jacques Maitam describes accidentally embarrassing his *commissaire* when he exposed the Frenchman's involvement with local gambling syndicates. Yet the French tried to distance themselves from corruption and abuses by pushing the blame onto Vietnamese agents.

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<sup>62</sup> CAOM, GGI 21497, Letter from Belland, Commissaire Central, to Lieutenant-gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon, October 2, 1896.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

In a case from April 1910, Belland went so far as to explain that a certain amount of corruption was to be expected from indigenous agents. This was followed an abuse complaint accusing both himself and Chinese police interpreter Tchang Yan Veng of protecting illegal gambling dens and extorting bribes, resorting to violence to ensure compliance. Tchang Yan Veng was one of very few Chinese police employees, all of whom were employed not as police agents but as interpreters, although in practice the line between agent and interpreter was a blurry one. Tchang Yan Veng *dit* (also called) Tran Vien Seng, had joined the Saigon police under Belland's command as an interpreter in 1901 under somewhat unusual circumstances. Unlike many of the Indian, Vietnamese, and French applicants, it was not financial need that led him to solicit work in the police. Tchang Yan Veng not only co-owned a restaurant with his brother-in-law in Cholon, which also served as a notorious gambling den, but he had also worked for ten years for both European businessmen and the Saigon Immigration Service as a *comprador*—a lucrative position in which he procured laborers from China. Tchang Yan Veng spoke several Chinese dialects fluently, and according to Belland, was the "best Chinese interpreter in the police."<sup>64</sup> Interpreters were no better paid than Vietnamese agents, and earned a mere fraction of European salaries—the highest paid police interpreter earned only 350 piastres in 1905 (about 840 francs), while Belland himself earned 13,000 francs plus benefits.

Tchang Yan Veng was, according to the complaint, not only a corrupt policeman but a "cruel and imposing [*redoubtable*] man" who had recently ordered the beating of a Cholon man who fell behind on his payments. The policeman, however, had recently fled because, the letter claimed, his corruption was about to come to light. Tchang Yan Veng had arranged to pay a French employee in the justice department an enormous sum of 3,000 piastres (9,000 francs) in

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<sup>64</sup> CAOM, GGI 20577, Dossier: "plainte anonyme portée contre le chinois Tran Vieu Seng, interprète du service de la police, à Saigon;" Belland, Commissaire Central to Lieutenant-gouverneur de la Cochinchine, "Au sujet d'une plainte anonyme portée contre un ancien interprète chinois," Saigon, April 8, 1910.

jewelry to dismiss a rape case, but the plot was discovered. According to Belland, who dismissed the entire letter as "fantasy," Tchang Yan Veng had indeed disappeared, but only because he was in trouble with debtors to whom he owed 1,500 piastres, and not because of a bribery plot. As to the letter's accusation against himself, Belland wrote that it was "so nonsensical" that the accusers should not have stopped at accusing him of taking only 800 piastres.<sup>65</sup>

As to the alleged corruption of his agents, Belland was more blasé. Writing of Tchang Yan Veng, Belland wrote "That he extorted while in the service, this is nothing extraordinary for a Chinese interpreter, and in fact it is even probable..." He went on to distance himself and his French colleagues, including the Justice Service accomplice, from such behavior: "but I think no European can be implicated because of the wrongdoing he may have committed."<sup>66</sup> The Governor sided with his *commissaire*, reporting to the GGI that Belland found the complaint's details "completely untrue."<sup>67</sup> Belland died a few months later of a sudden illness, and neither he nor his colleagues appear to have been investigated further.

The police's fearsome reputation and status as go-betweens in the colonial power structure could also be co-opted. Colonial police authority was potent to the extent that in Tonkin, Vietnamese conmen claiming to be policemen were able to "commit all sorts of abuses" in the provinces, evading detection and arrest.<sup>68</sup> In 1908, Belland's Hanoi counterpart, Brault, alerted the RST to the fact that "rogue natives" had been "frequenting the provinces" claiming to belong to the Sûreté police service. The RST in turn alerted Tonkin's regional officials to watch for the fraudulent policemen, reminding them that real Sûreté agents would always carry proper

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> CAOM, GGI 20577, Goucouch to GGI, Hanoi, "Au sujet d'une plainte anonyme portée contre un interprète chinois du service de la police," Saigon, April 8, 1910.

<sup>68</sup> TTLT I, RST 021516, "A.S. des émissaires du service de sûreté 1908-14;" RST to Résidents chefs de province, "a.s. d'annamites se faisant passer pour indicateurs au Service de la Sûreté," Hanoi, January 26, 1908.

identification, but more importantly, "generally speaking, these agents never work alone outside of Hanoi, being almost always accompanied by Europeans, who monitor them to prevent abuses." The same file mentions that a similar con arose in 1914. No one would pretend to be a "middle" in the police if being a middle did not bring with it a degree of real authority. Posing as agents created opportunities to manipulate both Europeans and Vietnamese, just as it could someone actually employed by the police.

Two former Vietnamese police employees profited from an identification and tax card scam, using their specific knowledge of police procedure and bilingual skills to swindle British immigrants.<sup>69</sup> Several British missionaries were discovered, when attempting to renew their cards in 1940, to have not paid their identification taxes since 1938. In 1938, when one of the missionaries, Todd arrived in Saigon, he was approached by a "young native clerk, of a small stature, speaking flawlessly and correctly French" to whom he paid the card fee of \$40 piastres. Several days later, he received his tax and identification card. Only when he went into the immigration office for his 1940 renewal did the clerk notice that key stamps were missing. A subsequent investigation uncovered 420 piastres worth of fraud, and implicated two Vietnamese men who were former Sûreté agents, both of whom had been fired from the police in 1938. Nonetheless, the case against them was dismissed by the prosecutor for lack of evidence.

The degree to which policemen, as a whole, abused their position is difficult to determine. The Vietnamese were potentially more vulnerable than the French to reprisal and litigation. By disavowing responsibility for their subordinates and their conduct, the French police displaced blame onto their intermediaries, as in the 1910 case involving Belland and Tchang Yan Veng above. Vietnamese agents were expected to be corrupt, he wrote, while the

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<sup>69</sup> TTLT II, Phủ Thống Đốc Nam Kỳ, 1T 66-20, Note pour Monsieur le Gouverneur from le Directeur des Bureaux, "Objet: Détournement commis par M. Nguyen-Van-Canh et Do-Van-Chac," Saigon, May 31, 1940.



French were beyond reproach. To place blame for police abuses on the Vietnamese agents, as the colonial courts often did, is however to miss a larger power dynamic at work. These agents had considerable latitude at the same time enormous pressures (as in the Duc Hanh case) from their superiors. Lax institutional practices, poor working conditions, and low prestige further encouraged abuses among both European and non-European policemen.

**"You only have to fear the French, not us"**

The "power of the middle" resulted in abuses, but there are also hints of cases in which police intermediaries used their positions to aid or otherwise assist suspects. In both instances, agents potentially worked at cross purposes with French aims. Historian Hue-Tam Ho Tai describes one such example in her biography of Bao Luong, a female Communist revolutionary later convicted for her involvement to the notorious Barbier Street murder.<sup>70</sup>

During her 1929 arrest and month-long detention at the Saigon police headquarters, three Vietnamese men working for the Saigon police went significantly out of their way to help and protect her. According to Hue-Tam's account based on Bao Luong's memoirs, Ton, described as a police "gofer," police Sergeant Qui, and police Sergeant Think took her under their wing seemingly for no reason other than she was Vietnamese and she was a woman. Qui smuggled her extra food, a change of clothes, and released her from her shackles when the French inspectors were absent. After Ton brought her water and reassured her that the food was safe, Bao Luong was "bewildered by his kindness," although this did not make her a more cooperative suspect.<sup>71</sup> Ton also brought her information about her co-conspirators being held in the police headquarters on Catinat Street, and Qui reassured her "You only have to fear the French, not us."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Passion, Betrayal, and Revolution in Colonial Saigon: The Memoirs of Bao Luong*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Passion, Betrayal, and Revolution*, 117.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

The three tried to moderate her suffering under questioning, clueing her which of her interrogators spoke Vietnamese, or had Vietnamese family members, and advised total denial of any knowledge of the murder, or else "if you confess to even one thing, you'll go to hell."<sup>73</sup> Although she followed their advice, during the many interrogations the French inspectors beat her badly and in one session broke her jaw. Ton, along with Qui and Thinh, tended her injuries and brought her medicine, helping her to the point that Bao Luong began to worry that they would be disciplined if discovered. She nonetheless remained defiant in the face of her tormenters, even after the police transferred her to Saigon's central prison. She refused to name other revolutionaries, and the colonial courts finally sentenced her to eight years forced labor.

While historians can only speculate about the motives of Ton, Qui, and Thinh, this account stands in contrast to a portrayal of intermediaries as uniformly brutal and self-serving. There is a sense however in Hue-Tam's account that their protective treatment of Bao Luong stemmed from the fact that she was a woman: the policemen appear convinced of her innocence and believed that women were, as a rule, not revolutionaries. Nevertheless, another case involving a Vietnamese revolutionary suggests that these sorts of small kindnesses took place.

In his memoir "Tôi bị đày Bà Rá" [I was taken to Baria] Le Van Thu (written under his pen name Viet Tha) recalls his arrest and escort out of Saigon to Baria province on the eve of World War II. He writes about striking up a conversation with the Vietnamese police guard, his escort, whom he addresses in a friendly manner—"chu linh," uncle soldier. Le Van Thu complained that his handcuffs badly pinched his wrists, and the guard promised that once they left Saigon he would remove them. Le Van Thu later had to remind him about the painful cuffs, but once reminded, the guard did take them off.<sup>74</sup> His prison memoir, published in 1949 is

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Việt Tha, *Tôi bị đày Bà-Rá* (Sài Gòn: Nguyễn van cong, 1949), 23-24. Available at the BNF.

sympathetic to the guard, and these sorts of anecdotes may have served political purposes during the war to encourage racial solidarity. Once the war was won, the Communist Party recast collaborators (French "lackeys") as self-serving and traitorous, but this earlier anecdote suggests an alternative way of thinking about low-level intermediaries. Le Van Thu is clear that he does not blame the guard because the guard was just doing his job, and that they both were victims, in a sense, of the same system.

Taken together, these episodes suggest how low-level intermediaries had space to use their middle position to help, hinder, or otherwise exercise influence for ends other than the colonial state intended. As bridges between two worlds—and often two languages—people like Duc Hanh, Qui, and Thinh maneuvered within the colonial bureaucracy. Sometimes the results were very small—an act of kindness, a delivery of medicine. Other times, they ended in courtrooms and greatly shook the French leadership's confidence in their Vietnamese employees. As enforcers of colonial power and filters of colonial knowledge, Vietnamese agents exercised influence over both the French police and the policed.

## **Conclusion**

Osborn and Hunt's insights on middle figures provide a productive lens through which to view the Vietnamese agents who staffed the bottom ranks of the Saigon police, suggesting as they do the importance of intermediaries to understanding the application and maintenance of colonial rule. As enforcers of colonial power and filters of colonial knowledge, Vietnamese agents exercised sometimes extraordinary influence over both the police and the policed. Bilingual agents in particular could become significant power brokers and exercise considerable latitude in their work. Any account of the colonial police needs to take into consideration their pivotal role, whether in aiding or undermining police work.

The sixth and final chapter turns to the Chinese, a colonial demographic at the center of many of the police encounters described above. Members of this community were, in a sense, a different sort of middle, able to leverage their status as foreign nationals in their dealings with a discriminatory colonial state and its abusive police agents. Like the Indian police agents, the colony's Chinese community did not fit easily into the colonial hierarchy. Generally considered to have been a privileged class under French rule, the colonial state governed the Chinese as a group apart as "foreigner Asians" and singled them out for ethnic-specific legislation. This exposed members of this community to certain police actions, such as deportation. The Chinese were also largely excluded from police employment. But being subject to separate legislation ended up—in a case not unlike the Indian agents—giving them advantages. The Chinese were able to use their inbetween place to exert influence over police practices through community protests, letter writing campaigns, and individual appeals for special police protection. In the larger context of this study, police encounters with wealthier Chinese civilians also show breaches in the colonial order. In this instance, economic disparities went against the colonial order of things and destabilized racial hierarchy, and at the same time raised the stakes of race or ethnicity as a means to privilege.

## Chapter 6: Racial Hierarchies at Work, the Case of Policing the Chinese

Chinese individuals have been at the center of many of the conflicts recounted in this study. Duc Hanh attempted to frame prominent Chinese leaders for plotting rebellion in 1883 (chapter 5). The bandits Quan Binh tracked down in 1888 had pillaged Chinese shops at the Sai Vung market (chapter 4). French police agent Ployer was disciplined in 1907 for wrongfully arresting a Chinese shopkeeper on the urging of his Vietnamese subordinate (chapter 5). Agent Boonen was sanctioned in 1911 for treating a Chinese congregation pagoda in Haiphong like his personal café (chapter 2). Congregation leader Fooki was arrested for refusing to obey an Indian policemen and also for hitting the agent (chapter 3). In 1899, a French journalist in Saigon was outraged that a Chinese bank employee filed a brutality complaint against him (chapter 2). In 1906, the Chinese owner of the Café Shanghai called on police for help after drunken soldiers damaged his bar (chapter 3). In 1910, Cholon agent Brun extorted poultry from two Chinese women (chapter 2). In 1940, the Can Tho police suspended agent Le Van Tanh for extorting money from Chinese businesses (chapter 5). The list could go on.

The prevalence of police encounters centered on Chinese individuals reveals a community vulnerable to attacks and abuses, but also one prepared to bring grievances to the French administration. These incidences also illuminate again and again the dominant economic position of the Chinese as business owners, bankers, and merchants in Indochina. Like the Indian police agents, the question of where the colony's diverse Chinese community fit into the racial hierarchy remained unsettled. The wealthier Chinese maintained a privileged status vis-à-vis colonial subjects because of their economic role and certain legal exemptions.<sup>1</sup> They were

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, the Chinese "were allowed to own and operate mines and quarries," whereas the Vietnamese were not: Melissa Cheung, "The Legal Position of Ethnic Chinese in Indochina under French Rule," in *Law and the Chinese in Southeast Asia*, ed. M. Barry Hooker (Singapore: ISEAS Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002) 32, 42.

excluded from both conscription and *corvée* labor (unpaid, mandatory labor on public works projects such as roads and canals). The Chinese were also more inclined to appeal discriminatory treatment and call for police protection of their businesses and livelihoods. At the same time, the Chinese faced more ongoing ethnic-specific legislation, taxes, and police attention than any other single ethnic group in Indochina. The state required the Chinese to belong to state sanctioned political entities known as "congregations," which in turn managed and policed this community. Despite this, as Tracy Barrett argues in her work on Indochina's Chinese diaspora, "the Chinese consistently managed to evade French control."<sup>2</sup>

For reasons explored here, they were also excluded from employment in the colonial police—in practice if not in explicit policy—with the exception of interpreters. Yet as both police advocates and targets, the Chinese shaped the development of policing institutions in unexpected ways. First, congregation-led protests thwarted the introduction of Bertillon-style anthropometrics, a physical identification technique developed in Paris and imported to Indochina in 1897 specifically to be used on Chinese immigrants. Second, in the 1890s, Chinese businessmen advocated for a special police to protect their transport vessels in the Mekong delta. This led to the creation in 1903 of the first river police in Cochinchina, which would become the forerunner to the more infamous *Sûreté* mobile brigades of the 1920s. On these occasions, French administrators were forced to accommodate appeals made by groups who were neither definitively colonized nor colonizer, but who existed in an intermediary space in the hierarchy.

### **Who Was, and Was Not, Chinese?**

Vietnam's overseas Chinese community predated French conquest and continued to grow through immigration throughout the colonial period. The Chinese made up the single largest non-

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<sup>2</sup> Tracy C. Barrett, *The Chinese Diaspora in South-East Asia: The Overseas Chinese in Indochina* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 13.

native demographic by a substantial margin. In 1901, the number of Chinese living in Cochinchina reached 91,727, not including 40,632 persons of Chinese-Vietnamese heritage, also known as *minh huong*.<sup>3</sup> Official sources estimated the Chinese population in Indochina to be around 138,000 in 1908 and 195,000 in 1921.<sup>4</sup> In 1921 there were 293,000 Chinese immigrants in Indochina, and in 1940, 418,000.<sup>5</sup> By comparison, there were only about 40,000 Europeans for the whole of Indochina in 1937.<sup>6</sup> Alongside the iconic rice merchants, thousands of poorer immigrants augmented the colony's unskilled labor force—digging canals, laying railways, and working in rice fields and on rubber plantations.

By designating all Chinese to be "Asian foreigners," the colonial state technically categorized them not by ethnicity but by legal status or nationality. But in practice, the distinction was a slight one. Chinese and "Asian foreigners" were virtually synonymous, and official French sources use the terms interchangeably. Japanese immigrants, meanwhile, were governed as Europeans and subject to a different set of laws.<sup>7</sup> The categories of "Chinese" and "foreigner Asian" are furthermore problematic given the longer historical context of Indochina. The French congregation system effectively collapsed an ethnically and linguistically diverse

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<sup>3</sup> In 1901, the number of Chinese living in Cochinchina had risen to 91,727—nearly doubling the 1885 figure—not including 40,632 persons of Chinese-Vietnamese heritage, also called *minh huong*. Barrett, *The Chinese Diaspora in South-East Asia*, 22.

<sup>4</sup> According to Nguyen Dinh Dau, in 1905, Saigon was home to about 9,000 Europeans, 30,000 Vietnamese, 14,000 Chinese, 800 Indians, and about 1,000 other nationalities (Japanese, Malay, Cambodians, and others) for a total population of almost 55,000. The French population in Hanoi was 2,319 in 1907, 4,488 in 1913, and 6,000 in the 1930s, and never exceeded 5% of the total population. See chapter 4 in Nguyen Dinh Dau, *De Saigon à Ho Chi Minh Ville, 300 ans d'histoire* (Ho Chi Minh-Ville: Service de Cadastre, Edition Science et Technique, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 199.

<sup>6</sup> Keyes cites a 1937 census stating that there were 42,345 "Europeans and assimilated" in Indochina and 326,000 Chinese, while the total Indochina population was around 23,000,000: Charles Keyes, *The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995) 212-213. See also: Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta: Ecology, Economy, and Revolution, 1860-1960* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> CAOM, NF Carton 16, Dossier 158, Letter from the GGI to the Minister of Colonies, "Au Sujet de l'accord commercial franco-japonais. Statut personnel accordés aux diverses catégories d'étrangers en Indo-Chine," Saigon, February 21, 1908.

group of people into a single, rigid category and made it difficult distinguish newly arrived immigrants from those whose ancestors had intermarried with locals.

At the same time, these terms are not easily put aside because they were backed by colonial authority and carried legal weight, in turn shaping the community they described. As Trung Vu Nguyen argues, the colonial state's efforts to stabilize ethnic categories for administration purposes had pernicious effects on this community and implications for their future place in Vietnamese society. In Trung's words: "This distinction between the indigenous and the Asiatic foreigner placed the Chinese in a category outside of a Vietnamese socio-cultural periphery where it previously had been included within a Vietnamese sphere of identity."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Vietnamese nationalist groups targeted the Chinese with boycotts and brazen attacks because of their economic domination under the French.<sup>9</sup>

Legislation of the Chinese as a group apart began immediately after the French conquest of Saigon. In 1862, the French admiral-general limited Chinese entry to Saigon's port and required all Chinese to carry residency permits, *cartes de séjour*, which had to be renewed annually.<sup>10</sup> Although early French administrators abolished the Nguyen Dynasty's system of requiring Chinese to belong to administrative entities known as *bang*, after just a few years the French, struggling to find a way to control and monitor this population, reversed their decision and reinstated the congregation system. Following an 1871 law—which was further cemented by 1885 legislation—every Chinese person in Cochinchina was required to belong to one of the seven (later five) state sanctioned congregations, grouped initially by dialect. All immigrants had

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<sup>8</sup> Trung Vu Nguyen, "Marginalizing Practices: Bureaucracy, Ethnography and Becoming Chinese in Colonial Vietnam" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009), 26.

<sup>9</sup> Micheline Lessard, "'Organisons-nous!' Racial Antagonism and Vietnamese Economic Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century," *French Colonial History* 8, (2007): 171-201; Christopher E. Goscha, "Widening the Colonial Encounter: Asian Connections Inside French Indochina during the Interwar Period," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 5 (Sep., 2009): 1189-1228.

<sup>10</sup> Barrett, *The Chinese Diaspora in South-East Asia*, 13.



to be accepted by a congregation willing to vouch for their morality. The French strategy was thus to work with an organized community, at the same time trying to control it. The state meddled in congregation affairs—including French-mandated elections for congregation leaders—and policed intra-Chinese disputes.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the Vietnamese, all Chinese also had to pay substantial head taxes, collected by the congregations.

While not without its drawbacks, the congregation system offered certain advantages to both the French and Chinese. As Barrett writes, this system gave the French state access to existing market networks and taxes. The Chinese, for their part, used this framework to their advantage in what Barrett refers to as "tactical maneuverings" with the state.<sup>12</sup> This system "empowered Cochinchina's Chinese by requiring the French to consider carefully any drastic changes in immigration or police policy in order to avoid serious economic and political repercussions."<sup>13</sup> And by making congregation leaders directly responsible for the actions of their members, they ensured a degree of self-policing within the Chinese community.

### **The Intersection between Policing and the Colonial Economy**

Historian Martin Thomas argues that colonial police priorities—and police organizations themselves—were driven not by the rise of anti-colonial nationalism but rather by a given colony's political economy, specifically the need to manage economic interests (for instance, worker protests, unions, and land seizures).<sup>14</sup> This insight explains in large part why the colonial state was so concerned with policing Chinese immigration. As Melissa Cheung argues, "the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., introduction and chapter 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918-40* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

importance of controlling the Chinese lay mainly in their economic strength."<sup>15</sup> Policing concerns about the Chinese were unquestionably related to their role in the colonial economy.

The police connected a person's livelihood to their suitability to remain in the colony: one of the most common reasons for deportation in 1908, just to cite one year, was vagabondage. As in the metropole, unemployment and poverty were believed to breed criminal activity.<sup>16</sup> Policymakers regarded the Chinese as especially prone to criminal activity also in large part because at this time Chinese individuals controlled the main vice industries (both legal and illegal) in Indochina of gambling, opium, and prostitution. They were also among its consumers. Dominance of this industry—however vital to the colonial budget in the form of taxes—fed a certain criminal image, as did ugly stereotypes of the Chinese.<sup>17</sup> French *colons*, meanwhile, advocated for the influx of cheap, Chinese laborers for agricultural work at the same time the state needed labor for infrastructure projects, namely canals and railroads. Wealthier Chinese would find colonial law much more forgiving.

Racial assumptions about their "mentality," as in the case of the Vietnamese policemen, underlay ongoing debates about the role of the Chinese in the local economy. To French policymakers, the Chinese community was irretrievably foreign and profited at the expense of the Vietnamese. The French state was also concerned by their large numbers, cross-border mobility, and perceived inability to assimilate into Vietnamese society. Immigrants were predominately male, adding a gendered element to the framing of immigrants as predatory criminals. Finally, the French feared Chinese "secret societies," organizations believed to have

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<sup>15</sup> Cheung, "The Legal Position of Ethnic Chinese in Indochina," 32.

<sup>16</sup> CAOM, GGI 65426, Dossier, Expulsion, Cochinchine, 1908-1911.

<sup>17</sup> Barrett, *The Chinese Diaspora in South-East Asia*, 107.

instigated political rebellions in the Mekong Delta in the late nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> For these reasons and others the Chinese in Vietnam became the target of special police attention.

### **"Pairs of arms:" Debating French immigration policy**

The French colonial state generally encouraged Chinese immigration because of overriding demands for labor for agricultural and infrastructure development. In the south, rich soil, uncultivated land, and relative under-population made labor recruitment among the Vietnamese and Cambodians a challenge to aspiring colonists. When Cochinchina came under civilian rule in 1879, the new governor established the Colonial Council, a powerful civilian legislative committee in Saigon. One of their first orders of business was to articulate the colony's Chinese policy with an eye towards labor needs.

At an 1880 meeting, the Council heard testimony from Vinson, a lawyer and former mayor, who claimed that Chinese immigrants would not only supply them with a desperately needed work force, their taxes would fund ambitious colonial projects. Regarding France's plans to build a railroad to Yunnan, "the remedy," Vinson concluded, "is Chinese immigration."<sup>19</sup> For Vinson the immigration issue was a question of priorities, and for him the priority was building the railroad to Yunnan, which required Chinese labor. (This railroad did not get built until the 1900s). Like many of his colleagues, Vinson tried to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Chinese based on their place in the economy: Vinson acknowledged the "repugnance with regards to the Chinese" because of their historic role in "bullying and exploiting" the Vietnamese. He argued however "It is not with the Chinese day laborer or farmer that the danger

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<sup>18</sup> Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta*; Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Procès-Verbaux, Conseil Colonial, Séance du November 20, 1880, (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1881), 121.

lies, it is in the person of the Chinese merchant!"<sup>20</sup> Laborers, he argued, would not pose a threat to either the Vietnamese or the French, in his assessment. Concern for a perceived Chinese threat therefore also stemmed from moments of colonial paternalism, which were nonetheless trumped by economic prerogatives: Chinese immigration continued.

Concerns over immigration resurfaced. At an 1898 meeting of the Saigon immigration commission (convened by the Colonial Council) participants again debated how to "facilitate in the colony—for commerce, industry, and agriculture the recruitment of Chinese coolies."<sup>21</sup> Although almost twenty years had passed, the parameters of the discussion remained familiar. Chamber of Commerce representatives sought to ensure a reliable work force. The previous year had seen a decrease in immigration due to an increase in taxes on the Chinese in Cochinchina to pay for a new identification service (discussed below), and a plague outbreak in Hong Kong, which halted port traffic. Chamber of Commerce representative Schnéegans testified that factory owners and cultivators like himself were desperate for labor: "at certain times of year we are very much troubled by the lack of coolies."<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, immigration service Chief Pottecher advocated easing taxes for the poorest, laborer class, those in the 5th category, to encourage immigration. In 1898, 80% of Chinese immigrants belonged to this category.<sup>23</sup> Tellingly, Pottecher referred to the 5th class immigrants as "pairs of arms" (*paires de bras*), reducing them to their labor.<sup>24</sup> The remaining 20% were artisans, merchants, and traders.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> TTLTII, Goucoch, IA21/151 "Commission de l'Immigration, Séance du 29 Décembre 1898." Commission met on December 29, 1898. Interestingly, the author crossed out every mention of the word Chinese in the typed transcript I consulted.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IA21/151 Commission de l'Immigration, Séance du 29 Décembre 1898.

<sup>24</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IA21/151, Pottecher, Chef du Service de l'Immigration et de l'identification to Lieutenant-gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon. "Rapport sur la situation du service de l'Immigration et de l'identification," Saigon, July 17, 1898.

Among the opponents to the plan was the Cholon mayor who warned of the complacent tendency of the state to overlook Chinese dominance of business affairs at the expense of French entrepreneurs and Vietnamese farmers. Another member agreed, but was resigned to the fact that: "Immigration...is a necessary evil." Even Pottecher, the advocate of Chinese immigration, wrote that the French should be careful with allowing the entry of too many "coolies," those in the 5<sup>th</sup> class, because of their proclivity for vice and crime. For this reason, he argued, members of this class should be permitted only to a limited extent and encouraged to undertake agricultural livelihoods, as the unemployed among them "can become an element of trouble."<sup>25</sup> Schnégans, representing the entrepreneurs, took a more sanguine view, and countered that "the Chinese were more intelligent and more open to our ideas: it is certain that they are the appropriate intermediary between the *annamites* and us." Pragmatism and economic imperatives, as usual, won out. At the same time, the commission's president reassured the Cholon mayor: "The day when we no longer need the Chinese we will no longer ask for them."<sup>26</sup> This was the ambivalence that underwrote colonial policy, particularly with regards to policing.

The colonial state depended on myriad taxes required of wealthy and poor Chinese residents alike. Paris politicians were unwilling to support colonial expenses once the initial phase of conquest ended, forcing Cochinchina's administration to turn to local sources of income. Taxes on the Chinese and their businesses provided the lion's share of the colonial budget, as did taxes on Cochinchina's vice industries—prostitution, gambling, and opium—most of which were in the hands of Chinese businessmen in the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, until 1881, the alcohol and opium firms, based on contracts resulting from the colony's system of tax

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Fourniau, *Vietnam. Domination coloniale et résistance nationale (1858-1914)* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2003), 196.

monopolies, were also mostly in the hands of Chinese contractors. The additional head tax and resident permit tax contributed greatly towards the colonial budget. The income from these taxes was, as Charles Fourniau writes, "remarkable."<sup>28</sup> In 1880, the Saigon treasury took in 1,100,000 francs, of which almost one third, or 360,000 francs, came from gambling taxes alone.<sup>29</sup> This general approach to Chinese immigration—open door, but highly taxed—held through the colonial period despite protest from both Vietnamese politicians (objecting to the open door) and Chinese congregations (objecting to the high taxes).

Debates about immigration were never just about this community's economic role in the colony. Also at issue were prejudices and an unclear idea of their place in the colonial order of things. As the "colonial mirage" of easy wealth disappointed many French immigrants, well-established Chinese businessmen loomed large both as competition and a reminder about the failure of French businesses to make inroads into the local economy—particularly in the rice trade.<sup>30</sup> Anxiety about Chinese immigration, at least in part, resulted from this of racial hierarchies with material realities.

### **Policing the Chinese**

The growth of Chinese "secret societies" and their suspected involvement in revolts and piracy gave the authorities additional reasons to fear unchecked Chinese immigration.<sup>31</sup> Tourillon was among those who viewed the Chinese as requiring exceptional police attention. In a proposal from 1876, he stressed the importance of employing Chinese translators and agents to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Procès-Verbaux, Conseil Colonial, Séance du November 20, 1880, (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1881), 89.

<sup>30</sup> Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina," 209-210. For Chinese dominance of the colonial economy see: Brocheux, Fourniau, Barrett.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Englebert, "'Go West' in Cochinchina. Chinese and Vietnamese Illicit Activities in the Transbassac (c. 1860-1920s)," *Chinese Diaspora Studies* 1, (2007).

the police, and the pressing need to exercise surveillance of their activities.<sup>32</sup> In 1880, Tourillon cited the criminal tendencies of the Chinese as a primary reason to employ more police agents and extend powers of arrest to municipal police agents.

Agents of the municipal police such as it exists today, cannot make any arrest, even those of Chinese lacking their residence permits [*cartes de séjour*], and however, there is necessity, not only in the interest of the Treasury, but also for the inhabitant's security to investigate with care, every day the Chinese in these conditions, among which one finds often ex-convicts left to the vice of opium, not reformed through their detention.<sup>33</sup>

Chinese gambling houses needed special surveillance, as did groups who "buy or steal children and attempt to sell them in neighboring colonies. Trade in *annamese* and even Chinese prostitutes is also infamous."<sup>34</sup> The Chinese threat was again framed as protecting the Vietnamese, and as Chinese immigrants were male-dominated, there was a gendered element to the threat they posed in the eyes of Frenchmen like Tourillon.

In 1884, the Cochinchina Governor had to be reassured that the rate of Chinese immigration was normal and not cause for concern. Alarmed that a British steamboat brought 266 Chinese immigrants to Saigon from Hong Kong in a single voyage, the Governor alerted his advisers. After checking with Tourillon, the director of the interior was able to report that this was not unusual, although the overall immigration numbers were higher in 1884 than in 1883: "The movement of immigration that increased energetically in 1883 continues on an upward march; from August 31, 1884 there entered via Saigon and Cholon alone 6,905 immigrations against 5,636 at the same date in 1883."<sup>35</sup> Although he saw nothing necessarily suspicious in their motives, the director instructed the police department to engage in active surveillance of all

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<sup>32</sup> Barrett, *The Chinese Diaspora in South-East Asia*, 222.

<sup>33</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB25/135(1), "Police divers, reorganization, 1879-1883." Le commissaire de police, chef du service, Tourillon. "Rapport au Conseil Coloniale, Police. Historique, Situation, Besoins," Saigon, August 12, 1881.

<sup>34</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB25/135(1), "Police divers, reorganization, 1879-1883."

<sup>35</sup> CAOM, GGI 11506, "Immigration des Chinois, 1884;" Directeur de l'intérieur, "Rapport au Gouverneur," Saigon, September 3, 1884; Commissaire central Tourillon to Directeur de l'intérieur, September 3, 1884.

boats originating in China. In his reply, Tourillon indicates that the police were not responsible for overseeing immigration, but this did not stop him from paying close attention. As Tourillon wrote: "It is certain that if the number of Chinese immigrants increases at these remarkable rates, there will be cause for worry; but I am too attentive of this development for it to escape me."<sup>36</sup>

War further brought the Chinese question to the fore during Tourillon's tenure. During France's protracted conquest of central and northern Vietnam starting in the late 1870s, Tourillon and his police service watched the Hue consulate in Saigon closely. The French expected the Hue court to attempt to incite a revolt in Cochinchina, and Tourillon watched for signs (the Duc Hanh story, in chapter 5, was a part of this). Tourillon was particularly concerned about Vietnamese diplomats allying with the Chinese in the south, as Chinese bandits known as the Black Flags in the north had come to the aid of the Hue court along Vietnam's border with China. Tourillon therefore reported any hint of a Chinese-Vietnamese alliance against the French.<sup>37</sup> In January 1883, Tourillon's eyes and ears told him that according to rumors at the Nhi Phu pagoda, a ship would be arriving from Tonkin, carrying around twenty Black Flags "dressed as Vietnamese" among its forty passengers.<sup>38</sup> The Black Flag invasion never came, however. Although there had been some discussion of a Saigon campaign between the Hue court and the Black Flags, the plan faltered for lack of support among the Black Flag leadership.<sup>39</sup>

Compounding popular concern for the unsupervised Chinese immigrant was the growth of organizations the French referred to as "secret societies," which were part religious organization, part political group, and part mutual aid society. As Hue-Tam Ho Tai describes,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> CAOM, GGI 11572, "Surveillance de chinois dans l'arrond. de Saigon. Rapports de police, 1884;" Commissaire Tourillon, "Rapport de police," Saigon, February 15, 1884; CAOM, GGI 11573, Commissaire de police Tourillon, "Rapport de police sur les relations entre les Chinois de Coch. et la cour de Hue, 1883," Saigon, June 19, 1883.

<sup>38</sup> CAOM, GGI 11572, Rapport de Police, Tourillon, February 15, 1884.

<sup>39</sup> Bradley Camp Davis, "States of Banditry: The Nguyen Government, Bandit Rule, and the Culture of Power in the post-Taiping China-Vietnam Borderlands" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2008).



these Chinese societies often harbored anti-French sentiments and began successfully attracting Vietnamese adepts after around 1880.<sup>40</sup> The most notorious of these was the Heaven and Earth Society, although as Brocheux writes the French often confused the different groups. They came to represent the single greatest threat to colonial rule outside the cities prior to World War I.<sup>41</sup>

In 1882, the first civilian Governor, Le Myre de Vilers, wrote to the Minister of the Marine and Colonies Jauréguiberry in Paris to notify him of recent sanctions taken against the Trieu Chau congregation following the discovery of Heaven and Earth secret society activity in Soc Trang province.<sup>42</sup> The governor expressed concern that the Society was spreading among Vietnamese and Cambodians, who in his view were being forced to join. He did not see the threat as political in nature, but he felt that it was definitely a danger to the state's authority: "The society does not seem to have a political program, but seems to exploit brigandage on a great scale and to escape the authority of the administration." After personally visiting Soc Trang, Le Myre de Vilers recommended the expulsion of those convicted, the confiscation of their belongings, and a heavy fine for the congregation Trieu Chau, which he held responsible. He mused about "doubling or tripling" the head taxes in all areas with society activity as another means to discourage congregation complicity.

### **Appeals for Protection**

By the 1880s, secret societies had become synonymous with the problem of crime, particularly theft and piracy, and these societies were synonymous with the Chinese even as they attracted a more diverse following. Yet Chinese congregations actively worked with the colonial

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<sup>40</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983). See also: Englebert and Brocheux.

<sup>41</sup> TTLT I, RST 038390, "Renseignements sur la situation de l'Indochine 1908;" Lieutenant-gouverneur p.i. Ernest Outrey, "Rapport d'Ensemble, Sur la situation en Cochinchine, " Saigon July 23, 1908.

<sup>42</sup> TTLT II Goucoch IA22/059, "Sociétés secrètes, expulsions de chinois 1882-1906," Chef de quartiers de la ville de Cholon [13 signatures in all] to le Commissaire. N.d. but the rest of the file is from 1882.

state, and brought unwanted secret society activity to the attention of the administration in order to distance themselves from it. In other cases, the Chinese were not just targets but advocates of police intervention in ways that expose the weakness of police control in this period. In 1882, thirteen of Cholon's community leaders addressed a formal letter to the local police commissaire to ask him to take "very severe measures against the cruel vagabonds" plaguing Cholon and belonging to the "Hoi Van Xe" society. "These men don't have fixed addresses, they assemble in bands to hurt the inhabitants and force them to support [the society]."<sup>43</sup> The letter claimed that the members compelled proprietors to hire only members of this society with the threat of being "attacked and beaten." The Cholon police, the letter writers explained, were unable to protect the victims of these attacks, since by the time the agents arrive the criminals had already fled.<sup>44</sup>

In an 1883 decision to imprison suspected leader Ky Do, a French council report cited as justification for their ruling prior formal complaints from Chinese leaders in Sadec, Vinhlong, and Cholon. One man in particular, Ky Diep Rui or Ky Do, had been making threats towards anyone who refused to join the Nghi Heng secret society, according to the Chinese petitions, complaints which had been verified by the Cholon police. Ky Do was subsequently arrested, and in January 1883 the Private Council sentenced him to one year at the Poulo Condore Island prison, after which he was to be expelled from the colony. Such appeals stemmed from the fact that community leaders expected the state to provide basic security and objected that the police were unable to prevent the harassment and violence described in the 1882 letter.

The Chinese also appealed to the French to protect their community and interests against Vietnamese intermediaries. In 1895, the Canton congregation in Haiphong wrote the GGI that the Chinese would rather cover up a theft than report it to the Vietnamese administrators because

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

"with the justice of the mandarins, there is no longer security for people or their belongings [*biens*]. When a Chinese is victim of a theft, if he has the imprudence to complain, it is him who will be convicted..."<sup>45</sup> The Chinese also appealed to the police to protect them in times of conflict with the Vietnamese community. Barrett cites several instances of violence against Chinese business owners during an anti-Chinese boycott in Vinh Long, which turned ugly when Vietnamese students targeted Chinese shop owners. In response to such incidences, local Chinese leaders wrote to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Cholon in 1922, which in turn appealed on their behalf for greater protection. In one instance of anti-Chinese violence in Vinh Long, the police agent stationed nearby failed to intervene and was subsequently fired.<sup>46</sup>

With this brief sketch as background for the ways the colonial state thought about the Chinese, and how the Chinese community in turn responded, the remainder of this chapter covers two major cases in which the Chinese community shaped police and security policy. First, Chinese merchants advocated for better policing of the waterways to protect rice-carrying junks from pirates, which indirectly resulted in the formation of Cochinchina's River Police (*police fluviale*) in 1903. The French, for their part, saw the River Police as an opportunity not only to crack down on bandits and satisfy longstanding demands from Chinese leaders, but also a means to police the Chinese community itself. Second, in a larger and more controversial episode, Chinese congregations protested the introduction of new identification procedures for Chinese immigrants beginning in 1897 based on Bertillon-style biometrics. Chinese protests eventually forced the state to innovate less invasive techniques, which led to the invention in 1899 of a new fingerprinting classification system developed in, and entirely unique to, Cochinchina. In 1903,

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in H el ene Russo, "L'Appareil Judiciaire Fran ais au Vietnam: son installation et son fonctionnement, 1887-1914" (M emoire de Ma trise [M.A.] d'histoire des Pays d'Outre Mer, Universit e Aix-Marseille I, 1992/1993), 41-42.

<sup>46</sup> Barrett, *The Chinese Diaspora in South-East Asia*, 151.

the ongoing protest over the treatment of Chinese immigrants further resulted in the removal the head of the service, and in 1906 convinced the GGI to suppress the service altogether and convene a special commission to study more liberal legislation. But not all benefited equally; after the 1910s the French adopted a more class-conscious approach to policing the Chinese.

### **The Cochinchina River Police**

In 1903, longstanding advocacy for better policing of the waterways to protect rice-carrying Chinese junks from "pirates" resulted in the formation of the River Police (*police fluviale*). Piracy had been an ongoing problem for merchants who used the Mekong's waterways to transport rice paddy and other commodities. In July 1902, Ben Tre province's administrator Paul Quesnel reported a pirate raid on the Ham Luong River, a branch of the upper Mekong.<sup>47</sup> Late in the evening on July 3, 1902 a gang of thieves used lightweight *sampan* boats to sneak up on a commercial Chinese junk laden with rice paddy en route to Cholon. Taking advantage of nightfall, the thieves boarded the junk and forced the crew—mainly rowers—down into the ship's hull. The brigands then navigated the hijacked junk to an uninhabited island where they unloaded some 1,030 sacks of rice, a value of 2,600 piastres. The next morning the trapped crew made their escape and reported the theft. By then the pirates were long gone.

Quesnel suspected that the band was one of the major crews that usually operated on the main river. He was doubtful that the goods would be recovered or the thieves apprehended. Stolen rice paddy was nearly impossible to identify or track.<sup>48</sup> The pattern Quesnel described was a familiar one to Saigon administrators, and his report inspired renewed calls for the creation of a river police to watch the waterways most used by merchants. Victor Pottecher, who had

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<sup>47</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB25/137(2), Paul Quesnel, Administrateur to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchine (Cabinet) Saigon, Bentre, July 10, 1902.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

recently become the head of the Immigration and Identification Service in Saigon, wrote in 1902 that river piracy was a veritable "industry."<sup>49</sup>

In his recommendation for the formation of a River Police in 1902, Pottecher stressed that this was something for which the Chinese merchants themselves had long been appealing. Pottecher wrote, "For many years already the Chinese traders complain bitterly about thefts committed on Cochinchina's waterways; notably between the Cholon factories and the ships in the Saigon harbor."<sup>50</sup> Calls to establish a *police fluvial* had begun as early as 1895 when members of the Chinese community proposed the idea to the Cholon mayor. *Le Courrier de Saigon* wrote in July 1895 in favor of the idea proposed the merchants (*gros commerçants chinois*) to the Cholon municipal council to expand the police to "stop the theft of paddy on boats all along the arroyo chinois."<sup>51</sup> The appeal was rejected however because "we have no money."<sup>52</sup> Between 1895 and 1902, this group again appealed to the colonial administrators to establish a river police on at least "5 or 6" occasions.<sup>53</sup> Chinese factory owners had even offered to pay for the new police service. Pottecher was present when the proposal was made to Cholon's Mayor Rossigneux in 1895, and again in 1897 to Mayor Laffon. In 1895, Rossigneux forwarded the suggestion to the Governor Fourès, who nonetheless objected to the Chinese paying the French to provide a police since "the government cannot decently accept such assistance."<sup>54</sup> In 1897, mayor Laffon claimed the plan was "incompatible with administrative traditions." The merchants

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<sup>49</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB25/137(2), Pottecher, Le Chef du Service de l'Immigration et de l'Identification, "Note au sujet de l'organisation d'une police supplétive pour la surveillance de l'arroyo-chinois," Saigon, April 28, 1902, enclosed in: "Rapport by Le Directeur des Bureaux to Monsieur le Lieutenant-gouverneur sur l'organisation d'une police fluviale pour la surveillance des arroyos de l'Ouest," Januray 26, 1903. See also: CAOM, GGI 3805, "Surveillance des rivières et arroyos en Cochinchine (Décision du Lieutenant-Gouverneur du 26 Janvier 1903).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> "Plus de Police," *Le Courrier de Saigon*, July 8, 1895, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB25/137(2), Pottecher, Le Chef du Service de l'Immigration et de l'Identification, "Note au sujet de l'organisation d'une police supplétive pour la surveillance de l'arroyo-chinois," Saigon, April 28, 1902.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

continued to look for ways to combat piracy. According to Pottecher, a group of Chinese petitioners had even attempted to form their own river police. They could only do so under European oversight, however, and they had been unable to find collaborators.

Immigration Chief Pottecher, a seemingly unlikely ally, had taken up the cause and appealed to Saigon's Bureau Director Berges. In January 1903, Berges in turn submitted a proposal outlining a plan for the establishment of a river police for the reason of protecting merchants. He began his report with the observation that "the community of commerce and industry has for a long time strongly complained of the numerous thefts committed to their detriment," particularly on the *arroyo chinois*, the river connecting Cholon with Saigon. He wrote: "To put an end to this regrettable state of things and bring to commerce the security that is indispensable for its transactions, it is worth setting up an active surveillance of the navigable waters that serve those transporting merchandise in Cholon and Saigon."<sup>55</sup> The proposal, approved ten days later, recommended acquiring two steamboats that could tow smaller *ghe luong* skiffs for the purpose of boarding other boats and allowing access to shallow branches of the river. The *commissaire central* in Saigon would be responsible for staffing and overseeing the *police fluviale*, although the new service was also available to the provincial administrators through whose territories the police passed. Each boat's personnel would also have at least one Chinese interpreter "speaking Cantonese, Phuoc-kien, Trieu-chau, as much as possible."<sup>56</sup>

Pottecher's motivations behind the project were however not as straightforward as simply protecting commercial vessels. The establishment of a new police, or at least Pottecher's vision of it, reflected the ambivalent attitude of the colonial state towards the Chinese community. On

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<sup>55</sup> TTLT II Goucoch IB25/137(2), Rapport to Lieutenant-gouverneur sur l'organisation d'une police fluviale pour la surveillance des arroyos de l'Ouest. January 26, 1903.

<sup>56</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB25/137(2), Pottecher, Le Chef du Service de l'Immigration et de l'Identification, "Note au sujet de l'organisation d'une police supplétive pour la surveillance de l'arroyo-chinois," Saigon, April 28, 1902.

the one hand, protecting the shipping routes meant promoting colonial economic interests. But Pottecher saw this as an opportunity to police the Chinese themselves. In his recommendation, the police would eventually be completely "sinized," and the Vietnamese employees replaced with Chinese agents so that it would evolve into a Chinese police, which "the ever growing numbers of foreigners will require before long."<sup>57</sup> He recommended at first employing Chinese and Vietnamese agents, the former from the Trieu Chau congregation to which many rowers belonged and who also had the advantage of speaking Vietnamese. The governor in the end approved a significantly reduced version of Pottecher's police. He had recommended a sizable force: 12 European, 27 Vietnamese, and 27 Chinese employees in addition to 12 mechanic and 6 river pilots. The *police fluviale* which came into existence in 1903 had by contrast only 4 Europeans, 2 Chinese interpreters, and 14 Vietnamese employees, with at least one person per boat "sufficiently literate to draft regular reports." These policemen were taken directly from the PAJ, further stretching thin police resources and personnel.

The governor approved two boats to watch the western part of the Mekong Delta. Between the two they would travel between the provinces of Tanan, Vinhlong, Bienhoa, Thudaumot, Mytho, Cholon, and Sadec along established trade routes. The first boat, "Vaico" left Saigon February 20, 1903 and returned in May to have its engine repaired.<sup>58</sup> Commissaire Belland sent out another boat, with a new crew, while Vaico was repaired. Its staff included two European agents, one officer (*gradé*), 6 Asian agents, and a Chinese interpreter. Also in May 1903, Belland reported on the "unexpectedly" positive results garnered by the new service: "Since the departure of the first brigade, the police service has found out 11 thefts of paddy,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> CAOM, GGI 3805, "Surveillance des rivières et arroyos en Cochinchine (Decision du Lieutenant-Gouverneur du 26 Janvier 1903); Commissaire Central Belland, to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Cochinchina, Saigon. "Au Sujet du Fonctionnement de la police de rivière," Saigon, May 25, 1903.

committed on the water, on board of junks coming from the interior. These 11 thefts totaled about 5,000 sacks."<sup>59</sup> The river police trial period had, according to Belland, been a success. While Pottecher's dream of a Chinese police would go unrealized, the river police did use their mobility to police Chinese vessels and to seek out secret societies in the countryside. One of the two patrol boats, the *Bassac*, reported in 1906 that they discovered branches of secret societies in Long Xuyen, where the brigade made regular patrols. A third boat was added in 1908 at Belland's request, to patrol the waters around Saigon.<sup>60</sup>

Cochinchina Governor Le Gallen suspended the service in 1913 during which time he sought to replace and upgrade the boats, but the outbreak of war apparently delayed the project. At a 1914 Colonial Council meeting, Girard pleaded for its re-establishment due to "resurgences in piracy." In 1917, the *commissaire central* reported that the three police fluviale brigades—which were "in reality veritable mobile brigades"—needed boats that were "faster and less noisy."<sup>61</sup> In 1916, the Baria province administrator moved to create a fourth brigade for his region.<sup>62</sup> The mobile brigades, as they came to be known, expanded in the 1920s, including more than 10 by World War II. The original idea came not from the French administrators, however, but from the community most targeted by this sort of crime.

### **Tracking the Chinese: The Immigration and Identification Service**

Notwithstanding the congregation system, resident permits, and heightened police attention, many immigrants were able to evade French surveillance with apparent ease. In 1894, the Hanoi criminal court sentenced a Chinese man by the name of Tran Thanh Huy to ten years

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Procès-verbaux du Colonial Council, "Séance du vendredi 11 septembre 1908, N. 60—Création d'une troisième brigade de police fluviale," 35.

<sup>61</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IB23/176, Rapport by the Commissaire Central, "sur le fonctionnement de la police administrative et judiciaire pendant l'année 1916," Saigon, May 29, 1917.

<sup>62</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch, IIB55/313, Note de Service, from Monsieur l'administrateur Chef de la province de BARIA, to Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, "Création d'une 4me brigade de Police mobile dite Brigade d'Est," Saigon, September 26, 1916.



imprisonment on Poulo Condore Island for "involvement with pirate groups."<sup>63</sup> In 1897, as part of a general amnesty, he was released, sent to Saigon, and then deported. To prevent his return, the administration passed an edict "forbidding him from ever traveling in any of the countries of the Indochinese union."<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, in 1901 Tran Thanh Huy returned to Cochinchina under the assumed name of Tran Tuong and joined the Phuoc Kien congregation. He found himself very soon in trouble with the police, this time for fraud in My Tho.<sup>65</sup> He served a short prison sentence and was released in 1901, his previous identity and criminal record still undetected by the authorities. He then resolved, by his own account, to reform his life, and settled down in Soc Trang province. He founded a successful import business that catered to the province's Europeans. He also became the head of the local branch of the Phuoc Kien congregation. Huy escaped detection from 1901 until 1908, when a former acquaintance alerted the authorities after failing to blackmail him. The Soc Trang court fined Tran 100 piastres, but before he could be expelled, Governor Bonhoure intervened on his behalf. Huy and his lawyer had appealed his deportation, and more than a dozen Frenchmen—his main clientele—signed a petition on Huy's behalf.<sup>66</sup> Klobukowski annulled the 1897 arrêté in November, allowing him to remain in the colony.<sup>67</sup>

Huy's experience is extraordinary in several respects as he benefited from his status as a popular import merchant among Europeans and as a congregation leader. And while this support likely played a larger role than the beneficence of the colonial administration, the

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<sup>63</sup> GGI 65426, Dossier, Exclusion, Cochinchine, 1908-1911. See his own statement: Tran Tuong dit A Cai to GGI, Soctrang, October 29, 1908. File includes signed statement (n.d.) from French citizens supporting his case.

<sup>64</sup> GGI 65426, Dossier, Exclusion, Cochinchine, 1908-1911; Arrêté [of exclusion], December 15, 1897, GGI P. Doumer.

<sup>65</sup> GGI 65426, Dossier, Exclusion, Cochinchine, 1908-1911. Soctrang Administrator Docuel to Goucoch, Soctrang, October 31, 1908.

<sup>66</sup> CAOM, GGI 65426, Dossier, Exclusion, Cochinchine, 1908-1911. Letter from Gouverneur Bonhoure to GGI, Hanoi, "A.S. du Chinois Tran-Tuong, dit A-Cai," Saigon, November 5, 1908.

<sup>67</sup> CAOM, GGI 65426, GGI 65426, Dossier, Exclusion, Cochinchine, 1908-1911. Arrêté, signed GGI A Klobukowski, Hanoi, November 20, 1908.

administration's leniency also suggests a certain pragmatism on the part of colonial officials. Even the head of the Immigration and Identity Service in 1908, Marty, recommended that if Tran Thanh Huy had to be deported, he should first be given three months to liquidate his assets.<sup>68</sup> His account speaks to the class element in France's approach to immigration. What his story also reveals is that as long as an expelled person could assume a new identity, very little prevented their re-entry into the colony in 1901. It would be precisely cases like Tran Thanh Huy's that motivated the Saigon administration to look for more scientific methods to track the Chinese.

As would be the case with the River Police, the call for identification methods in fact came first from the Chinese community. In 1894, congregation leaders requested the authorization to "tattoo, with an indelible sign, all foreigners expelled from the colony, in order to prevent their return."<sup>69</sup> The Colonial Council refused the proposal, "as contrary to our principles of civilization," but nonetheless asked for a "less barbarous procedure" to obtain the same result.<sup>70</sup> They looked to the metropole for a method that could be imported, as the Paris police had recently established the potential of using body measurements to establish identity.

In Paris, Alphonse Bertillon had recently developed a system of identification based on biometric data, to build a convict database in France. While Saigon policymakers saw value in creating an analogous criminal database in the colony's prisons, they were quick to see the potential of applying the same techniques to Chinese immigrants. Bertillon, the eponymous French inventor of the method, began his career in the Paris Police Department in 1879. Struck by the police's inability to identify recidivist criminals, in the 1880s he developed one of the first purportedly scientific identification systems which employed biometric data. Bertillon's methods

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<sup>68</sup> GGI 65426, GGI 65426, Dossier, Expulsion, Cochinchine, 1908-1911. M. F. Marty, Chef du Service de l'Immigration et de l'identité, to Lieutenant-gouverneur-Saigon, October 30, 1908.

<sup>69</sup> TTLT II Goucoch IA21/151, Le Chef de l'immigration et de l'identification V. Pottecher to Lieutenant-gouverneur, Saigon, March 23, 1898.

<sup>70</sup> "Procès-verbaux du Conseil colonial," January 10, 1896.

involved dozens of measurements of human bodies—including skulls, pelvic bones, ears, feet, fingers, and arms. Identifying marks supplemented this data, including facial characteristics, scars, and birthmarks. The measurements would then be sorted in a searchable card database: more specifically, the anthropometric cards in Saigon were sorted by head length, followed by head width, cheekbone spacing, length of the left middle finger, and length of the left foot. Bertillon is also credited with inventing the two-angle "mug shot," and although photography was still expensive and immobile, it too would soon arrive on a limited basis.<sup>71</sup>

The Chinese in Cochinchina were the first non-criminal population subjected *en masse* to Bertillon's identification techniques, a fact of which Chinese community leaders were keenly aware. The Council's scheme to expand these new methods was new and experimental, seemingly a classic example of the colony-as-laboratory thesis.<sup>72</sup> Yet as Alice Conklin reminds us, if the colonies were laboratories, they were also "sites, however unequal, of conflict and negotiation between colonizer and colonized."<sup>73</sup> Regarding the new system as insulting and a violation of "human dignity," the Chinese leadership in Cochinchina opposed the new procedures. In targeting the Chinese, the French quickly found themselves facing a powerful, wealthy, and internationally connected community.

### **Background of the Immigration and Identity Service**

Administrators in Cochinchina began looking for ways to import the Bertillon method starting in the mid-1890s, although for the first few years the response from the Colonial Counsel

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<sup>71</sup> Pierre Piazza, "Bertillonnage: savoirs, technologies, pratiques et diffusion internationale de l'identification judiciaire," *Criminocorpus, revue hypermédia* [Online], The Bertillon System and Criminal Identification, Présentation du dossier, Online since 18 April 2011, connection on 18 September 2012. URL: <http://criminocorpus.revues.org/347>

<sup>72</sup> Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>73</sup> Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) 5.

was lukewarm. In 1894, Rogue of Saigon's health department wrote the Governor in favor of a service "following the methods of Bertillon." Asked of his opinion, Dr. Grill, the head of the health department, responded that he was in favor of importing anthropometrics. The GGI then asked the governor to look into the organization of an anthropometric service.<sup>74</sup> Also in 1894, Chinese congregation leaders asked to be allowed to tattoo expelled persons.<sup>75</sup>

Navelle, the interim Governor in 1894, was already convinced of the need for a more scientific method of criminal investigation in the colony. Saigon's General Prosecutor had persuaded him that the Justice Department needed a fulltime *médecin légiste*—a forensic pathologist—to inspect crime scenes and testify in criminal cases. Combining the two objectives, the governor created a special commission to draft a plan for an anthropometric service with a *médecin légiste* heading this service. In 1896, Governor Ducos, presented the commission's proposal to the Colonial Council. He explained that the foremost use would be to aid the courts in investigating crimes, performing autopsies, and identifying repeat criminals. He argued that Asian names and faces were confusingly similar, and that "the anthropometric service alone it seems, with its guidelines so rigorous and precise, can remedy this confusion and render in the colony the same services that it provides to the *Sûreté générale* in Paris."<sup>76</sup>

The Colonial Council only embraced the idea of funding an anthropometric service however when it was demonstrated that the new service could be used on the Chinese as well as the convict population. Governor Ducos' 1896 proposal did not mention the regulation of immigrants, but the potential to use the same technology on the Chinese was brought up at the session by Council member Holbe, a pharmacist and amateur anthropologist. Holbe argued at the

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<sup>74</sup> CAOM GGI 9869, "Dossier, Création en Cochinchine d'un service d'identification anthropométrique," 1894.

<sup>75</sup> "Création d'un poste de médecin-légiste, avec adjonction d'un service anthropométrique," in "Procès-verbaux du Conseil colonial," January 10, 1896.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

1896 session that it would be of "greater importance to extend the measuring to the Chinese, who enter and leave Saigon, and whose annual movement, recorded at the Immigration Bureau, is considerable."<sup>77</sup> Governor Ducos was cautious in his response, and remarked that setting up an identification service for immigrants would require further study. The Colonial Council was also not convinced at this time that the services rendered would justify the cost, and 1896 was a particularly difficult year for the colonial budget. The Council therefore postponed voting on the issue. The coroner or *médecin légiste* position was also dropped from the proposal at this time.<sup>78</sup>

The creation of the Immigration and Identification Service intersects at this juncture with the career of Victor Joseph Pottecher, the future head of this service and a colorful figure in his own right. Born in 1860, Pottecher first appeared on the colonial state's radar in 1877 as a runaway.<sup>79</sup> At the age of seventeen, Pottecher ran away from his family in Paris and arrive in Saigon several months later. He had found work on a steamboat bound for Singapore, where the consulate took note of him. After he managed to leave Singapore for Saigon, via Hong Kong, the French consulate in Singapore alerted the Saigon government "to search for Pottecher urgently" in order "to return him to his family." Commissaire Tourillon wrote in his own report that Pottecher's intention in coming to Saigon was likely to join the navy, for which the youth claimed to have an "irresistible vocation."<sup>80</sup> It is not clear if he evaded the authorities at this time, as Pottecher does not resurface in colonial records until 1885.

In 1885, at the age of twenty-five, Pottecher joined the civil service in Saigon as an entry-level clerk. By 1893 he had reached the rank of accounting clerk of the second class, a position he still held in 1897 when the Council appointed him to head the Immigration and Identification

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> CAOM, FM EE/II/449/17, Pottecher personnel file. See also: CAOM, GGI 14181.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Service.<sup>81</sup> This was a remarkable promotion that increased his salary from 6,000 francs to 10,000 francs in 1897, and which was later increased 12,000 francs in 1900. How did Pottecher rise from low-level accounting clerk to become the chief of a new service, a promotion that doubled his annual salary in just four years? Part of his success can be attributed to the fact that Pottecher was a relentless self-promoter (he instigated the 1900 pay increase, for example). In 1894, when still working as a clerk, Pottecher began using his spare time to study the problem of how to prevent the return of expelled persons and limit the trade in counterfeit tax cards and resident permits. At the time, Saigon's Immigration Service recorded a person's height, *diem-chi* (a knuckle ink-print), and notable body marks, such as scars. Pottecher wrote that the reports were so "rudimentary and incomplete" as to be "mostly unusable."<sup>82</sup> During an administrative leave, Pottecher elected to study the Bertillon Method at the *Service de l'Identité Judiciaire* in Paris for five months. He obtained a certificate of technical aptitude and was also able to meet Alphonse Bertillon. Bertillon himself was active in the application of his technologies in the colonies—he had been instrumental in bringing the method to Algeria in 1890—and he agreed to help Pottecher establish an identification bureau in Cochinchina.<sup>83</sup> He later served as Pottecher's intermediary in Paris and helped obtain the measuring instruments and photography equipment.<sup>84</sup>

After returning with Paris Police school credentials in 1896, Pottecher presented his proposal for an identification system based on immutable physical characteristics. He argued that such a system would prevent name changes, "currently so frequent," provide a "tight surveillance

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<sup>81</sup> *Annuaire du Ministère des Colonies*, (Paris: Imprimerie Librairie Militaire, 1898-1902).

<sup>82</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IA21/151.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid; Ilsen About, "Surveillance des identités et régime colonial en Indochine, Indochine 1890-1912," *Criminocorpus, revue hypermédia* [Online], The Bertillon System and Criminal Identification, Articles, Online since 23 May 2011, connection on 05 September 2012. URL: <http://criminocorpus.revues.org/417>

<sup>84</sup> CAOM, GGI 5731, Service d'Identification Anthropométrique 1897, Pottecher, "Nomenclature des objets de matériel nécessaires au service d'identification anthropométrique de la Cochinchine," n.d; GGI to Ministre des Colonies, Paris, "Objet: Demande d'objets de matériel nécessaires au service de l'identification au service de l'identification anthropométrique," n.d.

of Chinese and Indians, whether during their stay in the colony or at their departure and arrival," and facilitate the collection of taxes. It would also aid in criminal investigations and in the identification of both dead and living persons. It would prevent the use of "false papers," a common problem with the residence permits, and would provide the administration, for the first time, with an accurate accounting of all foreigners living in the colony. As Pottecher concluded:

In a word, identification would provide the same service vis-à-vis the foreigner Asian population that the anthropometric [provides] vis-à-vis the criminal population in France, with this difference, however, that the first is much smaller than the second, and the work would be easier since the subjects being identified have generally less powerful reasons to remain unknown.<sup>85</sup>

Pottecher caught the council's attention. In his less-than-diplomatic enthusiasm for controlling the Chinese in particular, and his overt prejudices against this community, he also drew the attention, and ire, of the congregations.<sup>86</sup>

When the proposal came before the Colonial Council in May 1897, they approved funding for the new service with a particular emphasis on its role in monitoring Chinese immigrants. This fact was embodied in their recommendation to attach the new service to the Immigration Department, and not the Justice Department. Reflecting on this landmark decision, a council member later recalled that "The public powers and the population, through the organ of elections, were unanimous in recognizing the need to establish the real identity of foreigners and most especially Chinese."<sup>87</sup> At this preliminary stage, the council proposed dividing the new identification service into two sections: criminal and immigration. The criminal section would

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<sup>85</sup> TTLTII, Goucoch IA21/151.

<sup>86</sup> The colonial state bowed to pressure and retired Pottecher in 1903, at the age of 43. Pottecher remained in Saigon where by 1908 he co-managed a major rickshaw company, *Pousse-Pousse Saigonnais*. In 1908 he also secured a patent for "chamber indegonflable dite 'antipanne'" or an un-deflateable tire. He eventually returned to France, where at the age of nearly 70, claiming to be "half-blind" and "infirm," he wrote the colonial minister in 1929 to complain about his insufficient pension: "I can obviously not consider the colony to be paying me what it should, and after 26 years, what I have the right to expect." GGI 4162, Ministre des Colonies to GGI, "Objet: Brevet Pottecher," Paris, November 21, 1908.

<sup>87</sup> "Procès-verbaux du Conseil colonial," July 28, 1903.

work with the Justice Department to measure and photograph Cochinchina's convicts. The immigration section was charged with collecting biometric data on all foreigner Asians entering the colony, with the idea that Chinese residents already in Cochinchina would also be subject to the measurements at a later date.<sup>88</sup>

Before the GGI could sign the proposal into law, however, opposition emerged. Following the May 1897 Council session, congregation leaders submitted a petition to the French administration asking for the annulment of the vote.<sup>89</sup> The protests continued throughout 1897, forcing recently appointed GGI Paul Doumer to sign a partial proposal that temporarily excluded Chinese immigrants from the service's purview.<sup>90</sup> The modified law Doumer signed in October 1897 established an Anthropometric Identification Service in Saigon to be used only on convicts at the prisons.<sup>91</sup> By the time the service was extended to immigrants in 1898, the use of Bertillon-style measurements had been greatly curtailed. The standoff between Pottecher and the Chinese leadership nonetheless continued.

### **"To be treated like men and not dogs and pigs:" The Chinese Community Protests**

Members of the Chinese community found the indiscriminate use of Bertillon biometrics on immigrants unnecessarily invasive and degrading because the use of measurements had been originally designed for, and at this point been used only on, criminals. Their opposition to skull and pelvic bone measurements should also be understood in the broader context of nineteenth century race science and physical anthropology. Criminal anthropology's use of bone

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<sup>88</sup> CAOM, GGI 5687, "Création d'un service d'identification anthropométrique en Cochinchine," 1897. Conseil Privé, Extrait du registre des deliberations, Séance du 28 septembre 1897, Service local; "Rapport au Gouverneur Général," Saigon, October 5, 1897.

<sup>89</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IA21/151, Le Chef de l'immigration et de l'identification V. Pottecher to Lieutenant-gouverneur, "Transmissif de quatre projets d'arrêtés, relatifs à la création de l'immatriculation signalétique et à l'immigration en général," Saigon, March 23, 1898.

<sup>90</sup> About, "Surveillance des identités et régime colonial en Indochine, 1890-1912."

<sup>91</sup> For the many laws surrounding this service, see: CAOM, GGI 5729, "Service de l'Immigration en Cochinchine 1898-1906."



measurements as fixed characteristics useful for identifying criminals recalled the French physical anthropologist's collection and use of skull and other bone measurements to illustrate, under the mantle of scientific pursuit, the biologically inferiority of colonized races. Both fields emerged at about the same time in France—in the late 1870s in Paris—and both played a role in justifying and enabling France's colonial pursuits.<sup>92</sup>

Subsequent protests, which took the form of letters and petitions, reached the point that the administration worried that the existing immigration service would be disrupted should they implement the new measuring methods. In an 1898 session, a council member complained that "[The Chinese] declare, indeed, in a petition, which has made some noise, that the operations of measurement would violate their dignity and that they were particularly intolerable for the women and young girls."<sup>93</sup> The petitioners also objected to the fact that Chinese immigrants would pay for the service with new taxes, almost doubling the taxes paid by foreigner Asians. Pottecher was unsympathetic, writing that their objections were surprising to someone who knew "their race" as he did, but he conceded that the "Chinese prudishness was perhaps ruffled by measures taken on the bodies of these individuals."<sup>94</sup> Pottecher maintained that the principle of physical identification could not be abandoned.

In light of these objections, in late 1897 the council relented and asked Pottecher to recommend a more acceptable identification method. In his search for a system that was "fast, sure, and exempt from measurements," he identified fingerprints as a unique physical

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<sup>92</sup> Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*; Emmanuelle Sibaud, "A Useless Colonial Science? Practicing Anthropology in the French Colonial Empire, circa 1880–1960," *Current Anthropology* 53, S5, The Biological Anthropology of Living Human Populations: World Histories, National Styles, and International Networks (April 2012): S83-S94.

<sup>93</sup> "Procès-verbaux du Conseil colonial," July 28, 1903.

<sup>94</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IA21/151, Le Chef de l'immigration et de l'identification V. Pottecher to Lieutenant-gouverneur, "Transmissif de quatre projets d'arrêtés, relatifs à la création de l'immatriculation signalétique et à l'immigration en général," Saigon, March 23, 1898.

characteristic.<sup>95</sup> He later wrote that he was, at the time, aware of fingerprinting used in other colonies, namely by the British in India, but he was not familiar with its methods. Bertillon did use fingerprinting in Paris until 1902, so Pottecher could not import an existing classification method in 1897. Nonetheless, by January 1898, he devised his own fingerprinting classification system that became known as the Pottecher Method. Under the new guidelines, the Pottecher Method replaced the Bertillon Method with the exception of two body measurements—height and chest circumference—and special markings, such as birthmarks or tattoos.<sup>96</sup>

Following the approval of the new method, an 1898 *arrêté*, which modified the 1897 *arrêté*, finally fulfilled the Colonial Council's vision of extending the service to the Chinese. The council attached the Anthropometric Identification Service to the Immigration Service, creating a new Immigration and Identification Service headed by Pottecher. The same year, Chinese immigrants were subjected to the modified procedures on the Saigon docks. With just a handful of employees the service processed 18,000 immigrants in 1898 and 21,000 in 1902. By 1904, the service had 200,000 cards on file, 120,000 of which were for "Foreigner Asians."<sup>97</sup>

Chinese leaders continued to file complaints about this treatment, along with accusations that the service's agents were committing acts of brutality, including from a congregation leader who complained of being "'beaten and badly injured' by Pottecher himself."<sup>98</sup> Another petition reported that immigrants received "whacks" and other injuries. There was a distinct class component to the objections, as wealthy community leaders argued that they should not be subjected to the same measures as laborer immigrants. Pottecher remained unsympathetic, arguing that the protests were "no longer valid" since the less invasive method of fingerprinting

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<sup>95</sup> Cited in About, "Surveillance des identités et régime colonial en Indochine, 1890-1912;" See also: Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Cited in About, "Surveillance des identités et régime colonial en Indochine, 1890-1912."

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

had replaced anthropometrics.<sup>99</sup> In 1903, Chinese community leaders again addressed a petition to the GGI in which they requested "that the immigrants be treated like men and not like dogs and pigs by the Immigration chief and agents."<sup>100</sup> Agents searching the bodies of women for scars and birthmarks remained a particular concern.

The other issue was the immigration tax. Earlier tax hikes had provoked protests from the Chinese leadership, and administrators were already familiar with the political waves this community could make. In 1886, China's ambassador in France, Shu, asked for the abolition of the head tax on congregation members which he argued violated the terms of the 1886 Most Favored Nation Treaty signed between the two countries. French ambassadors stationed in Peking heard similar complaints from Chinese bureaucrats. Shu filed the complaint again in 1892 and 1893, and GGI de Lanessan, who took his post in Indochina in 1894, seriously considered the request, although he left office before cementing any real changes. His reluctance to act was mainly tied to the considerable revenue these taxes generated for the colonial budget.<sup>101</sup>

In 1903, Soueng-Pao-Ki—Shu's successor as ambassador—appealed to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on behalf of Cochinchina's Chinese community. He asked for the abolition of the head tax associated with the immigration service. This letter made its way through the bureaucratic labyrinth back to the colony in 1904. Also in 1904, in response to accusations of brutality, Pottecher was removed from his post and retired and replaced with his subordinate.<sup>102</sup> In 1905, GGI Beau consulted with the Cochinchina Governor and the *Résidents Supérieur* of Annam and Tonkin. They were unanimous that the "head tax needed to be maintained, at the double rate, as a fiscal instrument and as a means of surveillance of foreigner

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<sup>99</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IA21/151.

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in About, "Surveillance des identités et régime colonial en Indochine, 1890-1912."

<sup>101</sup> Jean André LaFargue, "L'immigration chinoise en Indochine" (PhD. diss., Université de Bordeaux, 1909), 97.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in About, "Surveillance des identités et régime colonial en Indochine, 1890-1912."

Asians."<sup>103</sup> The question of taxes hikes and special surveillance of the Chinese were intertwined issues. The latter was used as justification of the former, and both were seen as unjust by the Chinese. From the French perspective, the idea of the Chinese as prone to criminality remained central to shaping immigration policy. As Beau wrote:

With a goal of internal security and for easy to understand political reasons, the Government of Indochina finds itself with the obligation to practice a tight surveillance of the Chinese immigrants inclined, as is well known, to organize into secret societies that operate outside all authority. To assure this special police, it is indispensable to establish with the most precision possible the identity of each immigrant and to follow their subsequent movements. It is from there, the necessity of certain special measures (notably the deliverance of a personal card accompanied of a photograph of the individual) that involve costs supported by the budgets of each colony (*pays*) and of which the inevitable corollary is the collection of a specific tax. Moreover, this regulation has the advantage of putting an obstacle to the entry, in the colony, of vagrants that swarm neighboring Chinese provinces.<sup>104</sup>

The GGI defended his decision to maintain special taxes because the additional income was necessary to ensure surveillance and limit immigration.

The Chinese government continued to make an issue of the immigration service. In 1906, the French ambassador in Peking wrote the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris with concerns that the "discontentment from the tax issue would provoke a Chinese boycott against French imports similar to the anti-American boycott declared in 1905 in response to discriminatory US immigration laws. The Minister of Colonies, alerted to this possibility, appealed to the GGI asking "if it would not be possible to bring about a lessening of the current regulations on measuring."<sup>105</sup>

In 1906 two things happened which marked a victory for the Chinese petitioners. First, in February, GGI Beau established a commission to study Chinese immigration reform and sent a study mission to observe immigration in other Southeast Asian colonies lauded by the

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted in LaFagure, "L'immigration chinoise en Indochine," 101.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

petitioners, including Singapore.<sup>106</sup> Second, in March 1906, Beau abrogated Doumer's 1897 law creating the Service of Immigration and Identification in Saigon, in one stroke eliminating Pottecher's (former) service.<sup>107</sup> The identity service survived Beau's annulment but he ruled that "Judicial identification or measuring constitutes a service apart and only concerns criminals."<sup>108</sup>

By appealing to the Chinese and French governments, the congregation leaders successfully limited the routine use of Bertillon methods on immigrants in the colony. But if the state was willing to compromise in the face of international protest, it never gave up its prerogative for large-scale individual surveillance in the colony. At the same time the administration "softened" its position towards immigrants, it redoubled its efforts to extend the same system to Asians who worked for French employers, namely "boys" or servants, most of whom were Vietnamese.<sup>109</sup> Fingerprints became more widely used, including at the pension office.<sup>110</sup> The French also later adopted a more class-based approach to immigration policy. When they reintroduced the use of fingerprints on Chinese immigrants in January 1912, their efforts were focused on fourth and fifth class immigrants, the poorest categories.<sup>111</sup>

### **Wither the Judicial Identification Service?**

The "Chinese question" overshadowed the service's original purpose, which was to create a criminal database in the colony akin to that established in Paris. Doumer had approved the creation of a Judicial Identification service in October 8, 1897.<sup>112</sup> This service was tasked with photographing and taking biometric data from all arrested individuals, providing the Justice

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<sup>106</sup> This study can be found in: CAOM GGI 5729 "Service de l'Immigration en Cochinchine" 1898-1906.

<sup>107</sup> CAOM, GGI 39833, "Dossier: Création en Cochinchine d'un service d'identification anthropométrique, Arrêté du 8 Octobre (rapporté par arrêté du 9 Mars 1906)."

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in About, "Surveillance des identités et régime colonial en Indochine, 1890-1912."

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IA22/053(2), "A.S. de l'établissement de l'identité annamite 1911-1912. 1917."

<sup>111</sup> About, "Surveillance des identités et régime colonial en Indochine, 1890-1912."

<sup>112</sup> CAOM, GGI, 7779. Projet de réorganisation de le police de Sûreté générale en Indochine (Mission de M. Gautret), 1905-06; Arrêté Paul Doumer, Saigon, October 8, 1897.

Department with criminal records using a new database and documenting Asians employed by Europeans. Nonetheless, as late as the following July 1898, this service existed only on paper. Identifying criminals was revealed to be a distant second priority for Pottecher and the council, which only approved the service when it was clearly intended to work with the immigration department. This was in part because immigrants were expected to absorb the cost, an estimated 360,000 francs, through the tax increase.

In 1902, colonial prosecutor Assaud chastised the regional prosecutors for problems with the now five-year-old service: "Despite my formal instructions on the subject, I have found that while certain prosecutors follow rigorously my orders...there are others who seem to have not got it into their heads sufficiently the need for meticulous accuracy in the daily working of a service of this nature."<sup>113</sup> He found errors in the prison records, including prisoners listed as acquitted who had been convicted, or guilty verdicts documented without indication of the sentence. Five years after its creation, Saigon's identification service was still not working closely with the provincial courts, and clerical errors threatened its effectiveness as a scientific criminal database. The introduction of the same service in the north in 1909 shows similar non-compliance at the local level.<sup>114</sup> This indicates two things: the concern for the Chinese outweighed for the Colonial Council other security concerns. It also shows that it cannot be assumed that modern technologies were necessarily taken up in the colony and used in the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid. M. E. Assaud, Procureur General, Chef du Service Judiciaire de l'Indo-Chine to Juges d'Instruction, Juges de Paix a compétence étendue de la Cochinchine, Hanoi, February 25, 1902; See also: M. E. Assaud, Procureur General, Chef du Service Judiciaire de l'Indo-Chine to Greffiers des Cours et Tribunaux de Cochinchine, Hanoi, February 25, 1902.

<sup>114</sup> TTLT I, RST 013617 "Projet de création d'un service d'identification et anthropométrie, 1909-1919"; Le chef du Service de l'identité to RST, Hanoi, Hanoi June 30, 1909; TTLT I, RST 013616, "Organisation du Service d'identité judiciaire dans les provinces du Tonkin 1918;" L'administrateur Maire à Haiphong to Résident Supérieur, Hanoi, "Note postale," Haiphong, August 14, 1918; RST to administrateurs résidents, chefs de provinces, commandants de territoire militaire, administrateurs délégués à Phuc Yen et Phy Ly, administrateur maire de Haiphong, n.d.

expected ways. Rather than a hyper-modern colonial laboratory of state control, everyday policing in Indochina was far messier and far more contested.

### **Conclusion**

Examining how the French colonial state policed the Chinese suggests the finer contours of this community's position in colonial society, allowing historians to understand how the Chinese could be considered privileged even as they faced special regulation and discrimination. Any evaluation of the place of the Chinese in Vietnam, in short, needs to take into consideration the often contradictory thinking of the French concerning the Chinese. Conversely, any evaluation of the origins of Indochina's policing institutions must consider how the Chinese themselves—as both targets and advocates—directly contributed to shaping colonial policing practices. These episodes illustrate in another sense the instabilities and imperfections inherent in the colonial order of things. As the wealthy Chinese community's "tactical maneuverings" with the state make clear, class differences did not overlay neatly with the racial order, creating openings for its inversion.

## Conclusion

Looking at race and racial hierarchy opens up opportunities to understand more fully colonial polices and their practices. Rather than a source of strength, hierarchy created contradictions in an institution dependent on both projecting authority and utilizing force following the rules of colonial order. Threats to that order came from within and without, as selectively fluid racial and legal boundaries combined with the realities of colonial class divisions magnified the potential for imbalance. Competing hierarchies also created openings in the colonial order. Indians were employed as equals with white agents, earning the same salary and benefits; some were more formally educated, having been trained as clerks or scribes. The prosperity of the Chinese business community meanwhile illuminated all too clearly the earnings disparity between "foreigner Asians" and many French functionaries. Administrators sometimes looked down on their poorer French subordinates from the periphery who in turn pleaded poverty in their correspondence with the state. The racial ordering in the police also had the unexpected side effect of hampering the policing of white criminals when the police relied on its majority non-Europeans to carry out street work.

In the lower cadre, a closer examination of Vietnamese agents furthermore suggests a more complex balance of power within the police. The French were enormously dependent on intermediaries, for reasons explored in chapter 4, yet the state paid them derisory wages and doubted their loyalties. The most important element to understanding the subtle but potentially powerful influence of the lower cadre was the simple fact that very few French policemen mastered local languages in this period and Vietnamese police agents became their *de facto* interpreters. This in-between position put intermediaries front and center in everyday policing. Dependent on such agents, but ambivalent about their dependability, the French never really



resolved this conundrum of colonial policing. Even as late as 1949, in the midst of war, France refused to transfer the police service to Bao Dai's new government on the grounds that Vietnamese police agents were still too inexperienced and in need of French leadership. The police was in fact the only agency the French refused to relinquish to the Vietnamese state at this time.<sup>1</sup>

In a broader sense, this study seeks to account for patterns of colonial police violence, findings that still resonate in the post-1917 period. It set out to examine everyday policing and personnel in Vietnam beyond the familiar narrative of police-as-tool of colonial state and agents of political repression. Yet the story that emerges is very much about colonial violence. Viewed from the level of the *commissariats* and the city streets, police violence in this period appears to result less from a state directive of repression and more from the logic of colonial order. Casual abuses among agents were fed by unmet expectations of colonial privilege and perpetuated by their superiors' overriding concerns for protecting "prestige," of both the European and the uniform, as the *raison d'être* for colonial domination. Police abuses ultimately had political implications by inciting anti-colonial sentiment, but were not usually politically motivated themselves (in the sense that they were intended to serve a state purpose), revealing instead a state's apparent limited control over its police.

And yet, in this seeming disorder, the police embodied and reproduced "an" order, a colonial order shaped by gendered, class, and racialized norms and expectations. Legitimate violence—that is, violence that obeyed the logic of colonial hierarchy—served the double purpose of reaffirming and reestablishing that order. Breaches in the hierarchy—and

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<sup>1</sup> AN, F/60/ 1004, Exercice de la souveraineté interne en Cochinchine; "La Police La Sûreté dans les Territoires d'Indochine Associés dans l'Union Française," Le Directeur de la Police et de la Sûreté Fédérales Perrier, Saigon, October 21, 1947; AN, F/60/3036 1949 Exempleire particulier de M. le Ministre de la Marine Marchande, "Communication du ministre de la France d'Outre-Mer sur la situation politique dans les Etats Associés d'Indochine," Paris, September 13, 1949.

subsequently the imperfect antidote of violence—arose most in areas where the hierarchy was unstable, or where claims to privilege conflicted. As discussed in the context of prestige, violence and authority have a paradoxical relationship; authority precludes the need for violence. With this in mind, the hypertrophy of serious yet often arbitrary police abuses in colonial Vietnam speaks not to strength but to insecurity.

A shift in this order occurred around 1920. The decades after World War I were an enormously transformative period in Indochina, marking a turning point in both policing and a new phase in the order of things. Thousands of demobilized soldiers and workers returned from the Great War in France, where they encountered republican values and more radical ideologies including communism.<sup>2</sup> A new generation of anti-colonialists and nationalists emerged in the 1920s that became the single greatest preoccupation for the newly created Sûreté and its intelligence service.<sup>3</sup> There was renewed investment in economic exploitation, namely in rubber plantations, and economic developments and disruptions drew more and more people to the cities.<sup>4</sup> There was a Buddhist revival in this period and the emergence of new religions, including the founding of the syncretic Cao Dai religion in the south in 1921.<sup>5</sup> Vietnamese print culture flourished in this period, as did Vietnamese-run newspapers and political organizations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kimloan Hill, "Strangers in a Foreign Land: Vietnamese Soldiers and Workers in France during World War I," in *Việt Nam Borderless Histories*, eds. Nhung Tuyet Tran and Anthony Reid (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Scott McConnell, *Leftward Journey: The Education of Vietnamese Students in France, 1919-1939* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publisher, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization 1858-1954*, trans. Ly Lan Dill-Klein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). Especially chapters 3, 5, and 6.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Ruth Hansen, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860-1930* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007); Shawn McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004). The protestant church also grew during this time: Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Philippe Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916-1930* (New York: Columbia

From the perspective of the police, these developments created a new set of security concerns. Whereas the Chinese had once attracted inordinate police attention, after World War I the focus shifted to colonial subjects who had traveled to Europe, either as students or soldiers, as well as religious and spiritual leaders. The Chinese remained a concern inasmuch as they were active in their homeland's politics or involved with anti-colonial movements in Indochina. Emerging Vietnamese political organizations, both legal and illegal, meanwhile, came to dominate police attention and special police bureaus were created after World War I to manage intelligence and censorship.

This moment is treated as a watershed in colonial policing. Contemporaries in the colony envisioned a shift at this time from a reactionary form of policing crime (especially of political crime) to one rooted in prevention through more subtle methods of intelligence and surveillance. During World War I, Sarraut created a centralized intelligence service in Hanoi in 1915 (merged with the newly created Indochina police in 1917) that was seen as marking a conceptual break between an old and new way of policing.<sup>7</sup> This philosophy was embodied in the expression "La plus discrète vigilance s'impose" (the most discrete vigilance is required) which Sûreté chief Henisson recommended in 1923 with regards to how the police should handle growing communist activity in the colony.<sup>8</sup>

The 1917 reform was only the first step in this shift from repression to prevention however, and changes at the street level were not immediately evident. Later police reforms under GGI Robin and GGI Pasquier further pushed the Sûreté into political policing and created internal specialization within the service. After World War I, high-ranking colonial policemen

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University Press, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> The new service was called the API (Service des Affaires Politiques et Indigènes).

<sup>8</sup> CAOM, GGI 65474, Herisson to Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, "objet: sûreté politique," Saigon, April 2, 1921.

also began travelling back to Paris to study and share policing techniques, ending the police's relative isolation prior to this date.

Just as priorities and methods shifted, so too did personnel. By the end of the 1920s, more and more French candidates had high school diplomas and even university degrees, and exams raised the barrier to admission. Many in the elite police leadership came through the civil service rather than the military, and had backgrounds in law or politics. Police salaries in the higher ranks also skyrocketed, finally attracting more desirable candidates, at least at the leadership level. One example of a police elite was Alexis Lacombe, who came to the police via the colonial civil service. GGI Pasquier personally recruited Lacombe to become the director of the Police and Sûreté in 1928 at a salary of 52,000 francs annually. His pay more than doubled over the next few years, and in 1932 he earned an incredible 115,000 francs per year. He retired in 1934, but was nominated honorary *résident supérieur* in 1936, just one example of the increasing crossover between police and administrative positions.

The fluid racial hierarchy also became a little less fluid. During his tenure, Sarraut was concerned with addressing white poverty in the administration at the same time creating more jobs for Vietnamese applicants.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, in the police, Sarraut created more "space" between the upper and lower cadre. Europeans would no longer be employed as *agents*, and the new entry-level position was *brigadier* or *inspecteur* for the municipal police and Sûreté respectively. The term "agent" was reserved for those in the native hierarchy, a development that could very well have been a response to the dilemmas described in this study. The number of Indians employed in the Saigon police also decreased after WWI by half.

Among the important developments from the postwar period that warrants further investigation was the emergence of a new layer, so to speak, in the colonial hierarchy. Starting

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<sup>9</sup> Sager, "Indigenizing Indochina."

around the 1920s, more and more French creoles—Vietnam-born Frenchmen—came of age and joined the police ranks. Research into the rise of creoles may aid understanding of how racial hierarchy and power dynamics in the police changed after the 1920s. This cohort was more likely to be bilingual, finally overcoming the language impasse that had so long kept the colonial police dependent on local intermediaries. De Gantès hints at the "Creolisation" of the local community, which he sees as becoming more and more insular, but also better adapted to the colony starting in the 1900s. At the same time, the question of who was and was not French—culturally, legally, racially—became more and more complex. More research would also be welcome on regional variations. The racial dynamic in Hanoi and Saigon, not to mention Phnom Penh in Cambodia, or the Chinese city of Cholon, were all very different. While I found commonalities between the colonial cities, the nuances of local variation would reveal much about the historical specificities of hierarchies, and how these changed over time.

Alongside change however was continuity, and the findings in this dissertation tell an important but neglected side of the post-1917 police story. Below the leadership level much of the personnel remained the same; there was no immediate purge of the pre-1917 police, who instead received "famous promotions" after 1917.<sup>10</sup> Below the leadership level, administration problems persisted, including corruption, understaffing, and ill discipline. The municipal police remained more or less intact, and may have suffered due to the new Sûreté police. In 1933, the *résident supérieur* of the Saigon-Cholon region (the two cities merged in 1931) complained that he lost all his good policemen to the Sûreté, leaving the municipal police with only mediocre recruits. Governor Krautheimer wrote in reply that the aptitude required for the two services (investigative policing vs. street policing) were entirely different using a sports analogy: an

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<sup>10</sup> Morlat, *La Répression Coloniale*, 49.

excellent rugby player may make a terrible soccer player, and vice-versa. Such was the subordinate place of the municipal police post-WWI.<sup>11</sup>

The colonial police's use of modern technology can also be overstated, especially beyond the narrow niche of political policing. My impression from the archives is that what made the Sûreté police so formidable in the realm of politics was less new technologies of power and more the police's effective use of the collaborators and informants cited in intelligence reports, the quintessential Sûreté document. By contrast, I found criminal files with Bertillon's biometric data (a classic technology of power) left blank. There were also complaints about the ineffectiveness of identification cards, and reports rarely referenced the use of fingerprints to identify suspects. In the interwar period, policemen used these technologies of power only so much as they found them useful, and not as systematically as might be supposed. Collaboration, meanwhile, gave the colonial police the capacity to infiltrate anti-colonial groups and accumulate intelligence on their plans and their members. Intermediaries remained crucial to the story of colonial policing, and much remains to be written about their role in this later period.

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<sup>11</sup> TTLT II, Goucoch IIB.56/254, Gouverneur de la Cochinchine to Résident Supérieur en Indochine, Administrateur de la Région de Saigon-Cholon, Saigon, September 1, 1933.

### Annex I: Piastre-Franc Exchange Rate by Year, 1882-1936

Data from the Indochina Bank, cited in André Touzet, *Le régime monétaire indochinois* (Paris: Sirey, 1939), 216.

*Average number of francs per 1 piaster:*

1882: 4.68 francs	1901: 2.5	1920: 11.57
1883: 4.6	1902: 2.15	1921: 6.87
1884: 4.6	1903: 2.15	1922: 6.7
1885: 4.45	1904: 2.3	1923: 8.46
1886: 4	1905: 2.4	1924: 10.08
1887: 4	1906: 2.8	1925: 11.97
1888: 3.8	1907: 2.75	1926: 17.00
1889: 3.9	1908: 2.45	1927: 12.80
1890: 4.25	1909: 2.4	1928: 12.77
1891: 4.05	1910: 2.3	1929: 11.45
1892: 3.6	1911: 2.5	1930: 9.95
1893: 3.3	1912: 2.5	1931: 9.87
1894: 2.85	1913: 2.5	1932: 9.89
1895: 2.7	1914: 2.39	1933: 9.84
1896: 2.7	1915: 2.46	1934: 9.88
1897: 2.4	1916: 2.95	1935: 9.97
1898: 2.45	1917: 3.6	1936: 10.00
1899: 2.5	1918: 4.25	
1900: 2.55	1919: 6.56	

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Centre des archives d'outre-mer (CAOM), Aix-en-Provence

*Fonds Ministres (FM)*

*Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine (GGI)*

*Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine, Police personnel files (GGI C)*

*Indochine Nouveau Fonds (NF)*

*Résident Supérieur du Tonkin Nouveau Fonds (RSTNF)*

*Albert Sarraut, fonds des papiers d'agents*

#### Vietnam

Vietnam National Archive I/Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia I (TTLT I), Hanoi

*Résident Supérieur de Tonkin (RST)*

*Mairie de Hanoi*

Vietnam National Archive II/Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia II (TTLT II), Ho Chi Minh City

*Gouverneur de la Cochinchine Fonds (Goucoch)*

*Thủ hiến Nam Việt*

*Phủ Thống Đốc Nam Kỳ*

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