

## A Frenchwoman Writes about Indochina, 1931-1949: Andrée Viollis and Anti-colonialism

Mary Lynn Stewart

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Résumé de l'article

*A Frenchwoman Writes about Indochina, 1931-1949: Andrée Viollis and Anti-colonialism* examine la carrière d'Andrée Viollis à titre de journaliste d'investigation, en particulier ses articles et ses livres sur les colonies françaises et d'autres colonies européennes de 1922 à 1935, dans le but de remettre en question les récentes critiques postcoloniales de son ouvrage, *Indochine S.O.S.*, qui le qualifie d'emmuré dans l'idéologie et la rhétorique coloniales et de sorte de féminisme patriarcal, en dépit de la dénonciation des abus coloniaux et de la sympathie démontrée envers les indigènes opposés au régime colonial. Calqué sur les récentes critiques des approches culturelles postcoloniales qui font fief des conditions matérielles du colonialisme et sur les études menées sur le féminisme transnational, qui tentent d'établir un lien entre les conditions de travail dans les « pays industrialisés » et celles dans le « tiers monde », l'article établit d'abord la réputation de Viollis en tant que féministe libérale, non pas comme féministe matriarcale ou patriarcale; il analyse son style journaliste, en particulier l'utilisation qu'elle fait de la suggestion indirecte comme investigatrice dans la presse populaire quotidienne et il décrit l'intérêt des colonies pour la presse et le public français. Deuxièmement, l'article décrit les reportages et les publications de Viollis sur les colonies des années 1920 jusqu'en 1935, en portant une attention particulière à sa dénonciation de l'exploitation économique des colonies britanniques et françaises. Troisièmement, l'article examine la perspective des critiques postcoloniales à l'égard du point de vue de Viollis quant à l'égalité entre les colonisateurs et les colonisés, soit la simple égalité entre des personnes de même classe sociale, du portrait qu'elle brosse des Vietnamiens indigènes comme étant des personnes dégradées, et de la conviction que les Français ou les femmes françaises devraient être les tuteurs moraux des autochtones non civilisés, et finalement de sa représentation des autochtones comme celle de personnes avilies et habitées d'un instinct animal, à la lumière d'une analyse complète de sa carrière et de son livre. Après une analyse détaillée de son point de vue sur l'égalité, la moralité et la condition des paysans et des travailleurs jusqu'à la parution de son livre et dans son livre, l'article rejette l'argument le considérant comme partial et hors contexte, et l'interprétation comme se situant loin du style de Viollis.

## **A Frenchwoman Writes about Indochina, 1931-1949: Andrée Viollis and Anti-colonialism**

**MARY LYNN STEWART**

### ***Abstract***

*“A Frenchwoman Writes about Indochina, 1931-1949: Andrée Viollis and Anti-colonialism” examines investigative reporter Andrée Viollis’ journalistic career, especially her articles and books on French and other European colonies between 1922 and 1935, in order to challenge recent postcolonial critiques of her 1935 book, Indochine S.O.S, as immured in colonial ideology and rhetoric, including a kind of patriarchal feminism, despite being an exposé of colonial abuses and sympathetic to indigenous rebels against the colonial regime. Following the lines of recent critiques of postcolonial cultural approaches for inattention to the material conditions of colonialism, and feminist transnational scholars who attempt to link labour conditions in the “First World” to those in the “Third World,” The article establishes Viollis’ credentials as a liberal, not a maternal or patriarchal feminist, analyses her journalistic style, especially her use of indirect suggestion as a reporter in the popular daily press, and describes the interest in the colonies in the French public and press. Next the article describes Viollis’ colonial reporting and publications from the 1920s through 1935, with special attention to her exposés of economic exploitation in British and French colonies. Third, the article examines the evidence cited in postcolonial critiques of Viollis’ advocacy of equality between colonizers and colonized as mere equality between people of the same social class, her portrayal of indigenous Vietnamese as degraded, her belief that the French or French women should be moral tutors of the uncivilized natives, and finally her portrayal of indigenous peoples as degraded and animalistic, in light of a full analysis of her career and book. After a detailed analysis of her position on equality, morality, and the condition of peasants and workers up to and in the book, the article rejects the evidence as partial and decontextualized, and the interpretation as unfamiliar with Viollis’ style.*

### ***Résumé***

*A Frenchwoman Writes about Indochina, 1931-1949: Andrée Viollis and Anti-colonialism examine la carrière d’Andrée Viollis à titre de journaliste d’investigation, en particulier ses articles et ses livres sur les colonies*

*françaises et d'autres colonies européennes de 1922 à 1935, dans le but de remettre en question les récentes critiques postcoloniales de son ouvrage, Indochine S.O.S, qui le qualifie d'emmuré dans l'idéologie et la rhétorique coloniales et de sorte de féminisme patriarcal, en dépit de la dénonciation des abus coloniaux et de la sympathie démontrée envers les indigènes opposés au régime colonial. Calqué sur les récentes critiques des approches culturelles postcoloniales qui font fief des conditions matérielles du colonialisme et sur les études menées sur le féminisme transnational, qui tentent d'établir un lien entre les conditions de travail dans les « pays industrialisés » et celles dans le « tiers monde », l'article établit d'abord la réputation de Viollis en tant que féministe libérale, non pas comme féministe matriarcale ou patriarcale; il analyse son style journaliste, en particulier l'utilisation qu'elle fait de la suggestion indirecte comme investigatrice dans la presse populaire quotidienne et il décrit l'intérêt des colonies pour la presse et le public français. Deuxièmement, l'article décrit les reportages et les publications de Viollis sur les colonies des années 1920 jusqu'en 1935, en portant une attention particulière à sa dénonciation de l'exploitation économique des colonies britanniques et françaises. Troisièmement, l'article examine la perspective des critiques postcoloniales à l'égard du point de vue de Viollis quant à l'égalité entre les colonisateurs et les colonisés, soit la simple égalité entre des personnes de même classe sociale, du portrait qu'elle brosse des Vietnamiens indigènes comme étant des personnes dégradées, et de la conviction que les Français ou les femmes françaises devraient être les tuteurs moraux des autochtones non civilisés, et finalement de sa représentation des autochtones comme celle de personnes avilies et habitées d'un instinct animal, à la lumière d'une analyse complète de sa carrière et de son livre. Après une analyse détaillée de son point de vue sur l'égalité, la moralité et la condition des paysans et des travailleurs jusqu'à la parution de son livre et dans son livre, l'article rejette l'argument le considérant comme partial et hors contexte, et l'interprétation comme se situant loin du style de Viollis.*

**I**n October and November 1931 *Le Petit Parisien*, a pro-government republican newspaper, published a series of articles describing the trip to Indochina by one of its star reporters, Andrée Viollis (1870-1950), who accompanied the Minister of Colonies Paul Reynaud, a centre-right (*Alliance Démocratique*) member of the government, at his request.<sup>1</sup> As the French overseas empire reached its greatest extent between the two world wars, colonial reporting

1 Andrée Viollis (hereafter AV), "M. Reynaud en Indochine," "Quatre jours d'enchantement," "M. Paul Reynaud poursuivant son enquête visite l'Annam," and "L'Adieu de M. Reynaud à l'Indochine," *Le Petit Parisien* (hereafter *LPP*) (20 and 27 October, 6, 17, and 19 November 1933).

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became a regular feature in the press. Although the official position on this far-flung and barely secured empire was that the colonies were peaceful, colonial uprisings occurred regularly, which drew newspaper attention.<sup>2</sup> This first visit by a minister to Indochina was ostensibly to investigate the Yen Bay massacre of 1930, during which indigenous rebels killed several French colonial officers and in retaliation, courts sentenced eighty-three rebels to death. Thirteen were guillotined. In actual fact, the government intended to assert French control of the colony.<sup>3</sup> In December 1933 *L'Esprit*, a left-leaning Catholic journal, ran an article so critical of the colonial regime in Indochina that it reads like the antithesis of the earlier series. Yet this article was also written by Andrée Viollis.<sup>4</sup> Two years later Viollis published *Indochine S.O.S.*, a book with excerpts from her travel diary, passages from the original series, the *L'Esprit* article, and a more fully documented critique of colonial abuses than appeared in that article.<sup>5</sup> The 1933 article and the 1935 book disclosed prison torture, an indifferent official response to mass starvation after extensive flooding and crop failures in Indochina, and near intolerable working conditions on French plantations and in French mines and factories.

In the mid-1930s scholars considered Viollis book on Indochina a “bleak picture of the seamy side of colonization” and some cited it as authoritative.<sup>6</sup> Postcolonial scholars who take a cultural and especially a literary approach, such as Nicola Cooper, agree that Viollis’ book revealed colonial abuses and sympathized with the demands of indigenous peoples, but dismiss her position as immured in colonial ideology and rhetoric, including a kind of patriarchal feminism.<sup>7</sup> This article examines and rejects Cooper’s dismissal of Viollis’ book, drawing on the views of French colonial historians who question post-colonial applications of a cultural studies approach to historical research, particularly because of their inadequate understanding of the colonial context. It is also informed by more general critiques of postcolonial cultural approaches for their inattention to the material conditions of colonialism, anti-colonialism, and post-colonial scholarship.<sup>8</sup> Feminist transnational and neo-colonial scholars’ efforts to link labour conditions in the “First World” to

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2 Martin Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 103, 186.

3 Virginia Thompson, *French Indo-china* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968; reprint of 1937 ed. for the American Council, Institute of Pacific Relations), 407.

4 AV, “Quelques notes sur l’Indochine,” *L'Esprit* (December 1933).

5 AV, *Indochine S.O.S.* (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1949 [1935]).

6 Thompson, 406.

7 Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 95-6.

8 Alice L. Conklin, “Histories of Colonialism: Recent Studies of the Modern French Empire,” *French Historical Studies* 30, 2 (Spring 2007): 305-32, and Arif Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, 2 (Winter 1994): 328-56.

those in the “Third World”<sup>9</sup> have also been taken into account. Convinced that authorship and the conditions of publication, and not just “the text” or “the discourse,” affect the meaning of texts, I begin by introducing the author and tracing her career in journalism. Next I consider the metropolitan and colonial context of Viollis’ articles and book, focusing on how her position on the colonies changed in the 1930s. Knowledge of Viollis’ career as a reporter and in-depth analysis of her Indochina articles and book, as well as her other colonial texts, retrieve her stance on Indochina as a stage in anti-colonialism, free of patriarchal feminism.

Andrée Viollis, born Françoise Caroline Claudius Jacquet de La Verrrière in 1870, was one of only three Frenchwomen participating in the golden age of investigative journalism, when writers of the stature of André Gide and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry tried their hand at it, a vocation combining travel, adventure, and political engagement.<sup>10</sup> Simply being a female reporter was a rare accomplishment, given that less than two per cent of all French reporters were women. Of the three Frenchwomen in the celebrated category of foreign correspondent, Viollis travelled the most and had the largest readership. She had visited Russia, Afghanistan, and India before her trip to Indochina (and after went to China, Japan, Tunisia, and South Africa). Her byline appeared on the front page of *Le Petit Parisien*, with a circulation of 1,500,000 in the early 1930s.<sup>11</sup> In the mid-1930s male and female colleagues recognized her as a leading foreign affairs reporter and hailed her as the successor to Severine. Severine, pseudonym for Caroline Rémy (1855-1929), was the first Frenchwoman to earn her living as a journalist and was the most famous female journalist from the mid-1880s through the 1890s, though she continued to publish, notably in the communist organ *L’Humanité* from 1921 until her death in 1929.<sup>12</sup>

Nearly forty years experience as a reporter shaped Viollis’ choice of subjects and approach to research. Her first articles appeared in the feminist daily *La Fronde* in the 1890s and they soon examined current events that were not

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9 See R. Sunder Rajan and You-me Park, “Postcolonial Feminism/Postcolonialism and Feminism,” in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (London: Blackwell, 2000), 23-52.

10 “Andrée Viollis, princesse du journalisme,” *Minerva* (6 May 1934) and Henriette Sauret, “Les femmes et le journalisme: Andrée Viollis,” *La Française* (2 May 1936), in Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris (hereafter BHVP), Fonds Bouglé, Articles de presse, Viollis. See also Alice-Anne Jeandel, *Andrée Viollis: Une femme grand reporter. Une écriture de l’événement, 1927-1939* (Paris: Harmottan, 2006), preface.

11 *Ibid.*, 7, and Francine Amaury, *Histoire du Petit Parisien*, vol. 1, *La Société du Petit Parisien, entreprise de presse, d’éditions, et de messageries* (Paris: PUF, 1972), 400. The other two Frenchwomen were Louise Weiss and Geneviève Tabouis.

12 Louis Roubaud, “Andrée Viollis, princesse du journalisme. Elle succède à Severine,” *LPP* (13 May 1934), and Severine, *Choix de papiers*. Annoté par Evelyne le Garrec (Paris: Tierce, n.d.).

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obviously about women, from a liberal feminist point of view. Even this early in her career, she mobilized historical and sociological facts in her articles, as good investigative journalists did. In 1926 she published a scholarly study of the first novelist in France, Mme de Lafayette (1634-1693), that offered a fresh interpretation based on previously ignored letters.<sup>13</sup> Here she sought and interpreted new sources to challenge the canonical reading of her time. She would do the same in her news writing. Although she read historical and anthropological studies in preparation for her foreign trips and incorporated anthropological and historical insights into her writing, she modestly disclaimed any expertise in these areas, explaining that she was only a reporter presenting her reactions after a brief investigation.<sup>14</sup>

In the early 1900s, she joined her first husband, Gustave Téry (1871-1928), in writing for two major Free Thought organs, *La Raison* and *L'Action*, both of them anti-clerical, republican journals open to socialism. During the political uproar about the separation of church and state in 1905, she entered La Saltpetrière Hospital in the guise of an apprentice nurse to research a critical piece on the competence of the nursing sisters.<sup>15</sup> This action was the closest she came to the antics of Nellie Bly (1864-1922), the American reporter that regularly went underground to produce exposés. It is not known whether she knew about Nelly Bly, whose fame was more Anglo-American than French.<sup>16</sup> Although Viollis never again went underground for a story, she did publish exposés. Another similarity to Bly was her habit of posing embarrassing questions to her subjects, even those she admired. Although she considered her meeting with Ghandi the highlight of her career,<sup>17</sup> she asked him “uncomfortable” questions about the lack of untouchables in his movement and the treatment of widows and wives.<sup>18</sup>

As a well-born bourgeoisie educated at the Sorbonne and Oxford, and as a very feminine, even fragile-looking woman, Viollis relied upon her personal charm and social capital to access important people (and get away with disturbing questions). Her social graces played a role in the decision by the British press baron Lord Northcliffe to hire her as a French correspondent to the *Daily Mail* of London just after the First World War, and his support subsequently helped her obtain rare interviews with British cabinet ministers. Her second

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13 AV, *La Vraie Mme de Lafayette* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1926).

14 Preface to AV, *Japon Intime* (Paris: F. Aubier, 1934).

15 Anne Renoult, *Andrée Viollis, Une Femme journaliste* (Angers: Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 2004), 29-35.

16 On Bly, see David Randall, *The Great Reporters* (London: Pluto, 2005), chapter 5, and on Viollis' actions and knowledge, Renoult, 47-50.

17 “Quelques notes sur l'Indochine,” 401-48, and “Les Enquêtes. Chez les femmes, Une après-midi avec Andrée Viollis,” *Minerva* (10 February 1935), in BHVP, Fonds Bouglé.

18 AV, *L'Inde contre les Anglais* (Paris: Editions des Portiques, 1930), 87.

husband, Henri d'Ardenne de Tizac (1877-1932), an occasional contributor to *Le Petit Parisien*, likely introduced her to its editor Elie Bois, who hired her as a regular contributor in 1922.<sup>19</sup> However, this newspaper's support of the government accounts for the ministry's invitation to accompany Reynaud on his trip to Indochina, which in turn ensured her access to colonial officials.

*Le Petit Parisien* was one of a minority of French newspapers that survived the Great War by introducing specialty pages — such as sports pages — and by featuring sensational trials, exotic adventures, and daring flights on their front pages. Although other French dailies soon copied *Le Petit Parisien*, it boasted the largest circulation in the world in the 1920s.<sup>20</sup> The tabloid first employed Viollis to cover provincial trials and sports events;<sup>21</sup> she soon added accounts of her adventurous travels.

Like other newspapers, *Le Petit Parisien* assigned Viollis and two female contributors to trials of women charged with killing or arranging the murder of their husbands when they returned from the front, a subject of great interest in the immediate post-war years as veterans returned home to wives accustomed to greater independence, causing spousal conflict and considerable social anxiety about potential marital breakdowns. Unlike the other female reporters, Viollis did not particularly empathize with the accused.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the fact that she had recently welcomed her second husband, a wounded veteran, back from the front made her unsympathetic to wives who did not treat returning veterans well. Equally likely, as a liberal feminist, she balked at legal arguments based on claims of women's moral or material difference or weakness. If women did the crime, she thought that they should do the time.

Unlike the few female reporters on the sports beat, Viollis did not excel at any sport. She only occasionally reported on popular sports events, such as the matches of the tennis diva Suzanne Lenglen, and also mixed-sex events such as the 1924 Olympic Games.<sup>23</sup> She also distinguished herself from most other female reporters because she never wrote for the woman's page of *Le Petit Parisien* or the other daily newspaper, *Le Soir*, for which she worked in the late

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19 Frédéric Lefebvre, "Une Heure avec Andrée Viollis," *Les Nouvelles littéraires* (23 April 1933), in Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (hereafter BMD), DOS VIO. See also AV, *Lord Northcliffe* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1919).

20 Jean-Marie Charon, *La Presse quotidienne*, new ed. (Paris: La Découverte, 1996), 14, and *Histoire Générale de la presse française*, publié sous la Direction de Claude Bellanger, Jacques Godechot, Pierre Guiral et Fernand Terrou, vol 3, *De 1871 à 1940* (Paris: PUF, 1972), 457-80.

21 "Les Enquêtes" and Sauret in BHVP, Fonds Bouglé.

22 See her series on the trial of Madame Fortineau, culminating with "Mme. Fortineau condamnée à cinq ans de réclusion," *LPP* (25 March 1923). See also Renoult, 85-6.

23 For example, AV, "Travers les sports d'hiver. Un Concours de saut en skis," *LPP* (31 January 1923). On other female sports reporters, see Henriette Chandet, "La Femme de 1938 Sport et Journalisme," *L'Epoque* (22 February 1938).

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1930s. When she became a co-director of the Popular Front weekly *Vendredi* in 1935, she included a woman's page that combined the typical column on fashion with very atypical inquiries into women's work and civil status. She was interested in both subjects but was also motivated by a commitment to hire other women on the weekly.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1920s Viollis allowed her personality, or persona, to intrude into her reporting, and in so doing, invoked her gender to enhance the storyline. Her descriptions of travelling "alone and freely" in *A Girl in Soviet Russia*, as the English translation of the book was entitled, resemble the gutsy girl-reporter trope so common in the 1920s. Accounts of arduous train rides tap into the modern fascination with mobility; an anecdote about smoking in the corridor of one coach evokes the insouciant modern girl.<sup>25</sup> The theme of plucky modern femininity continued in articles on her travels in Afghanistan and a collection of these articles in the late 1920s, even though she was by then a fifty-six year old, twice-married and once divorced mother of four children. She characterized the Afghan trip as "an extraordinary adventure" replete with a dangerous flight that involved dodging bullets fired by a crowd near one airport. She ended *Torment in Afghanistan* with the pilot's praise for her: "Even for the aviators ... crossing Hindoustan is a major thing. And you were calm all the time ....? Few men are as calm as you." She added, "Even in my youth, no compliment made me blush so deliciously!"<sup>26</sup>

Although her wartime articles in the *Daily Mail* and occasionally in *Le Petit Parisien* were brief and factual,<sup>27</sup> her post-war coverage of court cases was lively and dramatic, combining brief but revealing portraits of defendants, attorneys, and judges with the (apparently) verbatim give-and-take of courtroom exchanges between prosecutors and defence lawyers. Her sports coverage was equally evocative. She deftly described athletes and audiences, selected telling quotes from her subjects, and used illustrative anecdotes to grab the reader's attention. All these techniques reappeared in her articles about the prisoners, rebels, and officials she met in Indochina. In short, she had learned how to write for the daily press, whose readers wanted information that they could assimilate without too much intellectual effort.<sup>28</sup>

In her foreign reporting of the 1920s, Viollis openly expressed some political opinions, as many investigative journalists did. The preface to her 1927

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24 AV, "Vendredi de la femme," *Vendredi* (22 November 1935).

25 AV, *Seule en Russie, la Baltique à la Caspienne* (Paris: Gallimard, les Documents bleus, no. 38, 1927), 21; and Sidonie Smith, *Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women's Travel Writing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 121.

26 AV, *Torment sur l'Afghanistan* (Paris: Valois, 1933), 219.

27 "M Lloyd George et le Lord Chief Justice dans la Somme, de notre correspondant particulier," *LPP* (15 September 1916).

28 Arlette Farge, "Penser et définir l'événement en histoire," *Terrain* 38 (March 2002): 70.



book on the Federation of Soviet Republics observed that she saw, “An enormous mass of one hundred and forty million people ... following the directions of the seven hundred thousand dictators of the communist party.” She concluded that “Russian-style bolshevism would not make inroads in Europe and particularly in France,” because it severely limited freedom of expression and over-regulated everyday life.<sup>29</sup> Conversely, she was positive about Alexandra Kollontai’s radical reforms in marriage and divorce laws, and about Kollontai’s innovations in maternity and child care. However, she expressed reservations about provisions for easy access to abortion, which may have been her obeisance to the anti-abortion climate in France after the passage of the draconian anti-female birth control and abortion law of 1920.<sup>30</sup> Yet her reservations did not fully reflect her own opinion. With no commentary, she recorded communist reactions to her discomfort about abortion, to the effect that the Soviets viewed abortion differently than hypocritical countries that criminalized abortions without reducing the number of abortions. Instead of focusing on raising the birth rate, a Soviet official insisted that the Soviet Union emphasized the fight against infant mortality.<sup>31</sup> She did not mention, because she did not need to tell contemporary readers, that France had criminalized abortion without reducing the number of abortions or that the French state aggressively pursued a pronatalist policy after the First World War. Juxtapositioning her expressed concerns about abortions with Soviet views about abortion and their implicit criticisms of the French situation cleverly let her feminist sensibilities speak to her audience.

Later works would use similarly indirect ways to raise political awareness about other issues. Sometimes she let others take the political action her reporting called for. Whereas she did not take any political action in or after her 1933 article on Indochina, one month after it appeared, the editor of *L'Esprit*, Emmanuel Mounier, printed a follow-up piece in the form of a tear-out petition demanding an investigation into the brutal repression of the Yen Bay massacre, amnesty for rebels, assurances of free speech, and preparation for eventual independence.<sup>32</sup> By 1936, when she returned to her criticism of the unmitigated severity of the repression of 1929-1932, she published an impassioned plea for a total amnesty.<sup>33</sup> When she turned to anti-fascism in the mid 1930s, she was more overtly political in her writing.<sup>34</sup>

29 AV, préface, in *Seule en Russie*, 9-11.

30 Jean Elizabeth Pedersen, “Regulating Abortion and Birth Control: Gender, Medicine, and Republican Politics in France, 1870-1920,” *French Historical Studies* 19 (Spring 1996): 673-98.

31 AV, chapter XXVI, Mariage, Divorce, Avortement, 243-4, and chapter XXVII, Madame Alexandra Kollontai, in *Seule en Russie*.

32 Emmanuel Mounier, “Pour la vérité en Extrême-Orient,” *L'Esprit* (January 1932).

33 AV, “Ce qu’attend l’Indochine,” and “Nous voulons l’amnésie,” *La Lutte* (4 March and 8 July 1936).

34 AV, “Gretchen muée en Walkyrie,” *Vendredi* (23 July 1936).

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Viollis was a literary journalist who also wrote fiction. Combining literary and journalistic careers was less common than it had been in the nineteenth century, but it was not unusual in a country that only had a handful of journalism schools and equally few fledgling journalists' unions (one of which Viollis joined becoming the only woman elected to the executive committee).<sup>35</sup> Before the First World War, she published a successful novel, *Criquet*, first in the form of a magazine serial — a popular mode of literary publication at that time — and then as a book. The novel garnered favourable reviews as a groundbreaking exploration of the sentiments of an adolescent girl at a time when adolescence was just being identified as a stage of life.<sup>36</sup> In the wake of her prize for foreign reporting and the media attention that greeted it, she republished the novel.<sup>37</sup> In both *Criquet*, and a 1925 novel she co-authored with her second husband,<sup>38</sup> Viollis developed the literary skill of revealing character through succinct physical description with special attention to facial features. She subsequently used these literary techniques in her reporting. If there are instances in her work on Indochina, China, and Japan of her resorting to Asian stereotypes, they were mostly adjectives, such as inscrutable, which she applied to crowd scenes. Especially when she depicted individual Indochinese, Chinese, and Japanese (and later African) people, she described revealing and appealing physical and facial features.

Viollis made her name for serious foreign and colonial reporting. In the Soviet Union, she visited prisons and spoke to many ordinary people, as well as to leaders “from whom she did not hide her doubts and criticisms.” She discussed the large number of “abandoned children,” derelict housing, and restrictions on minorities.<sup>39</sup> When she learned that Gandhi was touring India with his disciples and preaching a campaign of non-violent protest, she went to India. As a prominent French Orientalist wrote in the preface to her book on India, *L'Inde contre les Anglais*, she eschewed the “literary exercises that India had repeatedly inspired for centuries: the India of rajas ....” Instead, she conducted close-up investigations of “suffering and militant India.”<sup>40</sup> Her observations included many instances of economic exploitation, notably in the

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35 Thomas Ferenczi, *L'Invention du journalisme en France: Naissance de la presse moderne à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Plon/Payot, 1996), 243-57.

36 Kathleen Alaimo, “The Authority of Experts: The Crisis of Female Adolescence in France and England, 1880-1920,” in *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mill: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960*, eds. Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Soland, and Christina Benninghaus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 149-63.

37 AV, *Criquet* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1913) and (Paris: Gallimard, 1934).

38 Andrée and Jean Viollis, *La Perdrix dorée* (Paris: Baudinière, 1925), republished as *Puyccerrampion* (Paris: La Bibliothèque française, 1947).

39 AV, préface, in *Seule en Russie*, 9-11.

40 Régis-Leroi, “Ce qu’Andrée Viollis a vu aux Indes,” *Minerva* (26 April 1931), and Sylvain Lévi, préface, to AV, *L'Inde*.

41 *Ibid.*, 34-5.

textile trade.<sup>41</sup> Here, as elsewhere, she saw the relationship between workers in the colonies and the metropolis with great acuity. As co-director of *Vendredi*, she created a Colonial Page, because “few problems facing our époque are as serious, pressing, or sad as that of colonization.” She clarified that *Vendredi*’s page would “differ from others in that it would not celebrate colonials, but rather indicate the defects and injustices ... and seek in each colony the causes and remedies for any malaise.”<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, the spread of fascism in Europe cut this initiative even shorter than the short-lived leftist weekly, which closed in 1936. After its demise, Viollis concentrated on the menace of fascism in Europe.<sup>43</sup>

For nearly two centuries, French penetration of Cochinchina, Cambodia, and Vietnam had largely been the work of Catholic missionaries. In the mid-1880s, after the consolidation of the Third Republic, a colonial lobby composed of politicians, businessmen, adventurers, and scholars had taken an interest in the area. A leading republican (and twice Prime Minister) Jules Ferry devised a rationale, a “civilizing mission,” for colonial expansion to motivate a never-enthusiastic nation to invest in overseas possessions. As a majority of republicans in the Chamber of Deputies rallied to the idea, a treaty between France and the new and very mixed colony of Indochina was ratified in 1885. The metropolitan press, including *Le Petit Parisien*, popularized exploratory voyages by Frenchmen. Like many manuals in the new public school system, the press emphasized the humanitarian motives of violent incursions and elided economic motivations for these and more pacific ventures.<sup>44</sup>

In 1905 and again in 1917 the Ministry of the Colonies endorsed the doctrine of association, which replaced earlier references to conquests and acquisitions connected with the policy of assimilation, using more conciliatory language about incorporation and inclusion in metropolitan France. In reality, the differences between assimilation and association were modest: the latter was simply a less expensive policy that relied more on local elites to govern and exploit the economic resources of the colonies. Following the First World War and the creation of the Society of Nations, colonial rationales depended more on claims of development (*mise en valeur*). Albert Sarraut, twice Governor of Indochina before and during the war, and twice Prime Minister in the 1930s, lobbied for a policy of colonial development to rebuild the French economy. In the predominantly moderate and radical republican legislature, he won cross-party support in key parliamentary committees. Mines, rice production, rubber plantations, cotton, tobacco, and sugar production were intensified. However,

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42 AV, “Le Problème colonial,” *Vendredi* (19 November 1935), and Sauret in BHVP, Fond Bouglé.

43 AV, “Le Cœur d’Europe” (series on Czechoslovakia), *Ce Soir* (May 1938).

44 J.P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5, 16-18.

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the war had reduced the colonial service, which was faced with periodic anti-colonial violence organized by secret societies. Colonial governments ruled by decree, with, at best, a consultative assembly dominated by European settlers in Cochinchina.<sup>45</sup>

In Indochina, peasant rebels who had been mobilized by scholar rebels in preceding generations were by 1930 being organized by communists, some of them educated in France. However, the most famous of the French-educated communists, Nguyen Ai Quoc, best known by his last pseudonym, Ho Chi Minh, had not yet returned to Indochina. In France, from 1917 through 1923, Nguyen Ai Quoc had mingled in union and left-wing circles. At the pivotal Congress of Tours, where communists and socialists split, he had sided with the communists, largely on the basis of the communist position on imperialism. In the 1920s many Vietnamese encountered communism in Canton, which became a kind of an anti-imperialist Mecca.<sup>46</sup> By 1930 the prisons were full of communists, nationalists, and anti-imperialists. Communist inmates proselytized among other prisoners and coordinated resistance efforts outside the prisons.<sup>47</sup>

Ever since the French government had taken nominal control over Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and tried to consolidate these disparate regions into a single colony in the late nineteenth century, journalists had fed popular interest in Indochina with articles in newspapers that financed their travel. Many had produced separate volumes on their travels, and some wrote novels and short stories set in Indochina. So too did popular novelists, including several Frenchwomen. Exotic and picturesque elements, notably descriptions of the ruins of the remarkable temple Angkor Wat in Cambodia, were common features of this literature. Early novelists told adventurous tales of European conquests; later novelists concentrated more on the relationship between colonists and natives, often focusing on the mixed couple composed of a white man and an indigenous concubine called a *congaie*. Most of these accounts presented indigenous people as inscrutable and their “boys” (male servants) as treacherous and greedy, all of them typical Indochinese stereotypes.<sup>48</sup> Although aspects of the picturesque appear in her original series of articles and her 1935 book on Indochina, Viollis’ work on Indochina avoids adventurous narratives

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45 Ibid, 19 and 29; and Thomas, 18, 23, 32, and 57-63.

46 David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 256-9.

47 Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 200ff.

48 Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee. “Toward a Chronology of Representations,” in *France and Indochina: Cultural Representations*, eds. Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (New York, Oxford, Toronto: Lexington Books, 2005), 3-6; and Michael G. Vann, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Variation and Difference in French Racism in Colonial Indochine” in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, eds. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

and descriptions of cohabitation. Her age — sixty-one — more than her gender account for her avoidance of adventure tales, since she had, in the past, indulged in this masculine genre. The brief, rather incidental references to cohabitation, surely a subject of interest to Frenchwomen, no doubt reflect her decision to focus on political and economic analysis in this, as in her other works on foreign and colonial travels.<sup>49</sup>

During and after the International Colonial Exhibition of 1931 held in Paris — an exhibition designed to celebrate the economic and cultural benefits of French and European colonialism<sup>50</sup> — there was a flood of publications celebrating colonial riches and French development of those riches.<sup>51</sup> Viollis' first, rather anodyne newspaper series appeared in the course of this self-congratulatory frenzy. Almost simultaneously, a stream of works criticizing French colonial policy in Indochina after the Yen Bay massacre appeared. In her book Viollis informed readers that she had been influenced by two earlier publications denouncing the colonial administration and French colonists in Indochina.<sup>52</sup> *Viet-Nam, la tragédie indo-chinoise* by Louis Roubaud, a colleague on *Le Petit Parisien*, was part of a four-year long shift from the tabloid's tradition of colonial reportage glorifying colonial conquest to exposés of colonial abuses and reports on insurgents.<sup>53</sup> *Les Jauniers* by Paul Monet was a sharp condemnation of French planters' exploitation of thousands of Vietnamese dispossessed by massive flooding to recruit and retain "coolies" — a system, Monet noted, that resembled the widespread practice of trading and enslaving women and children.<sup>54</sup> Viollis' later publications covered exploitation and enslavement in general, with remarkably little attention to women and children. She also appended trial transcripts involving the massacre and added a bibliography of works to consult that included two works by colonial rebels, one of them the 1925 version of Nguyen Ai Quoc's *Le Procès de la colonisation française*.<sup>55</sup>

Viollis' indictments were so serious that she did not incorporate them in her original submissions to *Le Petit Parisien* and she hesitated about sending the more censorious article to *L'Esprit* for two years.<sup>56</sup> Although one scholar has

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49 Germaine Grey, "Les Livres et la politique, Ce qu'Andrée Viollis a vu en Chine et au Japon," *Minerva* (13 May 1933), in BHVP, Fonds Bouglé.

50 Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000), 1ff.

51 For example, Charles Robequain, *L'Indochine française* (Paris: Horizons de France, 1930).

52 AV, *Indochine S.O.S.*, 31.

53 Louis Roubaud, *Viet-Nam, la tragédie indo-chinoise* (Paris: Valois, 1931).

54 Paul Monet, *Les Jauniers: Histoire vraie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1930).

55 AV, *Indochine S.O.S.*, Annexes and Bibliographie. The Bibliothèque Nationale only contains later versions of Ho Chi Minh's book.

56 Renoult, 136, and Jeandel, 16.

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questioned her courage about exposing her attitude toward colonialism,<sup>57</sup> her motives for delaying publication were not insidious. She did not delay because she was a supporter of colonialism in 1931. On the contrary, she was on a path to rejection of colonialism. While she had paid obeisance to the notion of a French civilizing mission in her 1929 series of articles on Afghanistan,<sup>58</sup> *L'Inde contre les Anglais*, published in 1930, questioned the viability of colonialism. This book warned that if Indians revolted against Britain, the whole of Asia would revolt against Europe, that if Britain was vulnerable to the disintegration of its empire, all colonial powers were vulnerable.<sup>59</sup> Even before she travelled to Indochina, she had accepted that imperialism was vulnerable.

Nor did she postpone public censure of the colonial regime because she failed to draw negative conclusions in 1931. In the book on Indochina, she records that she openly questioned the Minister of the Colonies' purely political solution — better representation of indigenous people on local and national councils — and advocated pardons for all rebels condemned to death, immediately after the minister departed.<sup>60</sup> She stayed on in Indochina. Not surprisingly, as she testified, “The atmosphere became unbearable. Those who had welcomed me amicably turned their backs on me. No doubt their attitude was the result of superior orders.”<sup>61</sup> But the two-year lapse before sending her critical reactions to press was not due to a hostile reaction in the colony, which she left a few weeks after the Minister of the Colonies returned to France.

Instead, Viollis had occupational, personal, and political reasons to put off publishing her attack. She surely considered how receptive the editor of a pro-government newspaper would be to such a stinging indictment of the republican colonial system.<sup>62</sup> Although she praised Elie J. Bois as an editor who had confidence in special envoys and expressed gratitude to him for “letting me write what I think,” she also noted that Bois “sent me off saying ‘Go then, listen, observe, and try to understand. Be careful not to get too involved and especially, especially, remain objective’.”<sup>63</sup> In 1922, when she had socialized with Irish republicans and lobbied to stop the execution of Erskine Childers, a nationalist executed by the new Irish Free State during the Irish

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57 Kimberly J. Healey, “Andrée Viollis in Indochina: The Objective and Picturesque Truth about French Colonialism,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 31, 1 (2003): 26.

58 “Epilogue. *Le Petit Parisien* en Afghanistan,” *LPP* (28 October 1929).

59 AV, *L'Inde*, 266 and 269.

60 AV, *Indochine S.O.S.*, 123-5.

61 *Ibid.*, 169.

62 Francine Amaury, *Histoire du Petit Parisien*, vol. 3, *De Propagande de la IIIe République, 1876-1940* (Paris: PUF, 1972).

63 Frédéric Lefebvre, “Une Heure avec Andrée Viollis,” *Les Nouvelles littéraires* (23 April 1933), and Yves Dartois, “Mme Andrée Viollis, Prix de l'Europe Nouvelle,” *Intransigeant* (18 October 1933), in BMD, DOS VIO.

Civil War, Bois had pointedly reminded her of “the reporter’s modest role.”<sup>64</sup> Aware that she was involved in the colonial struggle nine years later, she must have realized that Bois would doubt her objectivity and/or think that she played an immodest role. In the event, she continued to collaborate on *Le Petit Parisien* until 1937, by which time she was also contributing to far more radical newspapers, including *L’Humanité*.

Another reason for delaying publication was the death of her second husband, Ardenne de Tizac, a conservator at the Cernushi Musée d’Art Asiatique in Paris, in 1932. Ardenne de Tizac, who wrote books and catalogue descriptions on Chinese art, as well as novels under the pseudonym Jean Viollis, had coauthored travel chronicles and the previously mentioned novel with his wife. Widowed with four children, Viollis had reason to be cautious about alienating her employer and political allies. While grieving the loss of her husband and adjusting to widowhood, she somehow found the time to edit three of the newspaper series on her travels in Asia for publication as books.

Until 1933, Viollis was also inhibited by her own republicanism. Born and married into republican families, when republicans were on the left of the political spectrum, she had not yet definitively moved further to the left in 1931, though she had been receptive to Fabian socialism during her English university years and to Irish nationalists in 1922.<sup>65</sup> In 1931, she was criticized by the communist newspaper, *L’Humanité*, for travelling to Indochina in “the baggage of Minister Paul Reynaud.”<sup>66</sup> The following two years changed the republic and Viollis’ political orientation. France began to feel the full effects of the Great Depression; the elections of May 1932 broke the hold of centre-right republicans on governments, which initiated a period of ministerial instability. The Stavisky financial scandal, and especially its cover-up, unleashed proto-fascist leagues into violent demonstrations that brought down the government in February 1934 and seemed to threaten the very regime. In defence, socialists and communists inched toward cooperation, a process that culminated in formation of the Popular Front government in 1936. In the same troubled period, Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and introduced a series of anti-democratic, anti-Semitic, and militaristic policies.

Meanwhile, Viollis had travelled from Indochina to Shanghai in 1932, arriving just before the Japanese invasion of that year, which she followed closely, cabling first-hand reports of combat in and around the city until she fell ill. Instead of returning to France, as most European victims of the influenza did, she chose to recuperate in Shanghai. Having suffered from tuberculosis in

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64 AV, “Les Femmes et le reportage,” *Marianne* (1 November 1933), in BMD, DOS VIO.

65 Renault, 19-25.

66 P. L., “Aujourd’hui. A propos de Mme Andrée Viollis,” no source or exact date indicated, in the BMD, DOS VIO.

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her youth and early adulthood, this was a courageous and dedicated decision. Once recovered, she resumed cabling *Le Petit Parisien*. Next she went to Japan, where she filed dispatches on public manifestations of Japanese militarism and fascist tendencies. She subsequently told a reporter that visiting these two countries overturned her preconceptions that Chinese nationalism did not exist and Japan was a bastion of order and civilization.<sup>67</sup> In short, she did not impose her preconceptions on these two countries. Like her reports from Afghanistan in 1929, which followed the progress of one of its many armed regime changes, the reports from China and Japan were printed by *Le Petit Parisien*.<sup>68</sup> As she had done with previous foreign reporting, she gathered these articles into books, one on Shanghai and two on Japan. Two of these books and her book on Afghanistan were published in 1933.<sup>69</sup> That same year, she won a political reporting prize for her Japanese exposé, but also for the entire body of her work, awarded by *L'Europe nouvelle*, the review of foreign policy founded by Louise Weiss, one of two other Frenchwomen doing international reporting.<sup>70</sup>

After her 1933 visit to Japan, Viollis became something of an authority on Japan.<sup>71</sup> From that point forward, she focused more on fascism in Europe than on the colonies. Her opposition to fascism drew her to the most outspoken opponents of fascism, communists. Both new confidence in herself and new confidants encouraged Viollis to be bolder in her mid-1930s publications on Indochina.

With this background, let us consider Cooper's critique of Viollis' texts on Indochina. First, Cooper dismisses Viollis' advocacy of equality between colonizers and colonized as merely equality between people of the same social class. Cooper's main piece of evidence is Viollis' disgust at the way Vietnamese political prisoners who were educated in France and who were therefore, in Cooper's opinion, of the same social strata, were treated by "ignorant settlers."<sup>72</sup> Second, Cooper charges that Viollis, like Roubaud, painted a debased picture of the colonizers and called for a kind of patriarchal feminism, in which the French and especially Frenchwomen would be moral tutors to uncivilized natives. Neither reporter, she contends, appealed for the right of the Indochinese to govern themselves, as opposed to reinforcing the much-vaunted French civilizing mission. Thirdly, she accuses Viollis of portraying the indige-

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67 Lefebvre in BMD, DOS VIO.

68 Series entitled "*Le Petit Parisien* en Afghanistan," "*Le Petit Parisien* dans l'Inde," and "*Le Petit Parisien* en Chine," *LPP* (November 1929, April 1930, and December 1931-February 1932).

69 *AV, Tourment, Changhai et le destin de la Chine*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paris: Corr ea, 1933); *Le Japon et son Empire* (Paris: Grasset, 1933), and *Japon intime*.

70 Dartois in BHVP, Fonds Bougl e.

71 A paper she presented to the prestigious Cercle Descartes was published as "Le Conflit Sino-Japonais," *Cahiers du Cercle Descartes* no. 7 (1938).

72 Cooper, 96.



nous people drawn into the new capitalistic economic system as morally and physically degraded, as “animal-like others.”<sup>73</sup> She implies that Viollis’ approach falls in the category of a typical journalistic rhetoric of empire, which consists not so much of establishing a radical opposition between colonizer and colonized, and hence of confrontation with an independent Other, but rather of domination by inclusion and domestication of the colonized.<sup>74</sup>

Viollis’ *Esprit* article and the first chapter of her Indochina book describe a tour of a political prison, an appropriate site to inspect given a history of prison riots in the colony, earlier exposés of prison conditions, and the incarceration of recently arrested rebels. Even though she was escorted by a prison official, she encountered young political prisoners who complained about their treatment. These prisoners spoke French, though that did not necessarily mean they had been educated in France, since francophone schools had proliferated in Indochina. One of the prisoners declared that he was a communist, which no longer implied education in France. Instead of passing judgment on Viollis’ reliance on French-speaking indigenous people, as Cooper does, try to imagine what other language would assure direct communication with Indochinese prisoners. In preparation for a three-month stay, Viollis could hardly have learned any of the Indochinese languages, not to mention several of them, well enough to converse with rebels or to understand and represent their conversations correctly.

Like any good reporter, she recorded both the prisoners’ complaints and the prison official’s response, albeit, also like many reporters, with more sympathy toward the prisoners. Soon after the prison interviews, Viollis received letters from three indigenous rebels, two of them educated in France, who expressed admiration of her earlier critique of British imperialism and favourable coverage of Ghandi and Indian nationalism in *L’Inde contre les Anglais*. These rebels asked her to meet them clandestinely and escorted her to an obscure location, where they told her of official maltreatment upon their return to Indochina. They decried the lack of basic liberties, such as freedom of the press and freedom of assembly, which they, like Viollis, associated with the French revolutionary tradition. If an education in the secular schools of Third Republic France (including public schools in the colonies) meant that they had political and civic values in common with Viollis, these political and civic values do not add up to similar class positions, as Cooper posits. Like other famous women journalists of this period, Viollis came from a privileged background and was very well-educated at the Sorbonne and Oxford.<sup>75</sup> As a sixty-one year old Frenchwoman, she differed from the young rebels she interviewed in age, race,

73 Ibid., 100-3.

74 David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 24 and 32.

75 Jeandel, 233.

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gender, and secure employment. It is a tribute to her capacity to empathize that she represented the young communist rebels favourably long before she aligned with the Communist Party in 1934, in reaction to the proto-fascist demonstrations mentioned above.<sup>76</sup>

In addition to providing information about overcrowding, infestation of vermin, limited access to infirmaries, and restrictions on reading material and visitors, the rebels disclosed the systematic practice of torture. In her words: "I did not want to, I could not believe this. But my hosts gave me such precise and complete information that I was slowly convinced." Clearly, her preconceptions had been smashed. Her initial resistance may seem naïve today, but it resembles the first reactions of many Americans to the Abu Graib photographs and, a generation earlier, of many French people to the scenes of torture in the film "The Battle of Algiers." Of course, Viollis could not visually shock her readers, not because she lacked a photographer (one travelled with her) but because she was not admitted to the prison's torture rooms. After further inquiries, she compiled a list of types of torture and coolly itemized archaic techniques and the application of modern electric devices. The shift from emotive to scientific language operates to intensify the reader's horror. As an admiring colleague said of her writing, it was characterized by "duality. She gives us ... charm with figures. To the technical knowledge of her *metier*, she joins the gift of life, enthusiasm, and ardent curiosity ...."<sup>77</sup> In this case, she brought empathy and shock to the data. But, as always, she brought her curiosity.

The *Esprit* article and the first chapter of *Indochina S.O.S.* end with an explanation that she would not discuss "the principle of colonization." But, in another juxtaposition that undermines the previous statement, she tags on a declaration that she has lost her belief that the country that had first accorded colonial indigenous men the right to vote, i.e., France, used more humane colonial methods than England did.<sup>78</sup> The initial assumption about a more humane French approach to colonies reflected the interwar lobbying effort, most notably conducted by a former and future colonial governor, Albert Sarraut, to convince an indifferent French public that France was "developing" and/or civilizing its colonies.<sup>79</sup> Viollis' declaration breaks with any assumption about the benefits of colonialism. Unlike her colleague Louis Roubaud, who continued to advocate moral reform of colonialism,<sup>80</sup> she was on a trajectory that culminated in her support of the Vietnamese demand for independence in 1946.<sup>81</sup>

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76 "Histoire de *Vendredi*," *Vendredi* (22 May 1936).

77 Suzanne Normand, "Une grande journaliste: Andrée Viollis," *Nouvelles Littéraires* (1929), in the BMD, DOS VIO.

78 AV, *Indochine S.O.S.*, 54.

79 Thomas, 30-2 and 62; and Spurr, 120-1.

80 Gaston Pelletier and Louis Roubaud, *Empire ou colonies?* (Paris: Plon, 1936).

81 AV, "Désillusion provisoire," in *La Vérité sur Viet-Nam* (Paris: La Bibliothèque française, 1949).

It is true that Viollis related better to French- and English-speaking colonial subjects and often used francophones and anglophones as informants. Because she spoke French and English, she had relied heavily on resident francophones or anglophones in trips to and publications on Russia and Afghanistan. Moreover, she admits that she often felt ill at ease when surrounded by people whose language she did not know.<sup>82</sup>

Perhaps this situation is one reason she responded so well to anglophone nationalists in India that her 1929 articles and 1930 book on India were openly anti-colonial and pro-self-government. Another important reason was Indian nationalists' appeal to basic democratic principles. She admired Ghandi's deployment of civil disobedience,<sup>83</sup> because she was a pacifist. During the First World War, Viollis had been a volunteer nurse on the front lines. Service in an ill-equipped front-line hospital which conducted up to eighteen major operations a day made her a pacifist.<sup>84</sup> But she was not an 'integral pacifist', since she sympathized with the communist rebels in Indochina, and, after struggling with the tension between pacifism and anti-fascism, supported the republicans during the Spanish Civil War in the mid-1930s. She also joined the Resistance during the Second World War.<sup>85</sup> Finally, she found it easier to indict a colonial power other than France, for, like many republicans, she was an ardent nationalist in the wake of the First World War.<sup>86</sup> Her nationalism also affected later work on the colonies. Although her final book on the colonies, *Notre Tunisie* (1938) sympathetically recorded the demands of Tunisian nationalists, she was, after the Ethiopian War, preoccupied with an Italian threat to French colonies. I hardly need to note the significance of her use of the adjective "Our" in the title. This language, and the brevity of her trip, made her less critical of French than of Italian colonial methods.<sup>87</sup>

It is also accurate to say that Viollis reported offensive deeds and words of colonial officials in Indochina. After visiting, inquiring about, and describing the long working hours, low wages, and terrible working and living conditions of plantation and textile workers, she attended a dinner in Tonkin. The planter seated on one side of her bemoaned letting the Indochinese speak about their conditions (presumably in local assemblies and newspapers), because it had made it impossible to hire a cheap labour force. Without further comment, she

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82 AV, *Seule en Russie*, and *Tourment*, 24.

83 AV, chapters XI and XII in *L'Inde*, and 266-9.

84 BMD, DOS VIO, *Lettres*, Viollis to Harlon, (5 October 1915).

85 AV, "Le Miracle du Peuple Espagnol," *Vendredi* (1 September 1936). On the struggle to reconcile anti-fascism and pacifism, see "A la conference internationale de la jeunesse, Andrée Viollis parle du fascisme et de la guerre," *L'Oeuvre* (14 April 1935), in BMD, DOS VIO.

86 AV, *Alsace et Lorraine au-dessus des passions* (Paris: Editions Victor Attinger, 1928). See especially the Lettre-Préface by the President of France, R. Poincaré.

87 AV, *Notre Tunisie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939). On Italian actions in the Ethiopian war, see AV, "Attentat contre la paix," *Vendredi* (20 December 1935).

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tells us, she turned to a planter on her other side and asked whether he did not feel an obligation to bring the benefits of European civilization to the colony, since she had seen their poor conditions and had been told of many cruel practices. The planter replied that there were brutes here, as elsewhere, but she should not generalize.<sup>88</sup> Note that in this exchange she was not referring to the vaunted benefits of European civilization (which she had already questioned, in the first chapter of the book), but rather to minimal labour standards that would meliorate the impact of metropolitan capital investment in the colony. She makes no direct judgement at this point in the book, but the specific and documented details about working and living conditions in the preceding passage ensure that most readers would be persuaded of their truth and disgusted by the two planters' responses. Once again, she contrasts personal observation backed by statistical information to prejudices, in this case, on the part of colonizers.

She was blunt in a subsequent passage. After stopping at several officials' residences in Laos, she writes, "I was stupefied by the table conversation of certain administrators, their egoism, and their puerility. There is no question of paying indemnities, returning to France, of regret. Is this possible? Are these men blind? Have they no concern about their duty, or of the anguishing problems here? Don't they see the writing on the wall?"<sup>89</sup> This passage is reminiscent of her anguished reaction to details of torture. The personal reactions of investigative journalists were part of the story.

It is indisputable that Viollis portrayed the plight of starving peasants as dehumanizing. Consider the most disturbing passage. Having stopped at a "huge hangar" filled with starving peasants, she writes:

What I saw then, I will never be able to forget.

In an immense enclosure, surrounded by wooden barriers, 3 to 4,000 human beings, dressed in dirty rags, were so crowded together that they formed a mass .... On each of them, all the signs of sickness and degeneration: swollen or sunken faces, missing teeth, dull or runny eyes, ulcerated sores. Were they men, women, or children? I do not know. No more of age or sex, nothing but a mortal poverty that cried out like an animal.<sup>90</sup>

The comparison to animals is demeaning, but there is pathos in this passage as well as a purpose: to expose the indifference of the colonial regime. She next notes that the wife of the local colonial agent, surprised by Viollis' shock, told her, "This often happens here." As she frequently did, she lets the narrative and descriptive material carry the moral message. Subsequently, she remarks upon the insensitivity of colonial reactions to many abuses with some understanding

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<sup>88</sup> AV, *Indochine S.O.S.*, 112-3.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

of how they might have blocked out empathy. After detailing the exhausting and unpleasant labour of plantation workers, she observed that she was not as upset about working conditions as she would have been before she came to Indonesia: "A month ago I would have been indignant to see them at their work. Today, after too many horrifying spectacles, I no longer react so much. Have I arrived at the point where I understand the ironic and weary attitude of the best of the officials? Ah, the colonial virus!"<sup>91</sup>

The narrative, and the shaming of the colonial regime, continues. Her travelling companion, an official, since she was still on the official tour, explains that these peasants have experienced three bad harvests in a row: "We are feeding about 80,000 ... every five days .... It is partly their fault, ... they are so improvident. And anyway, they left their villages, became communists. So much the worse for them!"<sup>92</sup> When the minister arrives, he is advised not to stop over because his presence will cause a riot. The official party went on to a lunch of "fish, fowl, foie gras, champagne .... They took away plates still full. I could not eat a bite. The Minister seemed preoccupied."<sup>93</sup> Once again the contrast, in this case between starvation and satiation, delivers a message.

During that first visit, a local doctor showed her another hangar filled with sick people whom he diagnosed as "in the last stage of physiological distress. Nothing can be done for them." Asked by Viollis how many have died from starvation (more accurately, complications from starvation), he answered: "Not less than 10,000 .... And yet with forty centimes a day and the produce of their gardens, these unhappy people could have lived. You should return after the departure of the Minister, I will explain many things to you."<sup>94</sup> When she returned, she noticed hungry children among the patients and inquired about them. With "a bitter smile" and "an ironic tone" the same doctor answered:

"We hope that someone will buy them ... Why are you startled? The mothers themselves prefer to sell their children than to see them die in their arms. In so far as the people who adopt them, do not intend to lose their money, they nourish and care for them. Go on! Don't look so tragic! We quickly lose French prejudices here. Maternal love is still a luxury. Not starving, that is the essential thing."<sup>95</sup>

Evidence for Cooper's charge of patriarchal feminism or an expectation that Europeans, and especially European women, would civilize colonials is sorely lacking. There are familiar diatribes about the puerility of colonial women but

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91 Ibid., 115.

92 Ibid., 57.

93 Ibid., 59-60.

94 Ibid., 58-9.

95 Ibid., 104.

A FRENCHWOMAN WRITES ABOUT INDOCHINA, 1931-1949:  
ANDRÉE VIOLLIS AND ANTI-COLONIALISM

no complaints about their failure to improve morality in the colonies. Viollis, who supported women's suffrage and encouraged other women to enter the field of journalism,<sup>96</sup> was a liberal and egalitarian feminist, not a maternal feminist. She had no more illusions about women's moral superiority than she had about the vulnerability and moral frailty of women charged with murder ten years earlier. She certainly had no interest in the colonial lobby's French Society for Female Emigration (*Société française d'émigration des femmes*), which tried, with modest success, to increase the number of Frenchwomen emigrating to the colonies, hopefully to marry colonial officials, form French families, and end the practice of cohabitation with indigenous concubines.<sup>97</sup> If anything, her Indochinese writing pays less attention to Frenchwomen than her other colonial writings. Her gender alone did not determine her subject matter; nor did her feminism, which was, in any case, neither patriarchal nor maternal.

Ultimately, Viollis was a reporter who loved her job, especially the travel.<sup>98</sup> She admitted that as a woman in a man's field, she had to be tenacious.<sup>99</sup> Advising women who were considering entering the occupation, she explained:

[I]t requires method and discipline, much reflection, a profound knowledge of politics, and a lucid and observing spirit .... One must know how to look, not be influenced by superficial details to the point of drawing general conclusions, must possess a certain philosophical sense. Finally, one should try to escape one's own personality ... one should tell what one saw and not what one wanted to see ... the brain of a journalist should become a slate on which one writes ... the facts he or she has witnessed.<sup>100</sup>

In her travel reporting, Viollis described her goals as losing "my personal existence" and recording what she saw and heard. While she no doubt believed that she erased her personality, she was never absent from her reporting, and her very presence enhanced reader identification with the situation.

She was not postcolonial, nor was she an early version of the presently admired — though less often practiced — reflexive scholar. As André Malraux, himself a critic of the colonial regime in Indochina and a journalist there, said of her book on Indochina, she was a practitioner of a new kind of journalism: investigative reporting for the popular press.<sup>101</sup> Her perspective was always

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96 AV, "Les Femmes, doivent-elles vote?" *LPP* (23 May 1925), and "Les Enquêtes" in BHVP, Fonds Bouglé.

97 Marie-Paule Ha, "French Women and the Empire," in *France and Indochina*, 107-17.

98 AV, "L'Inde décevante," *La Française* (18 February 1933).

99 Dartois and Sauret in BHVP, Fonds Bouglé.

100 Dartois in BHVP, Fonds Bouglé.

101 André Malraux, preface, *Indochine S.O.S.* (1935), and *The Royal Way*, trans. Stuart Gilber (New York: Vintage Books, 1935).

that of a European open to other cultures. Long after it can have been a genuine representation of her attitude, she repeats the useful heuristic device of expecting a stereotype, such as savage or a barbarian, but instead finding sensible and civilized people. This kind of writing should be read for what it was, an appeal to a mass readership, not what scholars today think it should be. More importantly, by reporting details about the economic backbone of French colonialism, the exploitation of colonial workers, and the corruption of the colonial regime, Viollis challenged orthodox colonial ideologies of association and assimilation alike.

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**MARY LYNN STEWART** is a Full Professor and the Chair of Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University. She is currently working on the subsequent careers and achievements of the journalists—all women—employed by the world's first feminist daily, *Le Fronde*, which ceased regular publication in 1906. Her most recent monograph is *For Health and Beauty: Physical Culture for Frenchwomen, 1880s-1930s*, published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 2000. She also has a book in press: *Dressing Modern Frenchwomen; Marketing Haute Couture, 1919-1939*, which will be published by Johns Hopkins University Press in March 2008.

**MARY LYNN STEWART** est professeur titulaire à l'université Simon Fraser où elle est également titulaire de la chaire de l'étude des femmes. Elle s'intéresse actuellement aux carrières et réalisations subséquentes des journalistes—toutes des femmes—engagées par le premier quotidien féministe dans le monde, *La Fronde*, qui a cessé sa publication régulière en 1906. Sa plus récente monographie, *For Health and Beauty: Physical Culture for Frenchwomen, 1880s-1930s*, a été publiée par les presses de l'université Johns Hopkins en 2000. Elle a aussi un livre sous presse : *Dressing Modern Frenchwomen; Marketing Haute Couture, 1919-1939*, qui sera publié par les presses de l'université Johns Hopkins en mars 2008.