



## Lyautey, a real colonial?

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**A specialist in questions of conflict, particularly in colonial situations, Julie d'Andurain is interested in the warlike phenomena of the 19th and 20th centuries along several lines: a RETEX approach, which allows the tactical field to be approached, a classical historical approach in order to reconstruct professional paths, and a broader approach, such as "War Studies", which allows an opening to other human sciences.**

In drawing the portrait of Lyautey, Madame d'Andurain shows us how the open-mindedness and rejection of the conformism of his time enabled the Marshal to determine the contours of a profoundly original thought that became over time the embodiment of French colonial thought.

As everyone knows, General Lyautey was not a colonial. Coming from the staff corps and then assigned to the cavalry, he had not been seduced by the marine infantry or marine artillery when he left Saint-Cyr. Not only was he neither a porpoise nor a bigor, but he never particularly celebrated the marine troops as such. However, today, Hubert Gonzague Lyautey - this "metro" - appears not only as General Gallieni's faithful deputy, but above all as one of the great masters of colonial thought. He is even one of the rare French officers to have been able to make, in the wake of his master, the synthesis of all the traditions coming from Asia and Africa.

We should therefore ask ourselves whether it is not precisely this atypical and external career that would have allowed him to have a new, more distant view. and, above all, clearer - today we would say "out of the box" - about the needs of the military institution in general and its needs in the colonies in particular.

We will not dwell on his military career, which is known to all, but we will try to determine

the contours of this profoundly original thought, which over time became the embodiment of French colonial thought, to ask ourselves whether, in fact, Lyautey did not always go far beyond colonial thought. From the outset, he had a global vision of the world that led him to look beyond his milieu, his circle of thought and his professional universe, a guarantee of an open-mindedness that is still unanimously celebrated today.

### **A "man from the outside"**

As a result of a difficult childhood under the sign of illness, Hubert Lyautey forged a character very early on that led him to curb his anxiety through action. Coming from an elitist background and demanding of himself, he has the feeling of living in an imperfect world of smallness and mediocrity. Like many young men who had been in the barracks, he became aware of this especially during his time at Saint-Cyr, where he found life in the garrison quite hard to endure, a life in which one was not asked to reason, but simply to obey. This did not prevent him from graduating from the École spéciale militaire at a brilliant rank (29th out of 281), which opened the doors to the Staff College, but he constantly suffered from the narrow-mindedness of his compatriots. He was distinguished by his desire to give birth to a new society, his way of wanting to understand changes, to digest them in order to better adapt to them.

In his famous article "Du rôle social de l'officier" published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1891, he raised the question of the role of universal military service, but more fundamentally that of the "social role of the officer". a student youth, very few in number and very privileged, called to become the elite of the nation in a new republican system that he tries to tame. Basically, in this text where he never speaks only of himself, he already sets out his vision of a new world - the Republic - where an elite, cultivated and educated, must take charge of the whole of society through structures set up by the government. But on the question of the barracks, which interested him at the time, on the need to build buildings to accommodate soldiers, on the ability to forge a neighbourhood life that is not dull for men, he came up against administrative brutality, regulations that forbid innovative solutions. Believing that the Republic will probably be less warlike than the monarchy, but considering that it will in any case be laden with souls, he proposes a new way of acting - in peace, in a position of trust, in a position of trust. He proposes a new way of acting - in peace, in a defensive position in metropolitan France or in a pacifying project overseas - so as to allow this youth to which he belongs and in which he recognises himself, a new way of acting, a new way of being in the world.

In this context, his decision to leave far from a metropolis that is gradually suffocating him, from an army that he considers "idle, routine and tied up", constitutes one of the great moments of his life. It is not only his personal life, but a more global context in which he observes a country divided by the Dreyfus affair, divided by the way in which it is welcoming the legacy of 1789, divided over the religious question, even as he dreams of a union around a common project to prepare for the next battle against Germany. Already seeing himself as a "man from the outside", he decided to make action his way of life and adopted Shelley's line "joy in action" as his motto. In fact, action is also a way of not thinking, or of not thinking too much, so as not to see a world that he considers hideous, decadent, uninteresting. Ready for the outdoor school and "not jaded by greatness", he set off at the end of 1894 to discover a vast world on which France had begun to leave its mark. Very quickly, his experience with Colonel Gallieni in Tonkin filled him with joy. Not because it allowed him to go to war, but because he discovered with him and other officers, such as Théophile Pennequin (1849-1916) the future flag bearer of the "yellow force", as well as with some of the administrators, their ability to adapt, to transform, to

build a completely new world.

## **A "solutionist"**

In order to share his feelings, Lieutenant Colonel Lyautey wrote a lot to those close to him, as he was unable to do better with his life in the bush. His letters were a great success and soon went beyond the strictly family sphere to circulate within an ever-growing group. Sent to a group of friends, his "omnibus letters" then circulate in the hands of a network of friends such as Eugène Melchior de Vogüé, an academic and politician, as well as Albert de Mun, his mentor, Émile Boutmy, the founder of the École des sciences politiques, and many others. In doing so, Lyautey shows that he is already clearly aware of the close relationship between the army and the university, of the need to constantly link the pen to the sword, a pledge of strength and confidence in the future. He is equally open to industry, considering that, like the army, it harbours potential for action.

In his epistolary confidences, he very quickly defined himself as a "solutionist". What does he mean by this? After having left France for Tonkin, disgusted by the metropolitan administrative carcasses, he discovered Indochina by acting as General Duchemin's chief of staff (1837-1907), commander of the occupation corps. Immediately immersed in the needs of the territory, in immediate contact with the political world, in particular Governor Lanessan (1843-1919) who was as unorthodox as he was, his Tongan experience filled him up and broadened his horizons. With an overhanging vision, filled with wonder, he discovered that an administrator, even one with a different political orientation from his own, could afford to have a world view that was "unencumbered by regulations, affordable". His meeting with Colonel Gallieni in December 1894 convinced him that in the colonies there was a dynamic like no other, a new world that could become the dream territory of the anti-formalists.

To "fertilize" this new world quickly became his main leitmotiv. He was helped in his approach by Colonel Gallieni (1849-1916), five years his senior, who already had considerable and varied colonial experience, by Captain Louis Loyseau de Grandmaison (1861-1915), who told him about his vision of colonization, a new form of Roman conquest in which the main activity resided more in the construction of cities, following the example of the pioneers of America. Struck by the intensity of the creations set up in military territories where the colonels had absolute powers, he was totally conquered by these officers from Asia, whom he called "officers-farmers", by their desire to create a new world. On the military confines that he soon discovered with them, the founding principles of Gallienism are already being forged within an identified and recognised tandem. The "Gallieni-Pennequin tactic" laid down the principle of the "oil stain", the slow progress of pacification which simultaneously advances the construction of roads, telegraphs, markets, European and indigenous concessions. He, who does not have words harsh enough to criticize the method of colonization of Algeria, acknowledges that Gallieni and Théophile Pennequin have developed a method that is "... a method of colonization that is not only a method of colonization, but also a method of peace, a method that is not only a method of colonization, but also a method of peace. of the best Bugeaud", a project that both ensures the domination of the French while serenely envisaging the transfer of skills to the local elite.

## **Thinking leadership**

He is enthusiastic about this "outside life" because, even though he acknowledges that

questions of people take precedence over anything else in Hanoi, the distance from the metropolis pushes him back very much. The distance from the metropolis pushes away uniform rivalries, the "button spirit", questions of administration and offices, another form of the mandarin spirit, any system that Lyautey calls "obstructionist". Imagining himself as a soldier, a builder, a pioneer, he sees himself as a creator. "A colony is a business", he wrote to the Viscount of Vogüé and "it is not enough to be a soldier to make it fruitful". Very quickly, he came to the idea that the important thing is not to be military or civilian, but to build. The "right man in the right place", a famous expression in Lyautey's verbal register, is no more military than civilian. It is embodied in the "colonial", in other words, the one who is capable of having no "button spirit", who builds, organizes, pacifies and gathers.

After a year in Tonkin, his profession of faith is already largely complete. While he is obviously inspired by Colonel Gallieni's instructions and results, particularly in the military territories that he considers to be the best formula for achieving pacification as he perceives it, he has given up the transfer of powers to the local elites. On the other hand, based on the idea that political action must engender military action, he considered it urgent to forge a stable corps of civil servants for the colonies. As early as the summer of 1896, he began thinking about a new colonial formula:

"A cadre of officers from military territories such as existed in Algeria and above all in the intelligence service of Tunisia, stabilised and specialised by the mastery of languages as he saw it at work in the British colonial framework.

With his article on the "colonial role of the army" published again in 1900 in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Lieutenant-Colonel Lyautey synthesizes the projects of all the colonials. On the one hand, he proposed to the future "colonial troops" about to be set up by the law of July 1900 a wide-ranging political programme designed to meet the challenges of the Chinese campaign; on the other hand, he found a sort of *modus vivendi* between the two regimes - civilian and military - which were constantly opposed to the colonies. He proposes a system in which the chief draws indifferently according to his needs from a pool of personnel, according to his preferred formula "the right man in the right place", which alone authorises action where it is necessary. With this text, he shows that his colonial doctrine is immutable because it does not belong to any country or coterie. It transcends all previous debates to propose a flexible path authorizing action.

Colonel Lyautey's thinking as formulated in 1900 is in reality less colonial than has been said. He does not think of the "colony", that is, territories isolated from one another, as settlers necessarily do when they are locked up in their respective colonies. Having passed through Tonkin, about to leave for Madagascar, he has already grasped that his method must be adaptable wherever France has to go. It is therefore not a colonial thought in the strict sense of the word, but a global thought that reasons in terms of power and influence. Most of his thinking is driven by a political principle: that of ensuring the greatness of France. In his mind, colonial action is never but one of the means of France's external influence.

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