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Mark McKinney, *Redrawing French Empire in Comics*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013. xi + 288 pp. Notes, works cited, and index. \$79.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8142-1220-2; \$14.95 U.S. (cd). ISBN 978-0-8142-9321-8.

Review by Jennifer Howell, Illinois State University.

In *Redrawing French Empire in Comics*, Mark McKinney analyzes French-language comics published primarily after 1962 and in which colonialism in Indochina and Algeria is represented. As indicated in chapter one, the author's investigation focuses "on the reconstruction of French national and ethnic identities in comics, in reaction to decolonization, and especially the wave of recent works...which increasingly provide critical reflection on the historical links between comic books, imperialism and colonialism" (p. 30). This edition constitutes the second volume in McKinney's proposed trilogy on colonialism in French comics. The first volume, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics*, examines the representation of colonialism and imperialism in Hergé's and Alain Saint-Ogan's colonial-era works. [1] A third volume exploring new character types and narrative paradigms that appear in comics set in post-1962 France is currently underway.

As the leading scholar of post-colonial comics, McKinney makes another significant contribution to this growing area of inquiry with his most recent book, which will undoubtedly serve as a reference for scholars and students of French colonial history, post-colonial studies, and popular culture due to its thorough investigation of primary and secondary sources. Indeed, his study underscores the importance of French-language comics in the creation of a "working memory" (a term borrowed from Anne Rigney) of colonialism and decolonization in addition to placing the medium at the crossroads of narrative, representation, scholarly research and post/colonial relations in contemporary France (p. 13). McKinney's book fills a void in current scholarship on French colonialism and invites researchers to focus on the special relationship between colonialism and comics as a popular, multimodal narrative form. Organized into five chapters, McKinney's study is largely chronological with respect to French colonial history. After the introductory chapter, chapters two through four examine comic-book representations of French colonial Algeria (1830-1962), the Indochinese War (1946-1954) and the Algerian War (1954-1962), respectively. The final chapter proposes a synthesis of the previous chapters and uses Edward Said's notion of the "voyage in" and McKinney's homologous notion of the "voyage out" as key narrative tropes in the comics studied throughout his book (p. 211). McKinney's work represents the first published account of colonialism and decolonization in post-colonial comics and presents a logical and cohesive transition between his two other major studies on comics and colonialism.

McKinney's study begins with a close reading of the first plate of Farid Boudjellal's *Jambon-Beur*. [2] The purpose of this initial analysis is to identify what McKinney calls the "colonial affrontier" for his audience (p. 1). Defined as "a boundary that...divides and connects France and [her former colonies], and around which individuals and groups confront each other...or seek peace" (p. 3), the colonial affrontier "includes a temporal and ontological tension between a dying colonialism, an ill-defined post-colonial present and a post/colonial future" (p. 3). Through a highly contextualized introduction to the colonial affrontier, McKinney demonstrates the singular importance of comics as representation of both

colonialism and decolonization, emphasizing the medium's "dialogical, narrative and visual capacities" that allow it to reproduce and directly engage with colonial iconography (p. 27). In the opening pages, the author not only illustrates how cartoonists such as Boudjellal represent empire and its repercussions on French society today; he also lays the groundwork for his book's central thesis: in what ways are these comics post-colonial from an ideological perspective? How do cartoonists approach and/or traverse the colonial affrontier? What is the purpose of redrawing empire in French popular culture and what does it tell us about the relationship between France's colonial past and post/colonial present?

McKinney's focus on the colonial affrontier creates space for the articulation of a multifaceted approach to the redrawing of empire in French comics. The strength of this study lies in the centrality of the colonial affrontier as it justifies McKinney's examination of a relatively large and diverse corpus in terms of artistic development and political tendencies. McKinney argues that cartoonists engage with the colonial affrontier via five interrelated forms of colonial and imperialist genealogies. Those highlighted are the "familial, ethnic, national, artistic and critical" genealogies that form the basis for post-colonial explorations of French colonialism (p. 12). Indeed, the cartoonists studied throughout this book use comics to engage in personal and historical inquiries relative to France's colonial past and explore, even critique, colonialist aesthetics existent in iconography produced from the colonial period through the present.

Yet how do cartoonists like Boudjellal make use of the aforementioned genealogies to represent the colonial affrontier? According to McKinney, they exploit the documentary record, including colonial and family archives, as well as published works by historians and scholars in related disciplines (e.g., sociology, anthropology, art history). The resulting mosaic of sources lends itself to the reproduction of and critical reflection on colonial iconography and the imperialist ideologies it disseminates. In so doing, cartoonists actively transform archival memory into a working, cultural memory of French colonialism. I would argue, however, that the genealogical focus of McKinney's study makes a strong case for the transformation of archival memory into what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory" rather than working memory.^[3] Indeed the majority of cartoonists presented in *Redrawing French Empire in Comics* are themselves children of Algerian and Vietnamese immigrants, Pieds-Noirs and French conscripts. As such, their narratives focus on the experiences of mirrored character types (e.g., immigrants, Pieds-Noirs, soldiers) who are uniquely positioned with respect to the colonial affrontier and thus can actively "guard [it], challenge it or disregard it" (p. 7).

One potential shortcoming of McKinney's study is its unequal representation of France's colonial empire, reduced here to French Indochina and French Algeria. Despite his intention to highlight a "national framework" for his study of colonialism in French comics, he recognizes his book's "substantial comparative aspect," which focuses on just two manifestations of empire (p. 30). Yet, as previously indicated, McKinney's book should be viewed as part of a larger series in which he examines various publication periods, geographic regions, cartoonists and narrative settings. In his first volume, McKinney draws particular attention to sub-Saharan West Africa and the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris. In the third, he proposes a study of post-colonial immigrant communities, including Maghrebi and Caribbean populations, living in metropolitan France after departmentalization and decolonization (p. 222). His focus on Indochina and Algeria here stem from the various shared characteristics of their wars of decolonization (e.g., their duration, professional soldiers who served in both wars). In addition to his limited focus of the French colonial empire, he acknowledges that he devotes two chapters to Algeria and the Algerian War compared to only one chapter on the Indochinese War. He explains that this further imbalance is necessary due to the great number of comics published on French Algeria and its decolonization.

While McKinney is forthcoming about his book's weaknesses, those interested in other regions of the French colonial empire are left wondering if the identified genealogical focus is applicable to all comics that attempt to redraw empire. McKinney argues that the cartoonists studied here "provide a powerful

case-study of the recent transformation of an artistic tradition and of the conflicting positions taken on the divisive issue of France's colonial history" (p. 32). One of these positions relates to the sheer brutality the French army demonstrated in the Indochinese and Algerian wars. Is political trauma (e.g., a violent war of decolonization) therefore a critical piece of the puzzle? Have other moments of trauma, for example the Haitian Revolution, the Thiaroye massacre in Senegal or the 1947 Malagasy uprising, inspired cartoonists to redraw empire in ways that resemble those works selected for McKinney's study? How do these cartoonists use their art so as to "cross and help to dismantle the colonial affrontier" (p. 210)? Although McKinney makes several editorial judgments regarding which events to include—indeed he uses chapters three and four to "study the traces of some of the most violent wars of decolonization in French comics" (p. 32)—he mentions at the end of chapter four that cartoonists are now focusing on historical events traditionally excluded from French national history and underexplored in French comics, most notably the May 1945 protest and subsequent repression in Sétif and the October 17, 1961 massacre in Paris. Despite this potential opening to other moments of political trauma, these events are nevertheless intimately related to the Algerian War. Notwithstanding these minor criticisms, McKinney's study remains the product of extensive research, close readings, mature critical reflection and excellent writing. The book's various openings invite further inquiry into trauma studies and popular culture.

Chapter two argues, for example, that the redrawing of empire can, as in the case of colonial Algeria, serve to construct "a *virtual* place of memory for colonial sites,...a substitute for lost or physically inaccessible places of memory" (p. 35, McKinney's emphasis). This approach to French comics on colonial Algeria highlights several forms of McKinney's colonial genealogy, including familial, ethnic, national and artistic. With his focus on Jacques Ferrandez, a Pied-Noir cartoonist celebrated for his ten-volume series, *Carnets d'Orient*, McKinney draws attention to Pied-Noir commemorative projects that rework colonial history so as to integrate select minority and family narratives into dominant discourses and therefore national history. Rather than applaud their "attempts to inflect mainstream history," McKinney offers a cautionary reading of comics by Ferrandez and other Pied-Noir cartoonists (p. 53). In his discussion of Pied-Noir comics that serve as a virtual site of memory for French Algeria (a space that no longer exists), McKinney raises important questions regarding representation. Do Pied-Noir cartoonists such as Ferrandez ultimately justify French colonialism in their comics? Does orientalism and cartoonists' recycling of orientalist tropes inevitably serve to limit their critiques of colonialism and imperialism? McKinney's analysis identifies here what I would describe as the "post-colonial paradox" inherent in Ferrandez's project. To quote McKinney: "On the one hand, his reworking of historical material and of visual and print documents allows him to represent and criticize colonial-era attitudes and artistic visions. On the other hand, Ferrandez incorporates this borrowed material into what is finally and most basically a recuperative *commemoration* of French Algeria--this fact fundamentally limits his attempts to diverge from certain aspects of colonial society and the aesthetic movements that it helped to foster" (p. 56).

Chapter three combines the central arguments found in chapters two and four in that it posits French Indochina as a virtual site of memory. With his focus on French cartoonists of Vietnamese heritage such as Clément Baloup who also reflect on colonial genealogies, McKinney concludes that the colonial affrontier separating Indochina and France is less treacherous than the Algerian colonial affrontier. One of the reasons for this difference is the smaller settler population of colonial Indochina with respect to that of colonial Algeria. Consequently, McKinney has not found evidence of comics about Indochina produced by cartoonists of settler heritage. As cartoonists of Pied-Noir heritage constitute a large percentage of cartoonists working on French Algeria and the Algerian War, readers soon understand McKinney's decision to concentrate almost entirely on French comics about Algeria. If cartoonists interested in the Indochinese War (e.g., Clément Baloup, Lax and Giroud) also recycle colonial-era iconography and other source material, their resulting narratives allow the constitution of counter-memories and the articulation of what McKinney calls "post-colonial irony" (p. 143). Both types of narratives work against the colonial nostalgia present in Ferrandez's series as well as "the ideology of

authoritarian post-colonial regimes that took control in Vietnam and Cambodia” (p. 85). Interestingly, there are few (if any) French cartoonists of Algerian heritage who redraw empire so as to contest the ideology of dictatorial governments and fundamentalist attitudes in post-colonial Algeria. Here McKinney makes a clear distinction regarding the identity politics affecting the various cartoonists targeted in his study.

Of course not all comics on the Indochinese War function as counter-histories. McKinney devotes several sections of chapter three to earlier comics published during the war and until the early 1990s that simply reproduce colonial ideologies and mythologies (e.g., Asian eroticism) without criticizing them. In this respect, he balances his investigation of comics on colonial Algeria in which he finds several uncritical representations of French colonialism and *idées reçues* about the colonies. McKinney nevertheless uses this chapter and chapter four to further develop his notion of colonial genealogy. Contemporary French comics on colonialism invite readers to consider “how ethnic minority artists present a colonial past that informs their own position in France today” (p. 109). Hence this explains McKinney’s interest in Clément Baloup, Farid Boudjellal and artists of Pied-Noir heritage, among others.

Chapter four is unquestionably McKinney’s strongest. Here he proposes close analytical readings of comics published from 1962 to today, placing special emphasis on comics that he considers to be “polyphonic,” meaning “works that redraw empire critically and dialogically, from various, conflicting perspectives” (p. 151). This chapter is of particular interest to post-colonial scholars because it demonstrates that post/colonial practices are complex and highly productive in how they respond to colonial affrontiers. If artists working on the Algerian War today continue to make use of the documentary record and colonial source material, their objective is neither to commemorate colonialism nor engender feelings of nostalgia. The majority of Pied-Noir cartoonists presented here use representations of the Algerian War to engage in a more critical reflection on colonial Algeria and, more importantly, on wartime violence. More so than comics about colonial Algeria, those that depict the Algerian War present contemporary cartoonists like Ferrandez with the opportunity “to depict historical events and to intervene in debates about them” (p. 178). If cartoonists sometimes appear ambivalent to the colonial project (i.e., Ferrandez who continues to recycle colonial erotica in the second cycle of his series), their understanding of France’s colonial past becomes essential to their understanding of the post/colonial present. Several comics presented here are therefore symptomatic of Stora’s metaphor for social “gangrene,” of France’s failure to reconcile coexisting, yet equally painful memories of the Algerian War in the present.[4]

In his concluding chapter, McKinney suggests that French comics on colonialism can be read as a “voyage out.” Contrary to the “voyage in” that signals the arrival of exiles and other immigrants in former colonial powers, the “voyage out” refers to the colonization, surveying, or, as is the case of the cartoonists studied here, the (re)drawing of empire (p. 211). While the voyage in and France’s resulting multiculturalism is the subject of his next book, McKinney underscores the importance of the (imaginary) voyage out to those who can no longer access the colonial spaces of their past. Yet both voyages are necessary to deal with the colonial affrontier as they allow travelers to reconsider the exploitative relationships inherent in colonialism and perhaps even to reconfigure these relationships so as to create a more balanced interaction between former colonizer and former colonized and between contemporary governments and their citizens. For McKinney, “redrawing empire [therefore] involves undermining the colonial affrontier” (p. 221). Only after empire has been redrawn and the colonial affrontier reworked can cartoonists investigate traces of the colonial encounter in metropolitan France. Easily accessible to specialists and non-specialists alike, *Redrawing French Empire in Comics* constitutes a valuable addition to the growing body of literature on French-language comics, post/colonial cultures, and the history of empire.

NOTES

[1] Mark McKinney, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

[2] Farid Boudjellal, *Jambon-beur* (Paris: Soleil, 1995).

[3] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[4] Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli: La mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, [1991] 1992).

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