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Mark McKinney, *Postcolonialism and Migration in French Comics*. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University press, 2020. 400 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$74.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9-78-9462702417.

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Mark McKinney's *Postcolonialism and Migration in French Comics* examines comics published after Algerian independence and the fall of France's colonial enterprise in 1962. As indicated in the title, the author places particular emphasis on the representation of postcolonial themes such as immigration, ethnic-minority identity, and racism. This monograph completes a three-part series on (post)colonial French comics. The first volume, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics*, published in 2011 by Liverpool University Press, studies colonial-era works in which European imperialism surfaces as a central thematic. In this study, McKinney highlights works by two of the most influential artists in the Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée* tradition: Hergé and Alain Saint-Ogan. The second volume, *Redrawing French Empire in Comics*, published in 2013 by The Ohio State University Press, explores the representation of former French Indochina and colonial Algeria in comics published in large part after decolonization.[1] Regarding the volume currently under review, McKinney explains in his introductory chapter that it "...picks up where [his] previous two books left off, focusing this time on comics about the postcolonial era in France.... Its primary subject is migration and postcolonial ethnic minorities in France, and their relationships with the ethnic majority" (p. 41). As is characteristic of McKinney's previous works, *Postcolonialism and Migration in French Comics* is eloquently written, beautifully illustrated, and extensively researched. With this volume, McKinney makes yet another significant contribution to the field of postcolonial comics and Francophone studies. Readers unfamiliar with these areas of inquiry will especially appreciate the glossary of terms related to (post)colonialism, migration, and comics.

McKinney's monograph is organized into eleven chapters and includes fifty color halftones. Considerably longer than the previous two, this volume explores postcolonialism and migration as key narrative and artistic elements in French comics produced by both ethnic-majority and ethnic-minority artists. French (post)colonial history has made its way into comics by ethnic-majority artists, just as postcolonial ethnic-minority ones have made their way into the history of French comics. McKinney notes that "[m]any cartoonists from a wide range of backgrounds have continued to make comics about postcolonial and immigrant themes, but they now cover a wide and expanding range of events, characters, genres, styles, modes and perspectives" (p. 39). Before discussing these artists, McKinney distinguishes three moments that have influenced how the postcolonial immigrant has appeared in comics: the transition from colonial-era to neo-

colonial comics by the French far right during and immediately after the French Algerian War (1954-62); the emergence of more progressive and antiracist comics from the French left, following the publication of Mœbius's "Cauchemar blanc" in 1974; and, finally, the coming-of-age of ethnic-minority artists in the 1980s and the public recognition of their work. For each of these moments, McKinney identifies representative artists to whom he will return in later chapters: Coral (pseudonym for Jacques de Larocque-Latour, an artist associated with the far right), Mœbius (nom de plume for the left-leaning artist Jean Giraud), and Anita Comix (a collective of three ethnic-minority artists: Farid Boudjellal, José Jover, and Roland Monpierre). For Coral, the figure of the postcolonial immigrant—frequently depicted as a violent single male—constitutes a threat to French society and is complicit in the "colonization" of France by people of color. Mœbius would later promote an antiracist discourse in his treatment of the postcolonial immigrant, this time drawn as a victim of white neocolonialist racism. Anita Comix would further contribute to this evolution by (re)asserting the agency and self-expression of the artist as postcolonial subject.

In chapters two and three, McKinney traces the emergence of antiracist postcolonial French comics after and in response to the publication of Mœbius's "Cauchemar blanc," analyzed in chapter one. As in other forms of French cultural production, more-or-less assimilated subjects would progressively replace the figure of the single male immigrant in comics, resulting in the representation of France as a culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse space. Contrary to comics aligned with far-right ideologies (the subject of chapters six and seven), the comics studied in this chapter illustrate the ways in which the permanent presence of the postcolonial Other in the Hexagon has changed the composition and artistic representation of French society. McKinney begins this section with Chantal Montellier's antiracist comics that rework elements of "Cauchemar blanc" and integrate the figure of the postcolonial immigrant as the victim of French racism. McKinney effectively demonstrates that Mœbius's seminal short paved the way for other ethnic-majority artists to include themes related to postcolonialism and migration in their work in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mœbius also inspired ethnic-minority artists, most notably those of Anita Comix, whose comics McKinney categorizes as "avant-garde" with respect to form and content (p. 56). Keenly aware that Anita Comix does not meet standard definitions of what constitutes an avant-garde artistic movement, McKinney nevertheless argues in favor of reading this collective's work as such based on Raymond Williams's understanding of the transnational dimension of turn-of-the-century avant-garde movements in Europe.^[2] The remainder of chapter two explores the "new realist" work of Anita Comix, as well as José Jover's and Roland Monpierre's individual comics, while chapter three provides an in-depth analysis of Farid Boudjellal's realist comics. Through close readings, McKinney contends that these artists "...have used innovative drawing and narrative techniques to unsettle received ways of viewing colonial history, migration and postcolonial France in and through comics" (p. 90). Some readers may find McKinney's presentation of postcolonial comics published after Mœbius's "Cauchemar blanc" unbalanced (more attention is paid to ethnic-minority than to ethnic-majority artists, and an entire chapter is devoted to Boudjellal). McKinney notes that postcolonial-themed comics by ethnic-majority artists in the 1970s and 1980s "...are too numerous for [him] to list them all here" (p. 60). He does, however, devote chapters four and five to celebrated left-leaning ethnic-majority artists: Baru (Hervé Barulea), Enki Bilal, and Jean-Christophe Chauzy. Moreover, unlike Jover and Monpierre, Boudjellal has remained active and highly prolific for over four decades. As an autodidact,

Boudjellal has also experimented with various artistic techniques throughout his career, which makes limiting his work to any particular aesthetic movement difficult.

Chapters four and five shift focus from ethnic-minority cartoonists to three ethnic-majority artists: Baru, Enki Bilal, and Chauzy. Like Boudjellal, Baru has enjoyed a long career as a comics artist. He won the Fauve d'Or in 1991 and 1996 for best comic-book album, and, in 2010, he received the Grand Prix de la Ville d'Angoulême (a lifetime achievement award) at the Angoulême International Comics Festival. McKinney reserves a single chapter for Baru due to the “dense intertextual connections” that unite several of his works (p. 145). Within the framework of McKinney’s dialogical approach to postcolonial comics, Baru presents an interesting case in that “...he has used intertextuality and intericonicity, including pastiche, to create an evolving dialogue between his narratives and canonical comics by other cartoonists” (p. 146). McKinney specifically highlights Baru’s comics that rework those by Mœbius (“Cauchemar blanc”) and Hergé (his *Tintin* series). Similar to Boudjellal, Baru’s long career and reworking of previously published comics allow the reader to chart his artistic and ideological development. The three “cycles” of Baru’s intertextual references to canonical cartoonists identified in this chapter correspond to France’s changing political landscape. The first cycle encourages solidarity among France’s working-class and migrant communities during the Mitterrand administration. In the second, McKinney points to Baru’s increasing pessimism after the political right reclaimed power under Chirac. The third cycle appears more optimistic with its particular use of pastiche. Although Baru and Hergé are ideologically opposed, Baru acknowledges that the latter gave legitimacy to comics as an art form all the while inspiring other artists like himself. For this reason, Baru’s use of pastiche in the third cycle focuses on the creative and imaginative possibilities that comics provide. Indeed, McKinney concludes this chapter, stating that “Baru’s own images can help us imagine a different world, a better and more just one” (p. 167).

In chapter five, the author applies Otto Karl Werckmeister’s notion of “citadel culture” to his reading of comics by Bilal, Baru, and Chauzy in which France, under the influence of far-right politics and racist discourse, is “...divided along ethnic and class lines” (p. 172).^[3] McKinney first revisits Werckmeister’s reading of Bilal’s futuristic Nikopol trilogy through a sustained focus on the artist’s references to post-Cold War France overlooked by Werckmeister’s more globalized approach, as well as the third installment of the trilogy published after Werckmeister’s monograph. McKinney then turns his attention back to Baru and his representation of the *banlieue* before proceeding to Chauzy’s comics. McKinney shows here (similar to his argument in chapter four) that Baru’s comics set in France’s *banlieues* can be read as examples of Werckmeister’s “argumentative culture” because they adopt the perspective of those excluded from France’s citadel society, rather than of that of ethnic-majority characters trapped within. Furthermore, the author demonstrates that Baru’s comics have become increasingly political over time, rendering the artist’s political position with respect to French racism and neocolonialist attitudes exceedingly clear. In contrast, Chauzy’s satirical comics primarily take place inside the Parisian citadel and privilege the perspective of the ethnic majority. Despite the artist’s seemingly virulent critique of racism, McKinney argues that Chauzy’s comics reveal a troubling ambivalence characteristic of citadel culture; their constant oscillation between social criticism and self-critique helps the artist avoid articulating a well-defined ideological position. There are, however, comics by other ethnic-majority artists that refuse to eschew politics.

Chapters six and seven constitute, in my opinion, the most interesting and innovative parts of McKinney’s research. While *Postcolonialism and Migration in French Comics* focuses primarily on

left-leaning ethnic-majority and ethnic-minority artists, these chapters present the perspective of far-right cartoonists. Unlike other chapters, these two are completely devoid of illustrations. As McKinney notes in his introduction, these comics target a clearly defined readership and circulate almost exclusively within this network, making the task of obtaining permission from copyright holders to reprint their work quite difficult. In addition, some of the artists presented in these chapters have been prosecuted for racism, antisemitism, Holocaust denial, and other negationist views and are perhaps less willing to expose themselves to further criticism. McKinney organizes his analysis of far-right comics into two distinct historical periods. Chapter six traces the evolution of far-right comics from the Dreyfus Affair through the 1990s, and chapter seven explores far-right comics from the 2000s to the present. This separation revolves around the 2002 presidential election in which Jean-Marie Le Pen won enough votes in the first round to proceed to the second against Jacques Chirac. While many of the themes found in earlier far-right comics continue to appear in more recently published works, the latter exhibit two new characteristics. First, far-right cartoonists tend to conceal their extremist views to avoid persecution under the Gayssot Act (law 90-615) in effect since 1990. Second, McKinney identifies a transition—or what he calls a “postcolonial turn” (p. 238)—in some far-right comics with respect to immigration. Once strictly xenophobic, far-right comics now include pro-African perspectives. This seemingly paradoxical shift stems from the “reconciliation” of the working classes whose rightwing (White nationalists) and leftwing (Muslims) contingencies share a common enemy (Zionists, Jews, and Freemasons). These comics recycle antisemitic conspiracy theories found in earlier far-right comics. That Dieudonné, a French comedian of Cameroonian heritage, is an active member of this new postcolonial far right, has encouraged marginalized youths from the *banlieues* to blame their social exclusion and economic disenfranchisement on France’s Jewish population: “Adopting antisemitic views allows some youths from those groups a perverse integration into society, through a longstanding tradition of hate and violence against another French ethnic minority” (p. 246). Before turning back to antiracist comics for the remainder of the book, the author contends that a discussion of racist comics is necessary for our understanding of the evolution of French society, in general, and of French comics, in particular. Since racist discourse continues to find an audience in France, works by artists that disseminate the opposite perspective—such as those by Yvan Alagbé and Zeina Abirached—become all the more important.

Roughly devoted to the same historical period as chapter seven, chapters eight and nine explore Alagbé’s and Abirached’s comics, respectively. Chapter seven returns to comics’ avant-gardism, previously examined in chapter two. Here analytic focus falls on the ways in which Alagbé’s experimental comics—published alone or in collaboration with other artists—poetically raise important questions about postcolonial French society, using fine-art techniques. In the following chapter, McKinney reads Abirached’s comics, specifically *Le piano oriental* (2015), as a form of “contra-bande dessinée,” which “...imports a form of postcolonial contraband into the language, culture and comics of France, and normalizes it there” (p. 284). Through storytelling, Abirached takes her readers across the colonial “affrontier” that separates the formerly colonized and the former colonizer along spatial, temporal, cultural, and linguistic lines.[4] The affrontier reappears in the book’s penultimate chapter, which reflects on the representation of undocumented migrants or *sans-papiers* in comics: “It seems fitting to end this volume with a chapter about one of the most enduring and emblematic characters related to migration in French comics, who invites us to rethink the postcolonial paradigm” (p. 340). Beginning with comics published in the late 1970s and ending with a close reading of more recent select comics, whose humanizing portrayal of the *sans-papiers* has garnered support for this vulnerable community in

France and throughout Western Europe, McKinney explores the ways in which these comics encourage contemporary readers to reassess the relationship between France and its former colonies both domestically and abroad.

Along with McKinney's previous publications, the present monograph is the fruit of nearly three decades of research.[5] As such, *Postcolonialism and Migration in French Comics* makes several noteworthy contributions to the field. Among its many positive aspects, this study refers to well-known and previously un(der)studied works; identifies areas of further inquiry such as the developing role of female artists; provides a well-documented historical context that draws important parallels between French (post)colonial history and the evolution of French comics; and establishes a constructive dialogue between the author's own research and that of recognized experts and emerging scholars. Not only does McKinney trace the history of postcolonial themes in French comics, but he also provides a summative overview of past and current scholarship, which will undoubtedly serve undergraduates, graduates, and academics in future years.

NOTES

[1] I reviewed McKinney's *Redrawing French Empire in Comics* for *H-France Review* in 2014 (see <https://www.h-france.net/vol14reviews/vol14no183howell.pdf>).

[2] McKinney cites Raymond Williams's *The Sociology of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[3] See Otto Karl Werckmeister, *Citadel Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[4] McKinney describes the "colonial affrontier" as "...a metaphor for a political, social and cultural frontier, and even a physical one, between colonizer and colonized..." whose purpose is to maintain the proper distance between the formerly colonized and the former colonizer (p. 18). The author engages critically with the affrontier in his second book, *Redrawing French Empire in Comics*.

[5] McKinney's "Works cited" section includes over two pages of self-references.

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