

McKinney (Mark), The Colonial Heritage of French Comics. Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 2011, 270 p. – ISBN 978-1-84631-642-5

Hugo Frey

L'enfant-soldat : langages & images
Numéro 32, 2011

URI : id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018665ar
DOI : [10.7202/1018665ar](https://doi.org/10.7202/1018665ar)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association pour l'Étude des Littératures africaines (APELA)

ISSN 0769-4563 (imprimé)
2270-0374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Frey, H. (2011). McKinney (Mark), The Colonial Heritage of French Comics. Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 2011, 270 p. – ISBN 978-1-84631-642-5. *Études littéraires africaines*, (32), 183–185. doi:10.7202/1018665ar

Tous droits réservés © Association pour l'Étude des Littératures africaines (APELA), 2012

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne. [<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>]

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche. www.erudit.org

in the light of the author's theoretical priority, that one can interpret the strikingly missing voices of those who write using these signs. *Écritures Africaines* is thus altogether more an academic, historiographical, and semiotic in depth disquisition on the nature of writing. Its reading triggers different questions, whilst it definitely calls for more research into this fascinating aspect of human communicative strategies.

■ Cristina BOSCOLO

MCKINNEY (MARK), *THE COLONIAL HERITAGE OF FRENCH COMICS*. LIVERPOOL : LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2011, 270 P. – ISBN 978-1-84631-642-5.

This book is an important contribution to the history of the Francophone comic strip. It explains how early masters of the form, Hergé and Alain Saint-Ogan, produced work that was sympathetic to imperialism. It narrates how these and other artists promoted the colonial idea by drawing work which encouraged readers to take pride in French and Belgian power overseas. However, this is only a part of the story. In addition, McKinney addresses more contemporary graphic narratives. He explains that since the 1980s graphic novelists in France, Switzerland, and Belgium have produced works that evoke imperial history. These new publications include some material that is nostalgic for empire, as well as strips that are more critical of it. McKinney admires the work of this latter type, produced by people such as Yvan Alagbé and Joann Sfar, and when he concludes the monograph it is to them that he gives the last word.

The Colonial Heritage of French Comics therefore combines detailed historical analysis of material from the 1930s with politically informed literary criticism of more contemporary art and writing. It successfully sweeps from past to present and back again, linking heritage to history and vice versa. This is achieved so elegantly because of the structure that is used. Quite clinically, the book is organized through a prolonged discussion of two dominant themes : comics and representations of the colonial exhibitions, such as the Exposition coloniale internationale (Paris, 1931), and how comics portray colonial expeditions, notably the Citroën sponsored Croisière Noire (1924-1925).

Grosso modo, McKinney's analysis reveals that comics are helpful barometers for understanding their times. Their creators are depic-

ted as producers of ideas, engaged in promulgating artistic and narrative visions of social importance. In this book they are conscious actors on the historical stage. The study confirms that in the colonial period most works supported the dominant ideology of believing in French supremacy overseas. It is also true that the comics from the 1980s-2000s are shown to capture the present mood in France. In these graphic novels there are multiple interpretations that provide different readings of the colonial past for different political audiences. The study is especially fascinating because it also debates those comics that did not entirely conform with their times. Here, McKinney's analysis of Louis Forton's *Les Pieds-Nickelés* series is pertinent. Some of these strips from the 1930s poked fun at colonialism and the bourgeois world. At the same time they contained racist stereotypes and did not manage to make substantive political criticism.

McKinney considers Edward Said to be his theoretical inspiration. Nevertheless, the author is far more of an empirical historian than a theorist. Throughout the volume he relies on expansive primary documentation and a good eye for contextual detail, rather than the rhetorical flourish of post-colonial theory. For this reason the chapters that analyse the role of comics in the promotion of colonial exhibitions and expeditions stand out as being especially rich. Indeed, little time is given to philosophical or psychological explanations of any of the material. For example, when McKinney speculates as to why the colonial subject returned to comic strips in the 1980s he seems to give short shrift to the idea that they may be some « return of the colonial repressed from a collective unconscious » (p. 111). Instead, he prefers to argue that they developed out of trends within the genre of comics themselves. The forgotten comic strip magazine, *Métal Aventure*, is noted here as sparking the fashion for colonial subject matter. One might add briefly, without diminishing McKinney's thesis, that developments in cinema were probably as influential. After all, it was from the early 1980s onwards, with works such as Swiss director Daniel Schmid's *Hécate* (1982), that Francophone cinema started using colonial settings, often for romantic backdrop. For what it's worth, contemporary French African policy also likely encouraged the renewed cultural attention on the colonial past. It was in 1978 that the French Foreign Legion was deployed to protect European mine workers from a violent local uprising in Kolwezi, Zaire. This successful military deployment was itself glorified in Raoul Coutard's melodramatic action movie, *La Légion saute sur Kolwezi* (1979).

This is a groundbreaking publication for the field of *bande dessinée* studies. For far too long some scholars working in this field have tended to overlook the links that exist between comics and colonialism. Thanks to McKinney's thoughtful and measured research this issue is brought to the forefront. Historians of empire will also have much to gain from the volume. The book will make for an excellent seminar text on any course treating the subject of European colonialism or racism. In short, this is a thoughtful, rigorous, and nuanced account that will be influential for many years to come. It is not lavishly illustrated. The selected, ugly, images of colonial comics are gathered together in a scientific manner in twenty-six carefully reproduced prints. This is an appropriate treatment for a scholarly publication that eschews any hint of nostalgia for the « good old days » of the *mission civilisatrice*.

■ Hugo FREY

MIKALA (GYNO NOËL), *STRATÉGIES DISCURSIVES DE LA SATIRE ET RHÉTORIQUE DE LA HONTE CHEZ AHMADOU KOUROUMA*. PRÉFACE DU DR GÉRARD-MARIE MESSINA. LIBREVILLE : ODETTE MANGANA, 2011, 235 P. – ISBN 978-2-919487-05-9.

Ce livre étudie systématiquement l'usage et les formes de la satire dans les cinq romans d'Ahmadou Kourouma, y compris le dernier, *Quand on refuse on dit non* (Seuil, 2004), ouvrage inachevé qui parut à titre posthume. G.N. Mikala commence par expliquer la position du romancier face au pouvoir en Côte d'Ivoire, sa profonde déception, son opposition au premier Président Félix Houphouët-Boigny, qui lui valut de nombreuses années d'exil et motiva son refus d'assister au forum de la réconciliation nationale organisé par Laurent Gbagbo. Face à une société qui conçoit le pouvoir comme une force toute puissante, exclusive et rétive à tout débat, il n'avait d'autre choix que de ridiculiser cette conception par la satire, posture qu'il adopta tout au long de sa carrière romanesque.

Le critique passe alors en revue les cibles d'A. Kourouma : évidemment les hommes en place comme le commandant blanc, les interprètes et les chefs coutumiers et, après l'indépendance, les dirigeants politiques. Également responsables de cette conception autocratique du pouvoir, les griots, les marabouts, et plus généralement tous ceux qui exercent une influence sur la population ; cette dernière n'est d'ailleurs pas exempte de responsabilité car elle demeure passive. Enfin, la communauté internationale y a sa part