

For a Mental Emancipation

Herman Steve Seukdeu Peumadji

Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen

Herman.S.Seukdeu-Peumadji@romanistik.uni-giessen.de

Abstract:

Not a day goes by without the media revealing acts of physical aggression against people simply because of their skin color, religious affiliation or their origin. Over time we have become almost accustomed to this kind of news. Yet despite being denounced, nothing changes – the situation gets worse and worse. This is why Etienne Achille and Lydie Moudileno have jointly published their essay *Mythologies postcoloniales: Pour une décolonisation du quotidien* in which they try no longer to denounce, but to understand the causes of this phenomenon and provide solutions. The fact that French society does not think of race as a product of the imagination is, in itself, already a real problem. Moreover, by paying attention to false problems such as those related to behaviors or language, we end up forgetting the real one. By adopting a postcolonial approach, the authors analyze aspects and factors in contemporary French society that constitute racial myths or prejudice that delay the process of de-racialization.

How to cite:

Seukdeu Peumadji, Herman Steve : “For a Mental Emancipation [Review of: Achille, Etienne and Lydie Moudileno: *Mythologies postcoloniales. Pour une décolonisation du quotidien*. Paris: Honoré champion, 2018.]“. In: KULT_online 61 (2020).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22029/ko.2020.1038>



Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

For a Mental Emancipation

Herman Steve Seukdeu Peumadji

Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen

Achille, Etienne and Lydie Moudileno. *Mythologies postcoloniales. Pour une décolonisation du quotidien*. Paris: Honoré champion, 2018. 150 pages, 29 Euro. ISBN 978-2-7453-4756-5.

“Le racisme au quotidien frappe parce que le langage n’est pas décolonisé, parce que les imaginaires demeurent racialisés, et parce que les corps sont pré-jugés en fonction de toute une histoire de racialisation de l’autre non-blanc ” (p. 12). As Achille and Moudileno observe, racism still remains because people’s mentality is not emancipated. The key question is: How then do you decolonize daily routines? How do you de-racialize language and the imaginary on a daily basis? Let us recall the authors’ first observations: “On ne vit pas la quotidienneté de la même façon, et on ne contribue pas au quotidien sur le même plan” (p. 8). The relationship to daily life is therefore considered to be relative according to whether one is white or black, poor or rich, Muslim or Christian – the observation remains the same.

“Decoloniser le quotidien” is the opening chapter of the essay and, right from the start, it provides information on the content of the arguments and on the style of the authors, who are precise in their words. No part of the work is insignificant; everything is chosen to measure up to the weight of the arguments. Whether it is in the chapters “Toponymie républicaine: Impasse Général Bugeaud,” “Jean-Pierre Pernaut: La plus petite France,” or “Touche pas à mon chocolat,” one discovers, as one reads, a predilection for conciseness and information, rather than writing limited to empty words.

Indeed, *Postcolonial Mythologies* aims to be a lantern to enlighten a society in search of reference points. According to the authors, French society is racialized. What is to be done? Consider race as a categorization of the imagination. How does French society refuse to think about the racial question? On the one hand, by revoking invisible race as a category and signifier, on the other hand, by integrating a differentialist racialization that advances under the mask of more conceivable signifiers including culture, ethnicity, and community (p. 9-10).

Indeed, the first myth is that of the “l’impensé de la race” (p. 9), an expression borrowed from the philosopher Achilles Mbembe. Unfortunately, society still finds it difficult to cut itself off from its demons. Racism is hard to eradicate because of the difficulty society has thinking about it. The authors lament the biased language, behaviors, and images that continue to celebrate the evil of society. For example, French streets dedicated to controversial historical figures such as General Bugeaud, Marshal Pétain, etc., which leads us to the second myth: that of la “Petite France.” Etienne Achille and Lydie Moudileno denounce a trend towards ethnic cleansing and historical denial in favor of the idyllic French past. The 1 p.m news, for example, presented by Jean-Pierre Pernaut, constitutes what the authors themselves call “la nostalgie restaurative” (p. 38), which manifests itself in several areas, such as popular music, film, and especially television (p. 38). The third mythical element is the chocolate “tête de Nègre” (p. 49), which in this chapter plays on the myth of a free France. The authors show how even in the gastronomic world there are still allusions of a racist nature.

Next, in “Qu’est ce qu’on a fait au bon Dieu? Comédie culturelle. . . ,” the Blanc-Black-Beur myth is presented in the same vein as “les aventures de Robbi Jacob” by Gérard Oury. In the following chapter “Aux confins des imaginaires nationales: pas de Charlie pour les Antilles,” the authors denounce the myth of hexagonality and exoticism as helping to keep individuals in a mental state of colonization. The authors know that the myth of national harmony as it is presented in the 8 p.m TV slots is that of a France that, topographically and historically, does not approve the participation of former colonies in the nation, as it is unable to think beyond its hexagonality (p. 94). What Etienne Achille and Lydie Moudileno are exposing here is quite simply the enormity of French neo-colonialism in its former colonies. Whether in Africa in general or in the West Indies specifically, thinking of territoriality beyond geography is far from hastening this process of mental deracialization.

Finally, however racialized French daily society might be, there is a way out of any impasse. For the authors, instead of being refuted, race should be understood as a category of the imagination (p. 9). *Mythologies postcoloniales* contributes, by its title alone, to showing where the problem lies, where it is necessary to work to liberate consciences; the authors show this well by dealing with concepts like ‘ignorance,’ ‘indifference,’ and ‘hyperconsciousness.’ The last concept is the most important – by “hyperconscious,” (p. 31) the authors understand two types of people. On the one hand, those who are conscious of the reality of racism in everyday life

and yet accept it. On other hand, there are those who, although knowing this reality, are opposed to change. Decolonizing the imaginary consists of working on these different cases. Achille and Moudileno, through their work, are laying the foundations on which numerous studies in cultural studies could henceforth be based upon. Moreover, they themselves admit that there is still a lot to be done.

One cannot deny the originality of Etienne Achille and Lydie Moudileno's approach, which gives cultural studies the opportunity to problematize an important subject in its field. What could be more exceptional than tackling what makes us subjects endowed with reason – our mental universe, the imaginary? *Mythologies Postcoloniales* does a good job of deconstructing mental patterns clinging to a crimson past and, in doing so, it will hopefully reach a wide audience.

Für eine geistige Emanzipation

German Abstract:

Es vergeht keinen Tag, an dem die Medien keine Akte körperlicher Aggressionen gegen Menschen allein aufgrund ihrer Hautfarbe, ihrer Religionszugehörigkeit oder ihrer Herkunft aufdecken. Im Laufe der Zeit haben wir uns fast an diese Art von Nachrichten gewöhnt. Doch obwohl sie angeprangert werden, ändert sich nichts, die Situation wird immer schlimmer. Aus diesem Grund haben Etienne Achille und Lydie Moudileno ihren Essay *Mythologies postcoloniales: Pour une décolonisation du quotidien* veröffentlicht, in dem sie versuchen, nicht mehr zu denunzieren, sondern die Ursachen dieses Phänomens zu verstehen und Lösungen anzubieten. Die Tatsache, dass die französische Gesellschaft Rasse nicht als ein Produkt der Fantasie betrachtet, ist an sich schon ein echtes Problem. Darüber hinaus vergisst man bei der Beachtung falscher Probleme, z.B. im Zusammenhang mit Verhalten oder Sprache, schließlich die tatsächliche Schwierigkeit. Mit einem postkolonialen Ansatz analysieren die Autoren Aspekte und Faktoren in der zeitgenössischen französischen Gesellschaft, die rassistische Mythen oder Vorurteile bilden, die den Prozess der ‚Entrassisierung‘ verzögern.