



Jessica da Silva C. de Oliveira.- *Postcolonial Maghreb and the Limits of IR* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 230p.

Albeit with a fairly long history, postcolonial writing remains – to say the least – a label with semantic and epistemological fluctuations. In short, it is a problematic label. However, postcolonial writing is oftentimes pointed up in relation to a cluster of complex debates, including ‘colonial encounters,’ ‘colonial legacy,’ ‘colonial discourse,’ ‘resistance,’ ‘writing back,’ to name but a few. In this vein, it becomes blatant how cultures, identities, and societies are thorny questions in the ongoing postcolonial discussions. Jessica da

Silva C. de Oliveira’s *Postcolonial Maghreb and the Limits of IR* participates in this discussion with a study about the Maghreb. C. de Oliveira peruses texts produced by Maghrebian, namely Moroccan and Algerian, writers during colonial and postcolonial periods in order to unpack the different and complex ways in which these writers (re)imagine and (re)think the Maghreb in the post-colonial and post-independence context by spotlighting such issues as memory, history, language, culture, borders, voice, etc. To C. de Oliveira, the choice of Maghrebian narratives – as political acts – emanates from the need to contribute to a ‘turn toward the margins,’ hence giving voice to ‘subaltern epistemologies.’ In this respect, C. de Oliveira argues against conventional International Relations (IR) as an approach to interpret postcolonial Maghrebian narratives, because IR has been servicing the Western-centric, Eurocentric and state-centric voices. This being the case, the author opts for a combination of ‘border thinking’ and ‘intellectual decolonization’ as an approach that privileges ‘the worldliness of texts’ in Said’s sense.

In framing the question, C. de Oliveira devotes the inaugurating pages of her book to map the Maghreb within the realm of international/global relations. In so doing, she outlines different perspectives about revisiting conventional IR beyond attempts to impose certain reductionist frameworks on reading people’s experiences. To the author, the aim is to set a viaduct between conventional IR and non-Western IR. In this vein, the novel understandings of IR warrant that Maghrebian narratives about encounters deconstructed outside the ‘state-centric logic’ and ‘western-centric discourse.’ Again, C. de Oliveira states the rationale behind the choice of the Maghreb as a region of analysis, including the fact that it is a site characterized by ‘the richness of encounters,’ as well as ‘contestation’ and ‘resistance.’ Her corpus pivots around Francophone Maghrebian writers, namely Abdelkbir Khatibi, Kateb Yacine, and Fatema Mernissi. Focusing on literary and narrative strategies, C. de Oliveira looks at these writers’ texts as sites of historical memory and collective identities. In this sense, literature, as a questioning tool, holds a riveting place in the process of re-inventing and re-imagining the Maghreb. These opening pages of C. de Oliveira’s book also proffer a set of research questions used to interpret the Maghrebian Francophone texts. These questions include the writers’ re-imagination of the Maghreb in literary spaces, their subject-positions about their societies in

the post-independence contexts, as well as the role of Francophone Maghrebian narratives as alternatives (hence counter-hegemonic) narratives to Eurocentric voices and discourses.

The book's second and third chapters serve also as introductory chapters providing the theoretical and critical frameworks of the study. Entitled 'Narrative IR, Worldly IR,' chapter two brings to sharper focus 'narratives' and 'narrative strategies' as questioning modes in investigating international relations. C. de Oliveira showcases how narrative approaches give soulful insights into the foci of the writings about global affairs through the narratives' contexts. In this respect, C. de Oliveira relates 'Narrative IR' to Edward Said's theory of the 'worldliness' of the text, underlying how this latter leverages the socio-political conditions of the narratives' production and reception as being axiomatic for an understanding of the writers' political, intellectual and ethical commitments. Through the lens of Said's 'worldliness,' C. de Oliveira's chapter three, 'Postcolonial Literature and the Task of (Re-) imagining the Maghreb,' highlights Francophone Maghrebian postcolonial literature. Here, emphasis is laid on the vital role of the contexts and the conditions wherein these Maghrebian texts are produced, as well as their importance as fertile grounds for the marginalized voices to proffer views on political change and alternative worldviews on international affairs. This way of analysis and/or 'turn to narratives,' underlines C. de Oliveira, enables us to make sense of the domain of global relations and affairs beyond the Western-centric totalizing attempts at the subjugation and the 'subalternization' of the knowledge production outside the West.

The remaining chapters in C. de Oliveira's book, namely chapters four, five and six, are analytical studies of the practice of writing and its politics in the postcolonial Francophone Maghrebian literature. C. de Oliveira concentrates first on Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* in order to examine how narratives are political acts to (re-) write the history of the Maghreb. In this regard, historical narration is brought to the fore by dint of its significance as a counter-history tool against totalizing discourses. In studying Kateb Yacine's novel, C. de Oliveira explores the different narrative strategies at play with a view to connect the 'past' and the 'present' articulating the non-linearity of history, hence the plurality of (hi)stories. By the same token, she focuses on the ways in which Kateb narrates the Algerian fauna and flora as a way to (re)think the postcolonial Maghreb's history. Adopting this strategy springs from the conviction that re-imagining landscapes helps rewrite 'history from below,' to use Bonhoeffer's phrase. This is thus useful in including popular myths and voices, hence demystifying the French stereotypical representations of the colonized, as well as the French attempts at writing the history of the Maghreb 'from above.' In short, Kateb's narrative wields the 'historical approach' as a truth-telling tool, as it were, to reconstruct the Algerian history and reproduce its collective identities. In this way, Kateb's *Nedjma* partakes in deconstructing 'Eurocentric modernity' as an apparatus for reading international relations and global affairs. Voices/views from the margin on these affairs are privileged in Kateb's narrative, for they are emblematic of political resistance.

C. de Oliveira then inaugurates a discussion about Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other* and Khatibi's *Love in Two Languages*, and she exposes these two writers'

discourse about the link between language and translation in opening up horizons for mutual understanding and the promotion of dialogue with the Other. Seen through the vantage point of Said's 'contrapuntal reading,' Derrida and Khatibi's texts offer insights into linguistic encounters brought about by the French colonialism. This state of fact makes of the Maghreb a site of intersections. This being the case, the Maghreb remains a region characterized by multiplicity and pluri-diversity. The latter thus challenge the different lines of demarcations that the Eurocentric discourse draws between the colonizer- France in this case- and the Maghreb. Foregrounding these pitfalls in the French discourse displays the Maghrebian postcolonial writers' aim at 'decoloniality' and 'resistance.' Speaking of the literary and narrative strategies used in the texts of Khatibi and Derrida, C. de Oliveira levels criticism against the 'I' voice in these writers' narratives, for it is in no way demonstrative of the Maghrebian collective identities. The fact of the matter is that writing in the French language shakens their attempts at destabilizing the French Eurocentric voice. However, irregardless of the pitfalls spotlighted in these writers' narratives, their views challenge the Western-centric belief that the 'subaltern cannot speak,' and they pave the route for experiences from the margin beyond the conventional IR theories.

Exploring Moroccan postcolonial writing, C. de Oliveira turns to the discussion of the writings of the Moroccan prolific writer, Fatema Mernissi. The discussion centers around the ways in which Mernissi problematizes the East/West encounters in order to reconsider the binary system that is at work when these two entities are a subject of representation. Such modes of looking at these encounters are the foundation of the Eurocentric discourses. At stake is the homogenizing constructions of the Otherness of the East/Orient/Muslim world. Mernissi's identity as an Arab Muslim female endows her with the power to 'write back' to the West and demystify its erroneous discourse about Islam and Muslim women. In this sense, Mernissi, by virtue of different discursive strategies, contributes to rethinking East-West encounters across languages, cultures and societies. Strikingly, Mernissi underlines the possibility of reappropriating binary representations as ways to destabilize 'totalizing knowledges' and Western images of itself as 'superior,' 'rationale,' and 'modern.' In so doing, alternative knowledges are produced. In truth, different 'writing back' discourses have been relying on these narrative and literary strategies in order to deconstruct and resist Eurocentric conceptions of the East. In this vein, in foregrounding the complexity of cultural encounters, Mernissi, stresses C. de Oliveira, deploys stereotypes and emotional language to 'return the gaze' and decipher the Western construction of its non-western subjects. In short, Mernissi's narratives, as the foundation of what is referred to today as 'Islamic feminism,' can be said to be a contributing 'political act' to critique and dissect the rigid borders that certain epistemologies tend to construct against non-Western perspectives and voices.

Studying narratives produced about postcolonial Maghreb, Jessica da Silva C. de Oliveira's work remains a riveting contribution to the field of North African postcolonial writing. Focusing on Morocco and Algeria, this book sets out to relocate the Maghreb in the world of international relations and global affairs. In this context, the book brings to discussion topical and hot issues in the domain of International

Relations (IR), a less charted area of scholarship, indeed. The book makes fantastic efforts to provide readers and researchers with insights into IR theory and its intricate aspects and dimensions. Likewise, it is interesting how C. de Oliveira's deconstructs the conventional IR theories-as they are smitten with Western-centric and state-centric voices- with a view to spotlight 'experiences of marginality' from the Maghreb, hence contributing to reading and writing 'history from below.' It is true that three chapters (out of seven) in the book are devoted to theoretical underpinnings, but they remain primordial for different reasons, including the fact that they pertinently frame the debate and they help readers follow smoothly the book's line of analysis. Once again, the region of analysis, that is the Maghreb, has long been subject to Western scrutiny in different forms of writing, including archives, documentaries, travel narratives, biographies, etc. Unsurprisingly, these western knowledges have been servicing the Western-centric discourses. Herein lies the significance of researching this region as a site of massive encounters in order to provoke further thoughts about its people's experiences and their 'will' to political change as represented in the writings of such postcolonial Maghrebian writers as Khatibi, Derrida, Mernissi, Kateb, etc. These writers are in no way representative of the Maghrebian experience, but their choice for study by C. de Oliveira is a successful one as their works are groundbreaking and thought provoking. This makes *Postcolonial Maghreb and the Limits of IR* an interesting reference in the study of Maghrebian writings.

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