

DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2020-20-1-249-252

Book review

De Oliveira, J.S.C. (2020). Postcolonial Maghreb and the Limits of IR. Palgrave Macmillan, 230 p.

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For citation: Mousli, M. (2020). Book review: De Oliveira, J.S.C. (2020). Postcolonial Maghreb and the Limits of IR. Palgrave Macmillan, 230 p. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 20 (1), 249—252. DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2020-20-1-249-252

Рецензия

De Oliveira J.S.C. Postcolonial Maghreb and the Limits of IR. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 230 p.

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Для цитирования: Mousli M. Рецензия: De Oliveira J.S.C. Postcolonial Maghreb and the Limits of IR. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 230 p. // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Международные отношения. 2020. Т. 20. № 1. С. 249—252. DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2020-20-1-249-252

Postcolonial International Relations scholarship criticizes the status quo and colonial character of conventional international relations (IR) with its theories and approaches made by the West as eternal battle between realists and liberals which are symptomatically “outworldly” [De Oliveira 2020]. It calls to re-imagine IR as a site of “heterology” and as an encounter with difference [Inayatullah, Blaney 2004]. Postcolonialism argues that the disciplinary borders of IR can be conceived only as functions of scholarly imagination and argumentation but also of the webs of power relationships marking such endeavors, defending the need to open up the space of this discipline for a variety and complex views. For this regard, postcolonial IR proposes a “worldlier” perspective on IR and de-centering

this discipline from Eurocentric worldviews by alternative ways of thinking, (re-)imagining, writing and talking about the world, in other words alternative lenses to view IR based on non-Western individual voices, imaginaries, experiences, literary texts in particular and narrative in General.

The reviewed book by Jessica da Silva C. de Oliveira is one of the important works that contributes to enrich postcolonialism in IR field. Its central goal is to amplify the understanding of IR as heterology through recourse to narratives (“Narrative IR”) from specific spatiotemporal context but which could possibly and broadly speak with other spatiotemporal contexts in meaningful ways. Besides, de Oliveira aims to start filling the gap between the world of

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conventional IR theory and the world(s) of people's everyday lives trajectories.

Based on this logic, de Oliveira explores literary texts produced in an almost entirely overlooked region in international studies "The Maghreb" in order to illustrate shortcomings of imagination in the discipline of IR and to bring an alternative view of this field. She re-situates the Maghreb in the world of international relations by paying due attention to the voices, knowledge frames, and concepts produced in the interstices of postcolonial encounters constituting that region. That is, the author focuses on the politics of narrating postcolonial Maghreb through a number of writers, including Kateb Yacine, Abdelkebir Khatibi, Fatema Mernissi and Jacques Derrida, who explicitly embraced the task of reimagining their respective societies after colonial independence and subsequent nation-building processes.

De Oliveira promotes an encounter between narratives from the Maghreb and IR and makes a case for the kinds of thinking and writing strategies that could be used to ensure a better approach to international and global studies. She highlights the stakes at play while approaching politics around the world through the postcolonial Maghrebian literature lens by inevitably struggling with the legacies of the colonialism. She builds on the works of postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Albert Memmi, Paul Sheeran, Naeem Inayatullah, David Blaney, Cynthia Weber and Clifford Geertz.

The book chapters can be divided into two main groups.

The first group is mainly theoretical and methodological in nature. It includes the first three chapters that introduce the reader to understand the purpose of the general argument developed in the book that is the politics of thinking and writing in postcolonial Maghreb or re-imagination of the Maghreb by Maghrebian writers.

The first chapter "Introduction: Making the Case for Re-imagination" exposes reason for choosing this topic, frames the question of the book, paves the way for critical imagination on postcolonial Maghreb and the limits of IR.

In chapter 2 "Narrative IR, Worldly IR", de Oliveira analyses the conceptualization of narratives as political acts and its implications. For this purpose, she addresses the ongoing debate on the subject of narrative and voice in IR to explore how the notion of narrative has been incorporated into the world of IR and how the more recent movement of Narrative IR has been particularly relevant in exposing the political aspects about writing international and global politics that academic language purports to hide. At the beginning of this chapter, the author brings up a brief discussion on some of the epistemological and methodological implications of taking the narratives seriously in the study of international and global affairs [De Oliveira 2020: 25, 26]. Then, she focuses on this recent turn to narratives in IR [De Oliveira 2020: 30]. Finally, she connects this broad map, the problematization of academic writing and the politics of representation with Edward Said's notion of the "worldliness" of the world literature [De Oliveira 2020: 42].

Chapter 3 "Postcolonial Literature and the Task of reimagining the Maghreb" introduces the reader to the world of Maghrebian postcolonial literature written in French and the main questions surrounding its development in both shores of the Mediterranean. The author contextualizes the emergence of postcolonial Franco-Maghrebian literature and the task of re-imagining the Maghreb after decolonization [De Oliveira 2020: 66] that is implicit in the works of exemplary Franco-Maghrebian writers such as Tahar Djaout, Abdelkebir Khatibi, Kateb Yacine, and Fatema Mernissi. In addition, she addresses the politics of writing in this set of writings through Edward Said's reflections on the worldliness of texts [De Oliveira 2020: 73].

The second group of chapters (from 4 to 6) is more specialized and can be described as a case study by exploration of the politics of writing in postcolonial Maghreb, with an attention to the ways that Maghrebian writers have been re-imagining and recounting the encounter with otherness in their narratives. De Olivera provides the reader with thought-provoking analysis that can be independently read as engagements with the politics of thinking and writing in postcolonial Maghreb.

Chapter 4 “History and Narration as Weapons of Decolonization: Kateb Yacine’s *Nedjma*” operates within the connection between narrative and history, truth and fiction, popular myths and collective memory, and practices of narrating postcolonial Maghreb. First, the chapter presents the Algerian writer, Kateb Yacine and his writings’ features, namely his masterpiece of Algerian modern literature *Nedjma*. In the Kateb’s own words, *Nedjma* was intended to be “a novel that would show French people, in their language, that Algeria was not French”. In addition, Kateb made an effort to rethink Algerian’s relationship to history in a time when colonial violence and uncertainty prevailed [De Oliveira 2020: 91, 92].

Next, the author presents a short overview on a classical debate in historiography addressing the question of *fact and fiction in historical narration* [De Oliveira 2020: 95]. She highlights the relation between this debate and discussion about the “*triumphalist*” discourses informing totalizing narratives on political modernity [De Oliveira 2020: 97]. Addressing this connection allows the reader to locate Kateb’s novel among those attempts at offering a counter-narrative of modernity and to examine his contributions beyond the captivity of modernity as world-framing.

Then, the author focuses on how the novel *Nedjma* has been interpreted by critics and, relatedly, on its connections with the context when Kateb Yacine first had it published, on the eve of Algerian anti-colonial war [De Oliveira 2020: 103]. As a final point, the author refers to Kateb’s narration of Algerian landscapes as a methodology for re-imagining and writing the history of postcolonial Maghreb in a way that transgresses statist borders and historical accounts centered on the modern State.

In Chapter 5 “Language and the (Im)possibility of Translation in Derrida’s *Monolingualism of the Other* and Khatibi’s *Love in Two Languages*”, the author purports to read Khatibi’s novel *Amour Bilingue* and Derrida’s *Le Monolinguisme de l’Autre: ou la prothèse d’origine* as well as the intellectual exchanges between these two Francophone Maghrebian writers, focusing on how each of them addresses *the relationship between language, translation,*

and the (im)possibilities of dialoguing with others/otherness in their theoretical framework. The author’s aim is to contextualize the centrality of the question of language in their respective intellectual projects within the history of the diverse and discrepant experiences of French colonialism in the Maghreb. In this sense, it is also an exercise of Edward Said’s “contrapuntal reading” approach of Khatibi against Derrida from the perspective of colonial difference [De Oliveira 2020: 138].

Chapter 6 “East and West Encounters and Double Critique in Fatema Mernissi’s Writings” intends to read Fatema Mernissi’s writings as containing a narrative of East and West encounters that not only challenges Orientalist conceptions of the non-West but also complexifies commonplace understandings of “*East*” and “*West*” divisions [De Oliveira 2020: 176].

Finally, chapter 7 “IR and the Need for Re-imagination: Concluding Remarks” returns to the main points addressed in each chapter and connect them with the broader question of narratives as “political acts” in both non-fictional Maghrebian literature and IR scholarship. The author concludes in this regard that the textual space of Maghrebian francophone postcolonial literature obeys a particular logic [De Oliveira 2020: 217] and that Maghrebian literatures express an ideology and aesthetics of difference oriented toward less violent forms of *being, belonging* and *being with* after decolonization took place in that region.

As final reflections, I want to emphasize that this research is an original and innovative look within the studies of Maghrebian francophone postcolonial literature as a lens to understand the international and world affairs. The author challenges the familiar conceptual repertoires of IR, giving us an excellent view of the creativity with which Maghrebian postcolonial politics engages theoretical, methodological and political challenges of our times. The book clearly shows the enormous effort made by the author that can be taken as a starting point for further research on postcolonial Maghrebian literature and IR. Furthermore, de Olivera’s book is as an exemplary to follow in the field of research on Maghrebian postcolonial literature and IR.

However, this work cannot be by itself sufficient to get a whole picture on the subject of Postcolonial Maghreb and the Limits of IR, rather, it needs to be completed by other research dealing with other IR concepts in Maghrebian literature written in different languages and by several writers in the Maghreb region (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya and Mauritania).

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 20.01.2020

Accepted / Принята к публикации: 10.02.2020

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