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Introduction by Julia Clancy-Smith

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## Introduction by Julia Clancy-Smith, University of Arizona

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Few modern anti-colonial struggles have generated more scholarly or popular passion than Algeria's independence movement. And bitter controversy as well as lively debate over the nature and meaning of that movement still resonate in the twenty-first century—not only in Algeria, North Africa, or France, but also globally. In *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order*, Jeffrey Byrne offers a meticulously researched and elegantly narrated study rich in new historical data and arguments. At the same time, through Byrne's nuanced, imaginative retelling of a tale told many times over, we grasp the ironies and contradictions of *la guerre d'Algérie*. How and why did Algeria become a "Mecca" for revolutionaries the world over? Why did the dramatic end of *l'Algérie française* incubate bold ambitions on the part of the *Front de libération nationale* (FLN) to 'resurrect' the Algerian nation while simultaneously transforming the international order of things? And why did the Cold War, decolonization, and Third Worldism converge in Algeria which, as most historians of colonialism point out, was not paradigmatic of French imperialism world-wide but rather an exceptional case? Much ink has been spilt on the processes whereby colonial worlds rapidly unraveled, but one of Byrne's original contributions to international history during this fraught period is his sustained South-South approach. Moreover, he argues that somewhat paradoxically, the transnational ideologies, praxis, and networks forged by Algerian leaders in the early years of independence actually buttressed the authoritarianism of the post-colonial state itself. And, I would add, of its patriarchal power.

For Priya Lal, Byrne's "novel, decentered" work pushes against previous scholarship on "Third Worldism" which has suffered from a surfeit of abstraction that concealed the critical play of personalities, motivations, and vulnerabilities. However, we learn less from Byrne's book about the FLN's lower rank and file membership or about popular aspirations or dynamics because the primary sources lack or are difficult to access. Especially meritorious in Lal's estimation is that Byrne disabuses us of the fallacy of Algeria as a "passive focal point" of superpower calculations and demonstrates the radicalization of the political class as it became enmeshed in, and eventually a center for, non-aligned and leftist projects. In addition, Lal finds that Byrne's comparative methodology establishes unsuspected parallels between nation-building and anti-colonialism in a large swath of the globe. He neither romanticizes nor dismisses the diverse social movements subsumed under the unsatisfactory rubric of "Third World." Lal's critique revolves around Byrne's conceptualization of ideology where the author tends to distinguish praxis from policy doctrine; here Lal suggests that a "messier" but perhaps more important exposition of "political world" views is needed—and not only for FLN elites but also for "ordinary" Algerians whose entire social universe had been up ended from 1954 (and before) until the ouster of Algeria's first President, Ahmed Ben Bella, in 1965.

In Jennifer Johnson's view, Byrne both builds upon, and departs from, Matthew Connelly's 2002 work, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, by presenting a "more diverse Cold War landscape."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, she lauds his close attention to South-South relations that betray the fact that Algerian actors and others were not simply guerrilla diplomats but in a very real sense statesmen able to inject "their causes into global politics." Johnson makes a significant point in her discussion of African historiography, which in earlier iterations reproduced the colonizer's model of the continent by cutting the Maghrib adrift from "sub-Saharan" Africa. Indeed, she urges Byrne to highlight the importance of his own research because it "breaks down entrenched divisive

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

categories” that separated the “North” from the Saharan “rest” or other. While praising Byrne’s archival savviness, as do all reviewers, Johnson finds that that author tends to “sideline” the scholarship on humanitarian assistance during the war whose findings—and whose sources of documentation—would provide a fuller portrait “from below” of the yearnings and sufferings of ordinary Algerians in an extraordinary age. In Johnson’s final estimation, *Mecca of Revolution* redefines the borders between “international and transnational history.”

While he too offers invaluable comparisons between Connelly’s work and Byrne’s *Mecca of Revolution*, Ryan Irwin takes us into wider and older historiographical debates regarding the rise and fall of the Third World project (or projects) within the envelope of shifting interpretations of the Cold War. Irwin poses the fundamental question that informs most research on the Algerian war and its immediate aftermath—why did the independent country fail to “live up to its revolutionary potential”? Yes, the colonizers had more or less departed, but sovereignty came with empty state coffers, institutional disarray, if not chaos, huge numbers of displaced persons, and equally terrible memories of inter and intra-communal violence. In a sense, the question haunting work on Algeria (and the rest of the “post-colonial” world) is not when decolonization began or ended but rather if “it” ever indeed happened. In Irwin’s estimation, the book under review is replete “with insights and provocations,” particularly Byrne’s deployment of a South-South analysis as well as his somewhat qualified contention that Afro-Asianism did not extend much beyond the 1965 coup installing President Houari Boumedienne and the army to power. In sum, according to Ryan the author has brilliantly demonstrated why and how Algeria exerted an enduring “imprint” on the international system.

Paul Thomas Chamberlin applauds Byrne’s thoughtful analysis of how Algerian revolutionaries assumed the guise of “Cold Warriors” *par la force des choses*. In a cruel irony, the FLN’s success in cultivating Algeria’s cosmopolitan stature and revolutionary allure, during and immediately after the war, was its undoing. Both local, domestic challenges within Algerian society and the international resources so desperately needed to engage in state-building coalesced, derailing progressive, secular programs; armed struggle ominously turned inward. Chamberlin makes an important observation about this “fine-grained study.” It not only enriches the now hefty corpus of scholarship on the post-colonial world but it also serves as an exemplar for the convergence of two genres of research—the areas studies paradigm and diplomatic/international history—that have only lately been brought into sustained conversation.

Riffing off of this last point, we might consider another scholarly dialogue that has largely, and eerily, been absent from new thinking on the Cold War, Third Worldism, and decolonization—which is not synonymous with the “end of empire.” In her memoirs published in French in 2013, Zohra Drif, a member of the armed wing of the FLN who actively participated in the Battle of Algiers, recounts her efforts to mobilize urban women into a mass organization that could undertake peaceful protests in the capital city during 1957. That her story had to wait until the twenty-first century for publication is, in itself, significant, as is the fact that it generated a firestorm in France—only a few years ago. But something that Drif observed regarding the ‘world views’ held by militants during the summer of 1957 begs for attention. At day’s end, after work, they would imagine “the radiant future that doubtlessly awaited us under the sun of independence.”<sup>2</sup> This leads one to wonder: if women and gender were more systematically integrated into scholarly treatments of not only the Algerian War specifically but also of the myriad socio-political movements labeled as revolutionary Third

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<sup>2</sup> Zohra Drif, *Inside the Battle of Algiers: Memoir of a Woman Freedom Fighter*, trans. by Andrew Farrand, foreword by Lakhdar Brahimi (Charlottesville: Just World Books, 2017), 307.

Worldism or anti-colonial struggles generally—would the border and boundaries between international and transnational histories need be ‘realigned’ yet again?

As epilogue, we reprise the insights of the Tunisian writer, Albert Memmi (born 1920) who has lamented over the years: “Why, if the colonial tree produced bitter fruit, has the tree of national independence provided us only with stunted and shriveled crops?”<sup>3</sup>

### Participants:

**Jeffrey James Byrne** is Associate Professor of History at the University of British Columbia. His work concerns postcolonial international history, especially in African and the Middle Eastern contexts. His first book, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order*, is published by Oxford University Press.

**Julia Clancy-Smith** (UCLA, History, 1988) is Regents Professor of Modern North African, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean History at the University of Arizona, Tucson. She authored *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c.1800–1900* (University of California Press, 2011), and *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)* (University of California Press, 1994). She co-edited *Domesticating the Empire: Languages of Gender, Race, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism, 1830-1962* (University of Virginia Press, 1998) as well as *Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City in Text and Image* (Getty Research Institute, 2009). Her Occasional Paper, *Tunisian Revolutions: Reflections on Seas, Coasts, and Interiors* (Georgetown University Press, 2014) examines women and gender in the Arab uprisings. She co-authored a textbook, *The Middle East and North Africa: A History in Documents* (Oxford University Press, 2014) and is completing another text *North Africa: from Carthage and Queen Dido to the Arab Spring* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). In 2017, she was awarded a Guggenheim Research Fellowship to complete a scholarly monograph devoted to women, gender, and schooling in colonial North Africa.

**Paul Thomas Chamberlin** is Associate Professor of History at Columbia University. He specializes in twentieth century international history with a focus on U.S. foreign relations and the Middle East. His first book, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford University Press, 2012), is an international history of the Palestinian liberation struggle. His next book, *The Cold War's Killing Fields: The Human Tragedy of the Superpower Struggle* (HarperCollins, forthcoming), is a global history of the bloodiest encounters of the Cold War.

**Ryan Irwin** received his Ph.D. at Ohio State University and his scholarship explores the historical relationship between globalization and decolonization. Although he writes specifically about the changing mechanics and shifting perceptions of American global power, his interests cover comparative imperialism, international institutions, nonstate activism, and technological development. His first book, *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (Oxford University Press, 2012), investigated the way small, non-

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<sup>3</sup> Albert Memmi, *Decolonization and the Decolonized*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 21.

European nation-states altered the international system at the height of the Cold War. His current projects include an intellectual history of the mid-1970s, as well as a political history about the growth and transformation of the nation-state during the mid-twentieth century.

**Jennifer Johnson** is an Assistant Professor of History at Brown University, where she teaches courses on African History, Nationalism and Decolonization, Medicine and Public Health, and Humanitarianism. Her first book, *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care, and Humanitarianism*, was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press (2016). She is currently working on her second book project, which examines the relationship between health care and state-building in post-colonial Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.

**Priya Lal** is an Assistant Professor of History at Boston College. Her first book, *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania: Between the Village and the World* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), tells the story of Tanzania's socialist experiment, the *ujamaa* villagization initiative of 1967-75. Her current research examines the training, labor, and circulation of skilled medical and educational workers in and beyond southeastern Africa since independence.

**Review by Paul Thomas Chamberlin, Columbia University**

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For a moment in the 1960s, it appeared as if secular progressive forces were set to transform the world. Radical students stormed the streets of cities across North America and Western Europe while heroic guerrilla fighters launched a wave of offensives across much of the Third World. Portraits of Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, and Yasir Arafat took on an iconic status that rivaled those of Lenin and Mao. Even today, one can still find their visages plastered on t-shirts and posters on college campuses around the world. Curiously, one of the earliest and most successful revolutionaries of this wave was absent from this revolutionary Rushmore. Ahmed Ben Bella, leader of the Algerian Revolution, would never enjoy this same level of recognition.

Similarly, although this wave of revolutions was supposed to topple a neo-imperialist world order dominated by the United States—whilst remaining separate from the Soviet bloc—this victory failed to materialize. Instead, a mere quarter century after the heyday of the Third-World guerrilla fighter, American neoconservatives announced an end to history and the universal validity of liberal-capitalist values. As Washington elites basked in the glow of post-Cold War triumphalism, Algeria, the Mecca of Revolution, descended into a horrific civil war between the ruling *Front de libération nationale* (FLN) and the *Front islamique du salut*.

In his new book, *Mecca of Revolution*, Jeffrey Byrne ties Ben Bella's strange disappearance and the collapse of the secular Third-World revolution together. Byrne's work is a case study that shows how, years before their heyday in 1968, the forces of secular revolution faced severe challenges in the postcolonial world.

Byrne sets out to locate revolutionary Algeria's importance in the landscape of the Cold War in the Third World. A 'pilot state,' revolutionary Algeria served as both an example to and destination for other aspiring Third-World liberation fighters. Byrne's book shows how the leaders of the FLN cultivated this status as the Mecca of postcolonial revolution, the motivations behind their choice to do so, and the implications of their strategy.

The book cannot avoid comparisons with Matthew Connelly's seminal *A Diplomatic Revolution* (2002), which stands as one of the early exemplars of the new international studies that would help to transform the field of diplomatic history.<sup>1</sup> Although the two books survey similar subject matter, Byrne reaches a very different set of conclusions. Where Connelly was concerned with the international dimensions of the Algerian Revolution, Byrne focuses on the challenges that the victorious postcolonial regime faced. Where Connelly's study spends much of its time in Paris and Washington, Byrne's story is told almost entirely from the perspective of Algiers. And where Connelly casts the Algerian Revolution as an early chapter in the rise of globalization, Byrne argues that Algeria's postcolonial experience showcased the hardening structures of the nation-state system. Far from breaking down national borders, Byrne argues, decolonization created a more state-centric world.

Byrne begins by locating Algerian nationalists between Wilsonian internationalism and Vladimir Lenin's revolutionary socialism. This early connection to the global would blossom into a full-blown cosmopolitanism

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

by the 1950s. The FLN's globalist appeal raised Algeria's international profile during and after the revolution. FLN leaders were enthralled with the Third-World project. Third Worldism became not just an ideal but a means of nation-building and a fundamental component of postcolonial Algerian identity. The FLN's Third Worldist strategies were as important for their domestic impact as their diplomatic repercussions.

But this globalism guaranteed that the Cold War would penetrate postcolonial Algeria.

Byrne also does an admirable job of tracing the connections between postcolonial politics and the Cold War, showing how the FLN chose to join the larger Cold War struggle as a reaffirmation of their globalist ambitions and a means of gaining foreign aid to launch their own nationalist projects. "Algerian revolutionaries," Byrne explains, "were becoming Cold Warriors" (53-54).

*Mecca of Revolution's* climax arrives with the 1965 coup that removed President Ahmed Ben Bella from power. The coup served as a discordant interruption in the otherwise inspiring tale of the FLN's heroic victory over French colonialism. Indeed, a mere three years after independence, the coup removed one of the greatest revolutionary heroes in the postcolonial world and scuttled plans for a second Bandung Conference to be held in the revolutionary capital of Algiers. News of Ben Bella's overthrow even caused an inbound flight of Chinese diplomats to change course rather than land in Algiers in the midst of a regime change. For Byrne, the coup exposed the pitfalls of postcolonial state-building and cast the Third World project in a new light. Byrne identifies Ben Bella's ouster as part of a "systemic convulsion across the Third World" that also led to the downfall of Sukarno in Indonesia, Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana (288-289).

In this regard, Byrne's work shares much with Robert Malley's *The Call from Algeria*.<sup>2</sup> Like Malley, Byrne points to the cautionary dimensions of the Algerian experience. The promise of the FLN's Third Worldist vision was ultimately circumscribed by local forces—in Malley's study, these were the Islamic parties that went to war against the state in the 1990s. Byrne identifies rival factions within the FLN itself led by Defence Minister Houari Boumediene.

But even these new leaders ultimately chose to reaffirm Algeria's Third-Worldist orientation. Revolutionary cosmopolitanism had become so ingrained in the new nation's identity that the regime could not abandon it. Algeria thus affirmed author Frantz Fanon's argument that armed struggle was integral to postcolonial nation-building.<sup>3</sup> However, by the mid-1960s the Third-World project had changed from a revolutionary to a conservative venture aimed at protecting postcolonial regimes.

Byrne deserves high praise for extensive research in Algerian archives. Though he is not the first to use these archives, I know of no scholar in the field who has carried out such extensive research in Algerian collections. Further, he has conducted interviews with key participants such as Ben Bella himself and made

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Malley, *The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

use of archives in France, Great Britain, the United States, and Serbia. Byrne's study is an impressive piece of multi-lingual, multi-archival research.

Likewise, Byrne's volume is ambitious. The author grapples with a range of themes from revolutionary theory and praxis, to postcolonial development schemes, Third World solidarity, and Algerian foreign policy. As a result of this expansive thematic scope, Byrne's central argument is not always clear. I would have also appreciated a literature review—particularly regarding the literature on postcolonial Algeria.

However, on the whole, *Mecca of Revolution* is a fine-grained study of Algeria that adds to the growing literature on the international history of the postcolonial world. It also represents a fine example of the fruitful convergence of international history and area-studies scholarship. Byrne's study will be necessary reading for all students of post-1945 Algerian history as well as historians of the Cold War in the Third World.



Review by Ryan Irwin, University at Albany, SUNY

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*After the Revolution*

Ten years ago, Arne Westad and Vijay Prashad helped spark a historiographical revolution by tackling the question: What would the twentieth century look like without the ‘Cold War lens’? Matthew Connelly had coined this phrase in 2000, and many scholars accepted the premise that conventional international histories had overemphasized bipolarity and North-North relationships. Both Westad and Prashad authored syntheses of the North-South past. Westad’s *The Global Cold War* reimagined the whole Soviet-American contest as a struggle over modernization in Asia and Africa, and illuminated perspectives that historians had barely considered. Prashad’s equally ambitious *The Darker Nations* explored the hope and heartache of the Third-World political project. Taken together, Westad and Prashad’s books offered big stories—told on large canvases—that challenged the presupposition that 1989 was a historical turning point. When examined from the perspective of the global South, the end of the Cold War changed very little.<sup>1</sup>

Jeffrey Byrne’s *Mecca of Revolution* arrives after this revolution. The literature on the Cold War and decolonization has expanded in the past decade, and his book elaborates the historiography usefully. Byrne uses Algeria as a crossroads. People flocked there, especially at the high point of the Cold War, because the country softened differences among self-styled revolutionaries from Africa, Europe, Southwest Asia, and Latin America. “Algeria offered support and hospitality to a panoply of national liberation movements, guerilla armies, and insurrectionary exiles,” Byrne explains, and it served as the world’s “entrepôt of subversion” (3). Connelly employed a comparable approach to establish Algeria’s importance in *A Diplomatic Revolution*, but *Mecca of Revolution* focuses on South-South relationships—not the French-Algeria conflict—and leads the reader to a very different conclusion.<sup>2</sup> Whereas Connelly argued that Algeria’s revolution heralded the arrival of a post-Cold War world, a world where stateless activists could defeat sovereign powers, Byrne sees evidence of a “dramatically *more* state-centric [international] system.” In his words, “It seems likely that [the] transnational phenomena” so central to Connelly’s story “became more visible” only because “states have been multiplying and monitoring ever more aspects of life” (9-10). Algeria did not upset the postwar order—it confirmed it.

Why did Algeria not live up to its revolutionary potential? The question orients Byrne’s analysis, and his muse throughout *Mecca of Revolution* is Islamist intellectual Malek Bennabi, who once predicted that decolonization would herald a new, more open international society. In Byrne’s retelling, Third Worldism began as a transnational movement that subverted the power of the colonial state, but morphed into a mutual recognition society that perpetuated, legitimized, and defended the authority of the postcolonial state. The problem stemmed from the *Front de libération nationale’s* (FLN) grand strategy, specifically the organization’s decision to blend Wilsonianism with Leninism. The FLN failed to recognize the inherent contradiction of

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<sup>1</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007); Matthew Connelly, “Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence,” *American Historical Review* 105:3 (2000): 739-769.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

equating revolution with diplomatic recognition in an international organization, which led its leaders to accept increasingly state-oriented conceptions of liberation. Rhetorically, they cast their struggle as coeval with the Cuban Revolution while jockeying to undermine their Moroccan and Tunisian counterparts within the Maghreb. And independence merely elaborated this paradox. After winning freedom in the 1962 Evian Accords, the FLN redeployed Third Worldism to legitimize their control of the government, only to discover that free Algeria had surprisingly little revenue. In practice, sovereignty gave Algeria a seat in the U.N. General Assembly and conditional loans from the global North.

Byrne uses this contradiction to understand Algeria's postcolonial fate. President Ahmed Ben Bella shored up his authority by supporting anticolonial rebels abroad, doubling down on the strategy that won him power, and as foreigners flocked to Algiers, he rebranded himself as Africa's Fidel Castro. Alas, celebrity did not put money in the pockets of Ben Bella's domestic supporters, nor did it prevent Morocco from seizing a resource-rich stretch of Algerian territory in 1963, which precipitated the so-called Sand War. As crises mounted, so did tensions between Ben Bella and his Minister of Defense, Houari Boumédiène, who used Morocco's attack to build up the military. Unlike Connelly's narrative, which climaxed with the Evian Accords, Byrne takes the story through 1965. Ben Bella responded to the Sand War by calling an Asia-Africa conference—a follow-up to the renowned Bandung meeting of 1955—and threw himself into the task of reconciling Afro-Asianism with nonalignment and African unity. When Boumédiène responded with a *coup d'état*, many Algerians cheered, not because they were ignorant of Ben Bella's intentions but because familiarity had bred contempt. And this mindset, which tacitly dismissed the line between *ped-rouges* and *ped-noirs*, undercut Bennabi's utopian prophecy.

*Mecca of Revolution* is filled with insights and provocations, but two stand out. First, Byrne suggests that Afro-Asianism did not survive 1965. He softens the claim expertly—providing a nuanced overview of the Non-Aligned Movement and New International Economic Order—but the conclusion resonates because there are enough books to have a decent conversation about the question as to when exactly the Third World project ended. Prashad saw decline in the 1980s and Westad emphasized the late 1960s. My own work has similarly argued for the mid-1960s, but some scholars have suggested that the pessimism started earlier. If the Bandung meeting forged a Sino-Indian alliance, certainly the 1962 Sino-Indian War was symbolic, just as the Sino-Soviet Split altered the politics and logic of anti-imperial revolution.<sup>3</sup> Some historians have argued that nonalignment, neutrality, and Afro-Asian solidarity were different projects with distinct genealogies.<sup>4</sup> Others have lamented this sort of political history altogether, suggesting that talk of turning points only distracts from the deeper mysteries of the decolonization process.<sup>5</sup> Is there now a consensus that two distinct Third

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<sup>3</sup> Robert McMahon, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Rakove, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Nonaligned World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

World projects—separated by America’s defeat in Vietnam—existed during the Cold War? Can we periodize Afro-Asianism, or is the concept still too contested?

Second, *Mecca of Revolution* argues for the primacy of South-South international history. Westad and Prashad’s books prompted a historiographical revolution, but much of the subsequent scholarship has emphasized North-South relationships.<sup>6</sup> Byrne demonstrates the utility of his alternative approach, and makes superb use of Algeria’s archives and interviews with Algerians. He proves that Ben Bella’s Afro-Asianism ran deep, organizing the country’s Foreign Ministry, and *Mecca of Revolution* never slips into the trap of describing events on great power terms. But what are the trade-offs of a South-South approach? Byrne’s analysis of international organizations is a little shallow, partly because he does not step back to consider the logic of the postwar international system through its architect’s eyes. Such an approach would have undercut the distinctiveness of his intervention, admittedly, and added unnecessary exposition to an argument about the contradictions and consequences of the FLN’s grand strategy. But there is an unasked riddle lurking in the shadows of his story. Would Algerian independence have been possible without the international organizations that circumscribed the FLN’s sovereignty? Was Algeria a pilot nation—or a pawn in some bigger game?

Indeed, my only critique of *Mecca of Revolution* stems from the author’s final conclusion. Byrne insists that his story is not a eulogy for the Third World. Thousands of would-be revolutionaries followed Algeria’s example, he explains, and the world is primed for a new Third World project that draws upon the lessons of Algerian history. Which feels inadequate, even if it is true. The premise that the Islamist transnational movements of today—as embodied by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant—resemble the hybrid Marxist-nationalism of yesterday—as personified by Algeria—blurs useful distinctions between reactionary and progressive utopianism, and sidesteps the actual implications of Byrne’s story. He shows that the FLN’s revolutionary strategy laid the groundwork for Ben Bella’s fate, and it is probably true that the habits of revolution preceded revolutionary ideologies in Algeria. But what are we supposed to do with that knowledge? After reading *Mecca of Revolution*, and stewing on its many revelations, my mind drifted toward the different riddle: How should we untangle freedom’s historical relationship to interdependence? This tension saturates every page of Byrne’s book, yet it appears in different guises, and I wonder if wrestling with the question openly might prompt the next historiographical revolution. It would certainly alter the book’s relationship to today’s front-page news.

Byrne has written an excellent study of postcolonial Algeria. *Mecca of Revolution* deserves a place alongside *A Diplomatic Revolution*, and it contributes to the wider conversation about international history in the twentieth century. Byrne offers a dramatic, convincing reminder that Algeria left a lasting imprint on the international system. As he writes, the postcolonial world is our world. What that means remains to be seen.

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<sup>6</sup> For a useful overview, see Lien-Hang Nguyen, “Revolutionary Circuits: Toward Internationalizing America in the World,” *Diplomatic History* 39:3 (June 2015): 411–422. See also Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lien-Hang Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to the Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

Review by Jennifer Johnson, Brown University

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Scholars of Algeria, and especially those who work on the international history of Algeria, know the Herculean task of climbing out and around the shadow of Matthew Connelly's field-defining *A Diplomatic Revolution*.<sup>1</sup> Connelly's work offered a radically different interpretation of the Cold War and showed how Algerian revolutionaries, and by extension the Third World, altered and manipulated the superpowers and Cold War politics during decolonization. Jeffrey James Byrne's new book, which relies on an impressive array of sources spanning Algerian, Western and Eastern European, and United States archives, analyzes Algerian foreign policy as discussed and constructed by the nationalists themselves from the early days of the National Liberation Front (FLN) in 1954 to 1965. His careful research is firmly rooted in Cold War history and yet his meticulous telling of how these nationalist 'guerrilla diplomats' achieved their ultimate goal—Algerian sovereignty—reshapes the Algerian War narrative as told by Connelly.

Byrne separates himself from Connelly's interpretation by depicting a more diverse Cold War landscape that is "much more complicated than a bipolar zero-sum game between Moscow and Washington" and shows how the Algerians deftly bobbed and weaved through a changing international landscape and juggled multiple political projects to their advantage (95). Byrne further distinguishes himself by focusing almost exclusively on South-South relations and in doing so convincingly demonstrates that nationalist leaders from Cuba, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia constantly negotiated and worked with one another in an effort to achieve individual goals as well as redefine global politics. Whereas Connelly's account was grounded in American foreign policy, Byrne highlights Algerian foreign policy in a varied and dynamic Cold War setting that traversed the Global North and Global South. Many Westerners dismissed these Third-World actors as insurgents, but they frequently misjudged the extent to which these elites understood and respected global order and their preparedness to perform diplomacy (65). As a result, these Global South leaders were able to insert themselves and their causes into global politics in ways that were inconceivable before World War II.

*Mecca of Revolution* argues that Third World internationalism, which Byrnes defines as "active cooperation between political elites in the developing world to achieve an extremely ambitious, yet not wholly unrealistic agenda of political and economic reordering on a global scale," was a central tenet of FLN foreign policy both during and after the Algerian War and that it directly challenged the colonial state and contributed to its demise (6). However, its "net result," Byrne contends, "was a dramatically more state-centric world than had been true of even the very late colonial post-World War II years" (9). Without question, the author supports his central thesis by showing the FLN leadership's transition from the varied ideological and political platforms that it pursued during the war to its more closed and traditional national political projects after 1962. He pinpoints the central paradox of postcolonial states: despite seeking out transnational connections during decolonization that directly undermined colonial authority, "postcolonial states sought to mediate and manage all interactions between the domestic space and the outside world" (291). The Algerian case is a particularly ripe example of the hypocritical position many newly independent countries adopted because, as the title suggests, Algiers embodied global revolution. The nationalists' myriad approaches to ousting the French and forging international connections across the Global South encapsulated the spirit of Bandung and inspired the previously colonized to generate alternative platforms, including the Organization of African

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Unity (OAU) and the Group of Seventy-Seven, for engaging with the international order. In this vein, Byrne builds upon the work of Odd Arne Westad, Ryan Irwin, and Paul Chamberlin.<sup>2</sup> However, I question the degree to which the central argument—that Third World internationalism did not succeed after independence and a state-centric model replaced it in its wake—provides a fundamentally different interpretation of the decolonization process.

In addition to reintroducing a state-centric model into the history of decolonization Byrne makes several noteworthy contributions to Algerian history, African history, transnational history, and the study of the end of empire. Unfortunately, Byrne does not adequately highlight his contributions to Algerian and African historiography. In other words, his work breaks down entrenched divisive categories between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa that some readers outside of these fields may not be aware of and which I believe warranted a stronger emphasis.

First, Byrne's Algerian source base is unprecedented and sheds new light on the FLN, the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA), and the post-colonial Algerian state. The Algerian National Archives are notoriously difficult to access, especially if one is working on the period after 1962. Inventories are sparse, permission to photograph or photocopy documents is hard to come by, and one must be prepared to wait days, sometimes weeks, to receive the requested documents.<sup>3</sup> Byrne's Algerian sources, ranging from internal FLN and GPRA strategy memos and foreign policy discussions to deliberations on the Evian Accords and Third World coalition-building efforts, reveal a sophisticated and politically savvy nationalist group. Even when Algerian diplomats felt outmatched in critical negotiations to end the Algerian War, they maintained a firm strategy of defensive obstructionism, forcing French President Charles de Gaulle to make numerous concessions (118). Byrne's nuanced and detailed discussion of top FLN operatives such as Ahmed Ben Bella, Algeria's first President, Houari Boumediene, the Minister of Defense who led the bloodless coup against Ben Bella, thirty-two year-old Mohammed Khemisti, the youngest Foreign Minister to date in 1962, and Rédha Malek, an Ambassador to Belgrade, help us better understand the FLN's intellectual, ideological, political, and military depth. The FLN was not a group of ragtag 'terrorists' as the French frequently claimed in an effort to discredit them. Rather, as Byrne shows, these men considered themselves statesmen and conducted their political affairs with foreign dignitaries and international organizations in ways befitting that title.

Byrne's notable aim of depicting the Algerian nationalists as discerning statesmen did not preclude him from carefully reconstructing the FLN's tumultuous and checkered history. Even though French and Algerian scholars have documented the nationalists' internal power struggles, few English-language sources cover them

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<sup>2</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Intervention and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ryan Irwin, *The Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Todd Shepard, "'Of Sovereignty': Disputed Archives, 'Wholly Modern' Archives, and the Post-Decolonization French and Algerian Republics, 1962-2012," *American Historical Review* 120:3 (2015): 869-883; Omnia El Shakry, "'History without Documents': The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East," *American Historical Review* 120:3 (2015): 920-934.

in the level of detail he does.<sup>4</sup> Byrne's overview of the FLN might encourage scholars of nationalist groups to examine them more fully and include their layered and fraught evolution. Portraying them in all their complexity breaks down the monolithic category of 'the nationalist party' that often emerged after independence and permits historians to engage with other political, economic, social, linguistic, and religious visions that were articulated during decolonization and the early post-colonial period.

While I might quibble with Byrne's portrayal of the Algerian National Archives, which he describes as "rich in a rare commodity in postcolonial archives: evidence from state archives" (7), he remains one of the few scholars to have worked on GPRA and FLN material. Other historians would benefit tremendously from a note on sources and a more detailed explanation of the collections consulted, particularly the FLN and *Ministère aux Affaires Etrangères* (MAE) files after 1962. They shed such crucial insight into the inner-workings of the post wartime FLN and open up a myriad of transnational connections that might offer new ways of understanding Algeria's place in the world after its influential and successful revolution.

Second, throughout the book, Byrne does an excellent job of showing the FLN's consistent and concerted efforts to forge and maintain relations with African leaders including Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Guinea's Sekou Touré, Ivory Coast's Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, and South Africa's Nelson Mandela.

Also, he stresses the ideological and practical impact of the Congo crisis (1960-1961), which led to the untimely assassination of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. Historians of these African countries might reference the FLN's struggle and victory over the French as a larger victory for the continent during decolonization. But too often, Algeria's political, ideological, and economic relations with its Arab neighbors, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt, eclipsed its meaningful ties with other African countries.

Byrne aptly anchors Algerian history in African history. This seemingly obvious statement is in fact more profound for scholars of the diverse continent. Too frequently, North Africa is treated as its own unit of analysis. Sometimes scholars consider it part of the Middle East or the Mediterranean or Africa. The latter is rare. Therefore, when Byrne explains that the Algerians viewed their commitment to buoying other rebel groups as foundational for Algeria's "relations with the rest of Africa" (189), he is (re)establishing often overlooked connections across the continent. Algerian diplomats believed they occupied a "vanguard role" in "leading the fight against imperialism by supporting national liberation movements to their utmost" (188) and they followed through by supporting other African rebel groups, including the Sawaba in Niger, the Union of Cameroonian Peoples in Cameroon, and revolutionary forces in South Africa and Angola. Algeria was heavily involved in forming the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa in May 1963 and "bridging Africa's political divide," further strengthening claims regarding their political acumen in positioning themselves as ideological and symbolic leaders of Africa's future.

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<sup>4</sup> On the origins of Algerian nationalism see, James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For foundational studies of the internal workings of the FLN, see Mohammed Harbi, *Le FLN: Mirage et réalité* (Paris: Editions Jeune Afrique, 1980); Harbi, ed., *Les archives de la Révolution algérienne* (Paris: Editions Jeune Afrique, 1981); Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN, 1954-1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2002).



Byrne admits, however, that some FLN diplomats actively eschewed identity politics and resisted racial categorization. For example, in 1964, Ahmed Ben Bella told Yugoslavia's Josip Tito that "Algeria wants to focus on Africa in its policies. Not because of skin color—we are white like you, maybe a little more brown—but because we have problems identical to problems of other nations on the continent and because our problems are intertwined" (200-201). Ben Bella's comments point to an existing tension about Algeria's place in Africa and in history. On the one hand, the Algerian War was a defining moment of African decolonization that elites across the continent gestured towards in their own struggles and political platforms in the 1950s and 1960s. On the other hand, Algeria's intersectionality between Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean world, and Europe incited multiple perspectives and claims on Algeria and Algerians, from within and from others. Studies of Algeria and African decolonization would be more nuanced if they better balanced these multiple perspectives and expanded the conventional narratives that frequently provincialize North Africa.

*Mecca of Revolution* goes a long way towards opening up new interpretations of the Algerians' remarkable diplomatic efforts. Byrne's interpretation of foreign aid in Algeria, and especially that of humanitarian assistance at the end of the war and under Ben Bella, however, is constrained within a Cold War framework. He writes that in July 1962, "a race to provide humanitarian aid" began (130). This contest yielded "quite a lengthy list of donors," including "the United States, the Soviet Union, communist China, the two Germanys, Yugoslavia, and various other countries from both sides of the Iron Curtain" (134). This analysis sidelines the robust international aid efforts that other scholars have shown were well developed during the war. Organizations such as the International Committee for the Red Cross, Save the Children, and national societies, including Algeria's Red Crescent, led humanitarian campaigns and fundraising initiatives as early as 1955.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these minor interpretative differences, *Mecca of Revolution* is a well-researched book which deserves a wide readership. Byrne's account redefines the parameters of international and transnational history and makes a strong case for why South-South relations are equally as significant as North-North and North-South relations. He shows the many different possibilities when Third World actors circumvented the colonizer/colonized relationship and formed regional alliances based on a shared sense of ideology and practice. Moreover, he bolsters Algeria's role in the Third World and begins the difficult task of analyzing postcolonial realities against the once boundless optimism of decolonization. The disjuncture is uncomfortable but one that must be told and reckoned with.

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<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care, and Humanitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Fabian Klose, *Human Rights in the Shadow of Colonial Violence: The Wars of Independence in Kenya and Algeria*, trans. Dona Geyer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Niek Pas, *Les Pays-Bas et la guerre d'Algérie*, trans. Annette Eskenazi (Algiers: Barzakh, 2013).

Review by Priya Lal, Boston College

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*Mecca of Revolution* takes a close look at Algeria's changing place in the world during and immediately after the country's armed struggle for independence from colonial rule. Jeffrey Byrne's primary point of engagement in this effort is a growing literature on decolonization and the Cold War that seeks to enhance our understanding of twentieth-century global political dynamics through attention to Third World (or non-Western) historical actors. Grounding his inquiry in the fascinating case of Algeria and mining an extensive range of archival material, Byrne presents a novel, decentered picture of the 1950s and early 1960s world that productively advances such scholarly conversations in multiple ways. Above all, Byrne introduces important empirical content into discussions about Third Worldism that are too often anchored by abstractions, helping to build a foundation for more rigorous consideration of this uneven but distinctive, eclipsed but consequential phenomenon. More generally, his work provides a model for analysis that emphasizes global context but centers on an understudied national trajectory, and critically evaluates the motives of historical subjects while taking seriously their stated aspirations and anxieties. The few shortcomings of *Mecca of Revolution* reflect those of its genre – international history – more broadly. Although foreign relations and domestic affairs are inherently linked, Byrne is less successful at illuminating the latter, particularly with respect to popular experiences and dynamics on the ground in Algeria. In addition, Byrne's study sometimes lacks theoretical depth, especially with regard to the concepts of ideology and race.

The book begins with the outbreak of the *Front de libération nationale's* (FLN) liberation war in 1954. Byrne's first chapter explores the Front's efforts to simultaneously tear down the basis of the French colonial regime and begin to lay the foundations for a new postcolonial, national one. Here, as throughout his study, Byrne is concerned with the beliefs, actions, and words of the proto-national movement's leadership, rather than its rank and file membership. He argues that the FLN's campaign initially lacked a meaningful ideological character, despite the fact that by 1958 Algerian political elites were reckoning with broader Cold War tensions and joining attendant alliances of Third World solidarity. Algeria, he shows, quickly became a prominent global center, not as a passive focal point of superpower competition but as an active organizer of leftist, anticolonial, and nonaligned networks. In the process, Algeria's political class became more radical in some respects, increasingly embracing socialist principles and supporting anticolonial revolutions. Simultaneously, the FLN became a more conservative force in other ways, affirming the closed logic of national sovereignty and the international order in which it was embedded, rather than proposing alternatives to these hardening political models and structures.

Chapter Two examines the FLN's provisional government between 1958 and 1962, tracing its efforts to consolidate Algerian sovereignty through participation in various iterations of Third World, nonaligned, and Afro-Asian activism. Such coalitions were themselves concurrently works in progress, although as non-institutionalized formations they remained especially fragile, needing constant reproduction and thereby undergoing almost continuous modification in membership, content, and tactics. Byrne's research into the imaginative, interpersonal, and logistical work that sustained this ongoing production and reconstruction of Third Worldist alliances is especially exciting. In viewing the global scene through Algerian eyes and disaggregating tropes of a monolithic Third World unit, he reveals a landscape populated by key players that most comparable narratives render peripheral, including (in addition to Algeria) Fidel Castro's Cuba, Gamal Nasser's Egypt, and Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia. The reader gains an awareness of the strategic concerns and contingent factors that informed the Algerian leadership's ties to these countries and others, but also develops a sense of empathy for the political outlooks and ethical orientations alternately underpinning and threatening such relationships.



Chapters Three, Four, and Five of *Mecca of Revolution* investigate independent Algeria's debut, following events from 1962 to 1965. Here Byrne delves into a more intensive examination of the shifting considerations animating Algeria's relationships to Cold War superpowers (the U.S., China, and the USSR), France, the Arab world and North Africa (especially Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia), and sub-Saharan African countries and liberation movements (including Ghana, Guinea, the Congo, among many others). At times, these chapters are so committed to precision that they overwhelm the reader with detail. Yet they also offer several organizing themes that help the reader digest this information. Byrne writes of Algerians struggling to craft an autonomous space for themselves in order to assert their radical anticolonial principles on the international stage without alienating the wealthy powers on and to whom they remained dependent and vulnerable. He describes the ultimately corrosive impact of acrimony within the communist world – especially the Sino-Soviet split – on countries like Algeria, and he elucidates Algerian leaders' strategies to maintain influence in the Arab world without becoming embroiled in regional conflicts. The reader learns as well of Algeria's role as a patron of leftist regimes and armed liberation movements in sub-Saharan Africa, a position that entailed a perpetual balancing of the exigency of continental unity with a divisive commitment to supporting potentially destabilizing anticolonial agendas in any form. Byrne's narrative concludes with the collapse of this early phase of the Algerian revolutionary project and the high point of Third Worldist organizing more generally, marked by army officer Houari Boumediene's coup against President Ahmed Ben Bella and the disintegration of what Byrne calls "Bandung 2" – the project of reconvening Afro-Asian countries that had come together a decade earlier to forge a common symbolic political agenda.

In addition to the points already mentioned, *Mecca of Revolution* has several overarching strengths worth noting. Byrne's evaluation of sometimes dry diplomatic archives is presented in a lively and inviting style, and his writing lends a human quality to the material he examines. Moreover, he displays a welcome propensity to think comparatively as well as connectively, not being content to simply trace literal historical linkages across the globe but also endeavoring to experiment with analytical associations that illuminate common conditions and patterns among occasionally unconventional pairings or groups of countries. Thus the reader is fruitfully encouraged to think about similarities and differences between anti-colonialism and nation-building processes in sites as disparate as the Congo, Ireland, and Cuba. Finally, the book balances attention to lofty rhetoric and concrete reality, affording insight into the contradictions inherent to postcolonial statehood in the Cold War world. It provides a window onto the mundane dilemmas and routine challenges at the core of the process of nation building in countries like Algeria, where resource shortages and structural constraints rendered the most basic tasks of setting up a functional state bureaucracy and maintaining a stable economy nearly impossible at times. Alongside Algeria's impressive ability to shape international disputes to local advantage, provide a crucial bridge between varied state and non-state actors scattered across the world, and channel tangible support to freedom fighters in sites like South Africa, Byrne highlights the country's effective imprisonment within unequal international trade patterns and lasting subordination to the political whims of wealthier powers. In this sense, the book does not romanticize the liberating potential of the Third World movement, but neither does it dismiss it.

By contrast, such nuanced treatment is lacking with respect to several thematic dimensions of *Mecca of Revolution*, beginning with Byrne's discussion of ideology. He repeatedly makes a distinction between revolutionary praxis and revolutionary ideology, asserting that the Algerian leadership often took seemingly radical action without understanding this activity within a broader political framework. The assumption upon which this argument resets – that action can be separated from thought, or that practice can be autonomous from discourse – seems oddly antiquated. Historians now take it as a given that all individual and collective experience is mediated by discursive webs and conceptual frameworks, however unstable or difficult to

identify. The fact that Byrne does not discern such an ideological map for his Algerian subjects does not mean they did not have one. For instance, the belief that immediate direct action should be prioritized over future-oriented policy proclamations, or that the latter should grow organically out of the former, is itself constitutive or reflective of an ideology of sorts. Defining “ideology” would be a helpful exercise in correcting this problem, since Byrne seems to be referring to the absence of an explicitly stated official policy *doctrine* rather than a more fundamental (and therefore messier) common political *worldview* among his Algerian subjects.

A second theoretical weakness appears with regard to *Mecca of Revolution*'s treatment of race. It is to Byrne's credit that he explicitly introduces the theme of race into his discussion of Third World organizing – a move that too few scholars have made, despite the obvious historical significance of this category. He brings up race in relation to competing models of Third Worldism that followed the Sino-Soviet split, with the Chinese proposing an identitarian definition of the Third World to be expressed in Afro-Asian coalitions, on the one hand, and the Soviets forwarding a programmatic definition of the movement encapsulated by a platform of non-alignment, on the other. Byrne also refers to racial friction between Algerians and their continental neighbors to the south. Yet these points come with little further exploration of their causes or implications. At times, the book's repeated references to racial tensions within the African context threaten to reify the social construct of race rather than interrogate it. The regular use of the essentializing phrase “black Africa” to denote sub-Saharan Africa exemplifies this critical blindspot. Instead of naturalizing racial fault lines and assuming them to be inevitably generative of hostility or suspicion, scholars would do well to investigate why and how such conceptions of identity and difference took on meaning for historical actors at different points in time. This is true not just for Africans but for the broader set of global actors that Byrne examines. We still do not have a full understanding of why racial considerations dropped out of the stated programs of much Third World organizing between the 1955 Bandung Conference and the 1974 declaration of the New International Economic Order, and more careful analysis would shed considerable light on this issue.

A final shortcoming of the book is its relative neglect of domestic or local processes. By the end of *Mecca of Revolution*, the reader has learned a great deal about Algeria's foreign policy but has encountered little evidence to make sense of the intra-national dynamics that precipitated Ben Bella's demise, for instance. This is not to suggest that Byrne should have undertaken a different study with a different purpose. His stated agenda foregrounds consideration of political elites and foreign affairs over average citizens and domestic affairs, and the former are indeed topics worthy of targeted inquiry. Yet the elite and popular, foreign and domestic cannot be treated in isolation from one another, since they are always entangled; an appropriate analytical balance must be found. What did *autogestion* and other domestic policies look like in practice? How did regional struggles and Islamist movements within Algerian borders originate and evolve? What exactly was behind a growing popular hostility to the cosmopolitan, leftist technocracy—the “*piéd rouges*”—that flocked to Algeria? How did average Algerians adopt, contest, reframe, or ignore their leadership's preoccupation with Third World globalism—did they see themselves as part of something called “the Third World,” or was this an imposed category? The reader is left wondering about such matters.

Yet in many ways, these questions point to the book's value; they build on the wonderfully rich foundation that Byrne's text provides. After all, one of the measures of an important intellectual contribution is its ability to provoke new questions and open up new directions for further research. In this respect among others, as this roundtable discussion will surely confirm, *Mecca of Revolution* has already established itself a significant resource for historians of decolonization, the Cold War, Third Worldism, and nation building in the postcolonial world.

**Author's Response by Jeffrey James Byrne, University of British Columbia**

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I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the H-Diplo team and to Professors Priya Lal, Jennifer Johnson, Ryan Irwin, and Paul Thomas Chamberlin for this terrific roundtable on my book. It really is a privilege to be able to discuss my work this thoroughly with scholars whom I admire greatly. The four reviews are admirably substantive and insightful. Naturally, I am pleased that they are generally very positive in their appraisals, but I am even happier to see that *Mecca of Revolution* can provoke so many fruitful questions and commentaries on a wide array of topics. As I wrote the book, there were many times that I worried that I might be 'blazing a trail' that few would care to follow by writing an international history so thoroughly centred on the postcolonial world and so-called "peripheral" people and places. But whatever its flaws or deficiencies, there does seem to be agreement in these and other reviews that *Mecca of Revolution* productively dis-orients and re-orients readers in defiance of the prevailing perspectives, geographies, and regional frameworks.

I want to start by addressing Professor Lal's expressed wariness of international history as a genre, since this attitude is indicative of a more widespread, pressing methodological debate today. As international and global histories of the Global South proliferate, many scholars are increasingly concerned that the local historical texture is being erased or ignored.<sup>1</sup> These concerns are particularly pressing with respect to the Global South because international history's inherent inclination to synthesize, abstract, and generalize carries the risk of perpetuating stereotypes and essentialism. A further concern of mine is that the ever-rising practical barriers of entry to the field of international history (extensive linguistic training, visas, and subsidized research trips) risk turning it into an inherently exploitative and exclusionary practice, in the post-colonial context. These dilemmas have always been in the forefront of my mind, not least because Algeria has become one of the focal points of the debate between the proponents of international history and those of microhistory, local history, and area studies traditions.<sup>2</sup>

In that context, I do not agree with Lal's contention that I treat the elite/foreign and popular/domestic spheres as if they existed in isolation from one another. For *Mecca of Revolution* describes the actual creation and separation of these spheres—the international and the domestic—within the colonial context. It is, in part, that process that generates and empowers new national elites, in Algeria and many other places. Decolonisation and its immediate consequences, local or otherwise, simply cannot be understood without a full appreciation of the international realm. While Lal would prefer that the book was balanced more towards the domestic popular sphere than it is, the reviews do collectively reassure me that it has sufficient analytical balance to properly explain the historical phenomena that I wanted to explain. Naturally, I would certainly have liked to explore some of the local issues she mentions in greater depth, space permitting, but by making those connections I am at least opening some possible future lines of inquiry.

I also think that there is a danger of shooting the messenger when it comes to critiquing international histories of Third Worldism and decolonisation. Global dynamics and ideas taken up by new national elites did, in

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see the upcoming conference at the University of York, "Revising the Geography of Modern World Histories", <https://www.york.ac.uk/history/americas/conferences/revising-geography-modern-world-histories/>

<sup>2</sup> See the recent conference at Oxford University, "The Algerian War of Independence: Global and Local Histories 1954-62, and Beyond", <https://oxfordalgeriaconference2017.wordpress.com/home/about/>

fact, erase some ‘local texture’ in many postcolonial contexts: we should not blame historians for accurately describing processes that we may deem regrettable.

Moreover, with *Mecca of Revolution*, I wanted to highlight Third Worldism’s creativity as well as its destructiveness. Decolonisation was a time of great possibility and potential—even if some of the diversity of thought that characterised the late-colonial era was lost to the homogenising influence of socialism and nation-statism. I wanted to recapture that era’s sense of possibility, and I am particularly gratified that the two historians of Africans participating in this roundtable, Lal and Johnson, are so appreciative of my disregard for the present day’s dominant geographic paradigms. I am humbled by Johnson’s assertion that I do not “adequately highlight [the book’s] contributions to Algerian and African historiography” in this respect, although I recognise that hers is also a trenchant criticism because I do, after all, deem it important to break down these categories and their accompanying intellectual traditions. Perhaps one of the most basic functions of a post-colonial and post-westernist approaches to international history is to surpass institutionalised concepts of regions and geographies, thereby recapturing the plausibility of futures lost.

It is with a mind to that same goal—recapturing the plausibility of futures lost—that I deliberately chose to give *Mecca of Revolution* a clear sense of chronological narrative while still embracing the complexity of international affairs in the time of decolonisation. As a result of this choice, some readers feel that the book has an excess of detail or that, as Chamberlin puts it, the book’s ambitions and “expansive thematic scope” can at times occlude my central argument. His complaint addresses one of my greatest worries, for I know that *Mecca of Revolution* can be a dense read. Yet it is in no way an exercise in detail for detail’s sake. I tried to strike a balance between narrative and interpretive clarity, on the one hand, and, on the other, offering an accurate portrayal of life ‘near the bottom’ of an international system in full flux. Could I have spared readers, for example, some of the myriad, often tiny liberation movements and revolutionary groups that feature in the book? Perhaps, but it is essential to appreciate that many of these tiny groups eventually rose to great influence and that, with this knowledge, ruling factions in places like Algiers, Accra, and Havana strove to know and cultivate them. There was an extremely fine line between obscurity and sovereignty.

I was concerned that each liberation movement omitted from the narrative because of its eventual future obscurity would bring *Mecca of Revolution* one step closer to the misleading sense of inevitability—including inevitable disappointment and deterioration—that often permeates histories of Africa, North Africa, and decolonization in general. Moreover, the power and appeal of revolutionary methods and ideologies can also not be fully appreciated without recognising that groups such as the Algerian *Front de libération nationale* (FLN) or Fidel Castro’s Cuban rebels were proof positive that tiny groups could take destiny in their hands. Third Worldism’s revolutionary rhetoric was anything but hollow—it was pragmatic and proven.

Likewise, some of the reviewers suggest, in different ways, that the book’s dense narrative can at times lack theoretical rigor and fail to adequately explain future developments such as the growing strength of political Islam in Algeria. These criticisms are understandable because I preferred, for the most part, to keep my theoretical frameworks implicit and my prose relatively jargon-free. I undertook this project with the conviction that, taken as a whole, the existing scholarship on Third Worldism suffered from an excess of theory, polemic, and discourse analysis—but a dearth of empiricism. My first goal was to produce a nuanced, disinterested demystification of decolonization and Third World internationalism. At the same time, I also wanted to avoid reading Algerian history backwards: Third Worldism was not ‘doomed to fail’—I do not even think it failed—and radical political Islamism was not destined to succeed it. Just as the first half of my book stresses the contingency of Algerian nationalism, I did not want the second half to present a false

socialist-nationalist/Islamist dialectic. To be quite honest, I already thought it a bit too on the nose to open Chapter Five with Sayyid Qutb, who is seen by many as an ideological antecedent of Al Qaeda, and the construction of the World Trade Centre...

I would like to address Lal's specific criticisms that *Mecca of Revolution* lacks theoretical rigor in its treatment of ideology and race. Concerning ideology, I believe that this is a case of misunderstanding, for Lal seems to read my argument in Chapter One fully contrary to my intent. That is, she accuses me of treating revolutionary praxis as something that can exist separately from revolutionary theory or ideology, even though, in her words, "[h]istorians now take it as a given that all individual and collective experience is mediated by discursive webs and conceptual frameworks." But I fully agree with the latter observation. Indeed, it serves as an elegant summation of my central argument in the first chapter. To be clear: I am not the one who believes that praxis can be separated from ideology, but rather the Algerian revolutionaries, who inadvertently inculcated themselves in Marxist-Leninist and Maoist 'discursive webs and conceptual frameworks' by taking up the revolutionary methodologies of the communist world.

It seems also that Lal does not perceive a clear distinction between my own understanding of race and that of my Algerian, Yugoslavian, Cuban, and African protagonists. So I want to stress that my purpose is not to reify or essentialize racial and geographical categories (on the contrary, I feel that one of the book's key contributions is to bypass them) but rather to show how Third-Worldist operatives struggled to use these subjective and elusive constructions for their own diplomatic ends. More generally, I do feel that the question of race within the Third-Worldist project is a fascinating and underexplored subject that is increasingly central to my ongoing research. I do concede that *Mecca of Revolution* is only one of the first steps on this course, and far from the last.

Finally, Irwin and Johnson put forward several intriguing questions and observations that clearly warrant a longer conversation than is possible here. They push me to elaborate my position on the nation-state in the postcolonial context. I confess that I am something of a transnational sceptic (in both meanings). Because scholars find transnationalist perspectives intellectually stimulating and because they have, until recently at least, overwhelmingly focused their attentions on Europe and North America, many have convinced themselves that the nation-state has declined in relative power, influence, and/or importance in the course of the twentieth century, even though the large majority of humankind has actually experienced an exponential, almost suffocating growth in state power. We see what we want to see, but we see more and more—including transnational processes—because we rely on the state's ever-multiplying eyes.

Irwin and Johnson raise the question of international organizations. I feel that one of the insights to be gained from the Third-Worldist perspective is to highlight the distinction between those international organizations (which happen, in my view, to be most of the major ones) that curtail sovereignty and those, conversely, whose net effect is to strengthen sovereignty and reinforce the primacy of the state. Moreover, many of those organizations that do meaningfully curtail state sovereignty largely do so in service of the most powerful state(s), so that their true function is to maintain the hierarchy among states (the International Criminal Court and International Atomic Energy Agency come to mind).

Irwin suggests that *Mecca of Revolution* asks why Algeria "did not live up to its revolutionary potential" by taking such a markedly statist turn after independence. He also asks how historians might "untangle freedom's historical relationship to interdependence," in the sense that international society and international organizations were crucial in bringing freedom to the colonial world. Yet, in my view, the Third World state

failed neither in Algeria nor in the more general sense (unfortunate exceptions notwithstanding). On the contrary, I believe that, on the balance of things, the Third-World state continues to be a far more important motor of liberation (from racism, from hunger, from tradition) for the lion's share of humanity than an 'international society' that has, until recently at least, generally been a euphemism for the postcolonial West and select invitees from the developing world (the so-called "moderates" and "liberals" and the like). It remains to be seen if international society as we think of it will survive the diminution of American power—indeed, recent events in the United States raise the prospect that the American order will be refuted and dismantled at its very heart in the same manner that the Young Turks terminated the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, widespread celebration of the 'Beijing model'—a newer variant of the Third-World state that seems to have accommodated and outlived the neoliberalism that sought so ardently to destroy it—suggests that Deng Xiaoping, China's architect of authoritarian state capitalism, may leave as great a mark on the twenty-first century as Vladimir Lenin did on the twentieth.

But such brash musings and contentions are, as we used to say at my postgraduate alma mater, questions for the pub. On that note, I look forward to the next opportunity to thank my reviewers in person. I again thank them and the H-Diplo organisers for this wonderful opportunity to discuss the shortcomings and merits of *Mecca of Revolution*.