

Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, decolonization,
and the Third World Order by Jeffrey James
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 ***Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, decolonization, and the Third World Order by Jeffrey James Byrne (review)***

Carolyn Barnett

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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When it gained independence from France in 1962, Algeria immediately faced a mass exodus of the *Pieds noirs*, the European inhabitants of French Algeria. Soon afterward, it encountered an influx of outsiders referred to as *Pieds rouges* ("red feet"), a hodge-podge of leftists, revolutionaries and other idealists from around the globe attracted to the "Mecca of Revolution," Algiers, a city full of radical possibilities. In *Mecca of Revolution*, Jeffrey James Byrne traces the emergence and evolution of Algerian nationalists' connection to broader Third World and revolutionary currents and how Algeria shaped the evolution of the international system from the early twentieth century to the mid-1960s.

The book is organized into five chapters which proceed in roughly chronological order. "Method Men," encompassing the emergence of the nationalist movement to the mid-point of the war, emphasizes the Algerians' greater focus on the praxis of revolution than on ideology and their early links with the international community. "Our Friends Today" discusses how, largely due to the collapse of the insurgency inside Algeria, the FLN embraced aggressive diplomacy in the West and East and began building deeper links with Cuba and with African independence movements, reflecting an embrace of the transformative power of Third Worldism as a concept. "Real Existing Third Worldism" explores the ambiguities and tensions that arose domestically as Ben Bella sought to implement a "specifically Algerian" brand of socialism and to play various foreign benefactors against one another so that Algeria would not become beholden to any particular outside patron. This course of action began to stir domestic opposition from those who resented the increasingly global and cosmopolitan orientation of the leadership in Algiers. "The Allure of Globalism" argues that independent Algeria's early foreign policy demonstrated that "Third Worldist ideals could indeed provide the basis for a practical and consistent foreign policy" (223). The final chapter, "Mecca of Impatience and Anxiety," argues that former Algerian President Houari Boumedienne—who overthrew Ben Bella—and

his "political clan" took advantage of growing tensions between the project of building a nation-state and Ben Bella's aggressive pursuit of an activist version of nonalignment to bring down the leader they saw as a threat to collective decision-making.

Several themes run through Byrne's work. First, he argues that Algeria's actions and those of other Third World powers demonstrate that the increasing globalization of politics reinforced the primacy of the nation-state as the organizing unit of the international system. In order to act effectively within the international system, Byrne argues, Algerian and other postcolonial (or aspiring postcolonial) leaders had to strengthen their claims to national sovereignty. Second, Byrne shows how the composition of the "Third World" ideology and community were the subject of significant contestation. In particular, by 1965, actors were divided as to whether the Third World was to be defined "programmatically," as "a movement with an agenda that was open to any who shared its political and economic goals," or as "the expression of an innate identity... limited to non-Western regions or races" (282). Algeria's leaders were partial to programmatic definitions, which suited their interests and reflected their convictions.

Third, Byrne underscores that a balance of pragmatic and principled motives drove Algerian foreign policy decision-making. Algeria sought to protect its territory from the ambitions of Moroccan and Tunisian leaders, and it saw little hope of steering the course of events in the Arab east, where revolutionary regimes under Nasser in Egypt and the Ba'ath Party in Syria and Iraq were already pursuing competing visions of Arab nationalism. In Africa, by contrast, Algeria proved itself a leader of anticolonial activism and postcolonial political organization, although its selective provision of arms and training to insurgent movements across the continent contributed, in time, to increasing polarization. Relations with Cuba and Yugoslavia were strong largely because of ideological affinities, but the former had also to be contained so as not to threaten Algeria's precarious relationship with the United States.

Byrne's work is engagingly written and highly impressive in...

Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, decolonization, and the Third World Order

By Jeffrey James Byrne. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

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Mecca: A Literary History of the Muslim Holy Land, aphelion really distorts the ethyl rotor.

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Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, decolonization, and the Third World Order by Jeffrey James

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