

Chris Patten, *The Hong Kong Diaries*, London, Penguin Books, 2022, 522 pp., ISBN 9780141999715

Chris Patten (full name: Christopher Francis Patten) is an iconic British political figure of the twentieth century. He began working for the Conservative Party in 1965 and was elected Member of Parliament in 1979. After serving as Secretary of State for the Environment under Margaret Thatcher and becoming Chairman of the Party in 1990, he unfortunately lost his seat in the Parliament in the 1992 elections, when John Major became Prime Minister. To compensate him for his excellent job, he was designated to take charge of the handover of Hong Kong to China, a role which earned him the enduring title of “the last Governor of Hong Kong.” The *Diaries* present an intriguing insight of the final years of the handover. By occasionally adding a touch of humor, Patten describes how his defeat in the 1992 general elections drove him to accept the huge responsibility of managing the transition of the city under the Chinese rule. During his stay in Hong Kong, from 1992 to 1997, Patten did what he thought was best to introduce a democratic system which could resist the influence of the Beijing government. He believed that the principle of “one country, two systems”, formulated by Deng Xiaoping, could ensure the development of a modern political order that could meet the expectations of the inhabitants of the former colony.

The Hong Kong harbor and the Kowloon Peninsula had fallen under the British control after the First and the Second Opium War respectively, while the New Territories had become part of the British Empire only later, on a 99-year lease conceded by the Qing court at the end of the nineteenth century. According to the Sino-British Joint Declaration, signed in 1984 to define the

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conditions of the return of Hong Kong to China, the city and the surrounding territories were supposed to return to the motherland on June 1st, 1997. Following the “one country, two system” principle, the former colony would maintain its capitalist economic system for 50 years after the handover. Patten believed that Hong Kong had two fundamental characteristics that made it different from the other former colonies. The first was that there was a precise date when the British would leave without granting it independence. The second was that most of the Hongkongers were refugees, and many of them had escaped from the extreme conditions of the newborn People’s Republic of China. Reforms such as the Great Leap Forward and political movements like the Cultural Revolution marked in depth the cities and the countryside. For this reason, the refugees from the mainland who arrived in Hong Kong were in most cases strongly motivated and well-prepared to face the difficulties of building a new life from scratch. However, when Patten arrived in the city, there were many second-generation immigrants who identified as Hongkongers and never experienced the hardships of life in Maoist China.

Being Governor was challenging, because Patten was confronted with the contrasting expectations of different groups of people. On the one hand most of the Hongkongers wanted him to stand on behalf of them in front of Beijing, but many (mostly tycoons) would have preferred to give up part of their freedom for protecting their economic interests. The main achievement of Patten’s administration was the electoral reform, by which he managed to expand the democratic representation in the Legislative Council (LegCo), even though his action had to remain within the framework imposed by the Sino-British Declaration and the Basic Law. He also considered the defense of the British interests on the construction of the Chek Lap Kok airport as a priority, and worked to ensure the enforcement of the *Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on the Construction of a New Airport in Hong Kong and Related Projects* to prevent the post-1997 administration from bearing an excessive financial burden. He also promoted the establishment of the Court of Final Appeal, and a series of bills aimed at improving the social welfare in today’s Hong Kong SAR (Special Administrative Region). In the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the UK stated its commitment to recognize the Chinese authority according to the principle of “two countries, one system”, while granting Hong Kong citizens the rights of freedom of press, speech and religion. However, Patten’s action was limited by the former agreements between the British Sec-

retary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Chinese Foreign Minister. Moreover, his reforms had to be coherent with the Basic Law, which can be considered as the equivalent of a Constitution for Hong Kong and has been approved in Beijing by the National People's Congress in 1990.

The main content of the book is divided into five chapters, one for every year from 1992 to 1997. Patten describes his activities almost every day, writing about his work as Governor and exposing his reflections about Chinese and British politics. His considerations are interspersed with tender scenes of family life. In the Foreword, he explains the history of the colony, and states that "no one today would seek to justify imperialism" (p. xxi). It can be said that Patten's work aims to attribute to the Beijing government alone all the responsibility for the gradual decline in the levels of freedom enjoyed in the former colony once it was returned to Chinese sovereignty. To do so, Patten presents his own account of the latest developments before 1997.

In the first chapter, *Democracy and the Dragon: April 1992-April 1993*, Patten recalls his decision to become Hong Kong's Governor. Supported by his wife Lavender, one of the most significant characters in the book, he decides to accept the post, knowing that it would be a challenging experience. After being briefed about the situation, Patten recognizes that between the main issues to solve there are the introduction of the Court of Final Appeal, the organization of the 1994 and 1995 elections and the agreement with the Chinese government about the construction of the new airport (pp. 15-16). He has clear ideas about his position on the handover: he is not representing Beijing and does not want to *kowtow* (knee and touch the ground with the forehead in worship or submission as part of Chinese custom). On the contrary, he presents himself as the defender of the interests of the Hongkongers, intending to maintain the British control over the city and fighting to entrench human rights principles as much as possible within Hong Kong's legal framework (pp. 38-39). He gradually becomes familiar with his new responsibilities and with the difficulties in the negotiations with Beijing. Lu Ping, head of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, does not seem open to accept Patten's propositions (p. 61), and Zhou Nan, head of the Hong Kong branch of the New China News Agency (NCNA), is also described as "cold and arrogant" (p. 48). Through these portrayals, Patten constructs a narrative that reinforces his self-image as a pragmatic yet principled actor, implicitly contrasting his political integrity with the intransigence of his Chinese counterparts. However, this self-representation also reveals a certain degree of partiality: by positioning himself as

the sole guardian of Hong Kong's freedoms, Patten risks oversimplifying the complexity of Sino-British relations and downplaying the broader geopolitical dynamics that shaped the transition.

The second chapter, *Round and Round the Mulberry Bush: April 1993 – April 1994*, is mostly focused on the infinite and often ineffective negotiations with Beijing about the electoral reform. The Chinese authorities remain resolutely uncompromising, refusing to make any concessions and deliberately prolonging the talks to pressure the British into reducing the number of directly elected legislators. The basis of their claim is an agreement made through a telegram exchange between Douglas Hurd, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth, and Qian Qichen, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, which is seen by the Chinese as a binding commitment. Beijing invites the UK to stick to the Joint Declaration and to the content of the Basic Law. At the same time, Patten's narrative reveals the ambivalence within the British establishment, where fears of jeopardizing economic relations with China and with Hong Kong-based businesses often temper the rhetoric of democratic reform. In this sense, the chapter exemplifies the broader tension that runs throughout Patten's account: the struggle to reconcile the language of moral principle with the pragmatism of late colonial diplomacy.

The year 1994-1995 is the most successful for Patten, it is described in the chapter *Winning the Big Vote: April 1994- April 1995*. In the beginning, Patten states the necessity of focusing on human rights as much as possible. The electoral reform is voted by LegCo, and it is approved. It is a great victory for Patten, which also obtains the agreement to continue working on the airport, a strategic infrastructural project he wants to carry on avoiding an excessive Chinese participation. In the end of September, district board elections are won by the Democrats. Yet beneath this triumphal narrative lies a degree of political tension: the governor's efforts to strengthen democratic institutions increasingly clash with Beijing's suspicion of British motives and its desire to reassert control before the handover. Ultimately, Patten's achievements, though presented as evidence of moral and political success, appear more symbolic than structural - a final assertion of British liberal ideals in a context already moving irreversibly toward Chinese sovereignty.

Starting the Countdown: May 1995-May 1996 is the fourth chapter. After the bad results of Patten's party in the UK local election, new political difficulties begin to emerge in Hong Kong as well. However, even if Conservatives were facing troubles in the UK, the Prime Minister John Major, Patten's friend, sup-

ports Patten's action in Hong Kong. Another fundamental ally of the Governor is the Chief Secretary Anson Chan. The bill on the Court of Final Appeal is discussed at LegCo, after this reform was intensively debated in the Joint Liaison Group. In September the Democrats triumphed in the LegCo elections, but Patten is criticized because he argues that the right of abode should be given to all the Hong Kong passport holders. Another political incident is caused by the declaration of Qian Qichen that LegCo will not have a role after 1997 in an interview in the UK. The Chinese insist, indeed, to create a provisional LegCo before the transition. In narrating this phase, Patten presents himself as a steadfast yet isolated figure, striving to uphold liberal principles amid the approaching handover — a narrative approach that subtly elevates political events into a reflection on responsibility, legacy, and the moral challenges of decolonization.

The final chapter, *The Empire Goes Home: May 1996-June 1997*, describes the talks about the organization of the handover ceremony, which become increasingly intricate and object of frequent discussions. C.H. Tung is elected as the first Chief Executive, and he is a figure aligned to Beijing. Patten fears for the freedom of the press and civil liberties after 1997, especially after having observed Tung's actions. He also acknowledges that no real effort towards democratization has been made in Hong Kong before his mandate. His role as Governor becomes increasingly irrelevant as the handover approaches, and he is often attacked by the press accusing him of selling out Hong Kong's interests. In Patten's opinion many nations are *kowtowing* to China to obtain economic advantages, but he opposes this strategy and thinks it is negative for the future of Hong Kong. On the 30th of June, after the handover ceremony, Patten and his family leave the city on board of the *Britannia*, marking the end of the British Empire. Through this final episode, Patten completes the self-portrait he has been shaping throughout the diaries: that of a conscientious and principled statesman standing against the tide of historical inevitability. His narrative transforms the political retreat of Britain from Hong Kong into a meditation on moral endurance and loss, blurring the line between personal testimony and the elegy of an empire coming to its end.

After the *Postscript*, in the paragraph *The Destruction of Hong Kong: What Happened after 1997?* Patten introduces his reflection on the consequences of the handover and on Hong Kong's situation today. He thinks that facts have proved Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" theory wrong. In 2020, the National Security Law was approved by the Standing Committee of the National

People's Congress in Beijing, after the protest arising because of the Hong Kong government attempt to amend the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance. Patten believes that this bill, which expands the power of authorities and strengthens punishments for some crimes including collaborating with foreign governments against the interest of the country, is a huge limitation to the city's call for democracy. He thinks that Xi's mandates increased the control of the Communist Party over the whole China, including Hong Kong and Macao. This idea is coherent with the description of the changes in the Chinese leadership by most scholars, for example Zhao Suisheng, who describes the differences between the mandates of the five leaders who guided China since 1949 in his book *The Dragon Roars Back* (2023), showing how Xi aims to transform his country in a great international power.

Overall, the *Diaries* provide a valuable testimony of one of the most significant moments in modern world history. While the events are recounted from Patten's personal perspective and therefore may not offer a fully objective account of the handover, they provide important insight into the challenges of that period. His efforts to promote democratization are commendable, though belated, reflecting both the limited time he had as the last Governor of Hong Kong and the pressures from the business community, which was primarily focused on preserving its privileges. At the same time, this book seems a blend of political testimony and self-reflective narrative which could be read as an attempt to frame the end of the empire not as a defeat but as a moment of ethical reflection and historical reckoning. Patten proudly presents himself as the defender of civil liberties and democratic aspirations in Hong Kong, transforming his governorship into the moral epilogue of Britain's imperial presence in Asia and by that, softening the critique against colonialism, which may be perceived as superficial.

Giada Donzel, Università di Cagliari

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Chiara Pagano, *La politica berbera nella Libia coloniale. Identità, reti e conflitti (1835-1924)*, Roma, Carocci, 2025, 166 pp., ISBN 9788829027545

The volume stands out for its depth and represents a significant contribution to Libyan historiography, offering a detailed and nuanced analysis of Libyan history from the mid-19th century to the advent of Fascism in Italy, adopting a critical and multidisciplinary perspective.

Through careful archival research and the use of multilingual sources, the author focuses her investigation on the construction and transformation of Berber/Amazigh ethnicity, examined through colonial dynamics, identity politics and imposed or negotiated historical narratives. The volume analyses how colonial powers attempted to shape and exploit North African identities, focusing on Tripolitania and its complex ethnic-religious dynamics. The discourse revolves around the idea that identity, especially Amazigh and Ibadi identity, is not an immutable given, but rather a terrain of negotiation and conflict. Within this framework, the colonisers' hegemonic project intersected with local strategies of resistance and mediation. While France developed a more refined and institutionalised colonial policy in Algeria, based on legal and anthropological knowledge that could be translated into concrete mechanisms of government, Italy oscillated between improvisation and repression, unable to establish a coherent colonial model.

The volume is rich in information and divided into four chapters that combine chronological analysis and thematic reflection. The first chapter challenges the notion that Ottoman Tripolitania was a backward and isolated region, but a meeting point for goods, people and ideas. The author shows that ethnic and religious pluralism was managed by a government that integrated differences (pp. 35-40). The Qaramanli dynasty and the regional autonomies of Cyrenaica and Fezzan demonstrate that Libyan provinces could negotiate with Istanbul while preserving their self-determination (pp. 41-43). Despite pressures for local autonomy, the populations did not see the Ottoman Empire as a coloniser, especially in contrast to the threat of Italian expansion. Indeed, as pressure from Italian colonialists in the region intensified between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, dissatisfaction with the Ottoman Empire's ambiguous response to this growing threat helped to legitimize the reformist movement of the Young Turks. The three provinces - Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan - saw

this movement as a means of remaining within the Ottoman sphere through a renewed autonomy pact that more effectively safeguarded them against European ambitions (pp. 51-53).

The second chapter examines the Italian colonial project, focusing on its preparation and implementation through policies and scientific knowledge used to justify domination. The author adopts the concept of colonial knowledge, showing how it is never neutral and how, in the Italian case, it was permeated by racial and religious stereotypes. The authorities sought to develop differentiated policies, particularly towards the Berber communities of the future Libyan colonies, in the belief that linguistic and historical knowledge could provide the Italian government with effective tools to rule in a region considered strategic. The creation of “Italian Berber studies” from 1914 onwards, with research promoted by scholars such as Francesco Beguinot, responded to both the desire to provide a scientific basis for the colonial project and the need to compete with France, which had already institutionalised its own tradition of Berber studies.

However, the investigations the Italians conducted, although accumulated with philological rigour, ended up providing a partial and contradictory picture which was never translated into concrete administrative measures. The complexity of the relations that the Ibadis communities had with the Ottoman Empire and with the cross-border networks of North Africa continued to be neglected by scholars.

The Italian colonial vision favoured a functional simplification of domination, which tended to marginalise the Ibadis Berbers or reduce them to essentialising categories, ignoring the plurality of their forms of political and social intermediation. In this sense, the promotion of Berber studies represented more a tool of ideological legitimisation and international competition than a genuine instrument of governance. Although Italian African studies underwent a period of reassessment in the 1980s and 1990s, Berber studies remained marginal and largely confined to Naples. In the Libyan context, ethnicity has often been treated as a fixed attribute, rather than as a political-cultural construct shaped by colonial dynamics. The isolation of Italian Amazigh studies, confined mainly to the University of Naples L’Orientale and lacking solid connections to the international academic and political worlds, accentuated this disconnect between the knowledge production and colonial practice, marking one of the structural limitations of the Italian colonial experiment.

The preservation of dialects and Ibadism by local communities was interpret-

ed as a sign of national consciousness (p. 105), but it was also used politically to justify collaboration with colonial authorities. Amazigh identity was thus simplified, ignoring the complexity of religious and political interactions. Pagano challenges various earlier interpretations, seeing the interaction between local notables and colonial power as the result of intermediation strategies rather than mere opportunity. Berber elites seemed capable of negotiating their own positions of authority, and their ambivalence must be interpreted in terms of local specificities, socio-economic dynamics and the perception of their strategies by local communities. Although useful, this approach must be applied with caution to avoid generalisations and to understand the true impact of notable figures in order to gauge how they were perceived, accepted, endured or opposed by local populations and to clarify the real effectiveness and legitimacy of their role.

The third chapter examines French colonial policies in Algeria and compares them with Italian strategies in Libya, highlighting the contradictions of colonial rule. It analyses how cultural and religious differences were used as instruments of power, but at the same time misunderstood. The division between Arabs and Berbers was not a natural one but was created by geographical and ethnological sciences, becoming an ethnic boundary used for colonial control. An example of the French colonial approach is the Mزاب region, where a treaty in 1853 granted special status to the Ibadis (p. 72), which served to co-opt local elites and simplify the mechanisms of French control. Italy sought to replicate this model in Libya, but without a clear strategy (p. 109). While in Algeria, Ibadis autonomy was used as a tool for mediation, in Tripolitania policies were inconsistent and linked to military control. The Italian approach in Libya was fragmented and lacked coherent strategies, with sporadic and poorly coordinated initiatives. In this context, the Italian experience in Libya reveals that Berber policy remained an incomplete and incoherent project, based on a “policy of chiefs” that lacked stable foundations.

The co-opting of local leaders proved insufficient to ensure lasting control, as there was no stable administrative apparatus. As a result, Italian policies strengthened community identity rather than weakening it, an identity which was further fuelled by the active support of cross-border Ibadis networks linking the Jabal Nafusa with southern Tunisia and the Algerian Mزاب. These transnational connections exposed a regional dimension that escaped the simplistic frameworks of Italian colonialism.

The fourth chapter of the volume analyses a key moment in Italian colonial

policy, highlighting the transition from a liberal to a fascist period, characterised by a more militaristic and repressive approach. After the First World War, the withdrawal of many Italian troops led to a power vacuum, revealing the contradictions of the colonial project. The rigidity of Italian colonialism clashed with Libyan resistance, revealing a fundamental disconnect between colonial intentions and local reality. The figure of Sulayman al-Baruni is exemplary, as he was initially welcomed as an ally but was later repressed for his political autonomy, revealing the structural failures of colonial logic. The chapter also explores the political dynamics in Tripolitania between the end of the Ottoman Empire and the Italian invasion, where Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism intersected. The urban elite of Tripoli saw Ottomanism as stability and protection, while Pan-Islamism appealed to religious solidarity and united the tribes in resistance against colonial encroachment (p. 148). This tension between institutional loyalty to the Empire and transnational religious mobilisation shaped the political landscape in which the colonial trauma unfolded. Pan-Arabism, on the other hand, promoted cultural and linguistic connections between people. War and invasion transformed these ideological currents into concrete political projects, compelling communities to unite in the face of colonial aggression. Italian attempts to divide communities based on ethnic identity failed, giving rise to alliances between Berbers and Arabs. Libyan resistance transformed the colonial threat into an opportunity for cohesion.

The fifth and final chapter analyses resistance in Tripolitania after the proclamation of the *Jumhuriyya al-Trabuslusiyya* (Tripolitanian Republic), showing how local forces sought to unify the struggles against colonial repression. Leaders were forced to change their strategies, forge new alliances, and negotiate for self-governance to sustain anti-colonial mobilisation. The author also examines how Berber and Arab identities changed within the resistance movements during the six years leading up to final colonial defeat (pp. 191-195). Although there was no autonomous ethnic agenda in the early post-war period, Italian authorities sought to limit patriotic sentiments by promoting a pro-Berber approach in Tripolitania. This strategy of division proved partially effective as Pan-Islamism and Pan-Ottomanism continued to fragment the political landscape. The chapter describes how, under Giuseppe Volpi, Italian colonialism shifted toward a systematic military strategy that aimed to eliminate resistance in the Jabal Nafusa. Under Rodolfo Graziani, repression became extreme, leading to a loss of mediation and reducing “Berber partic-

ularism” to mere colonial rhetoric.

In conclusion, Pagano’s volume, while focused on elite actors, offers an original and rigorous reading of Italian colonialism, linking the production of colonial knowledge to local political strategies and restoring the complexity of Amazigh and Ibadi identities often obscured by earlier historiographies. One constructive criticism concerns the absence of detailed analytical indexes, which limit the work’s ease of consultation. Nevertheless, the volume stands as a fundamental work for scholars of post-independence North Africa and colonial history, as well as for readers who wish to deepen their understanding of the historical roots of the contemporary Libya’s complex identity dynamics.

Anna Maria Di Tolla, University of Naples “L’Orientale”

Elisa Giunchi, Nicola Melis (eds), *The Abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate, 1924: Debates and Implications*, London, Routledge, 2024, 198 pp., ISBN 9781032613468

The centenary of the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate has inevitably prompted a renewed historiographical engagement with one of the most symbolically charged moments in twentieth-century Islamic and Middle Eastern history. While the republican reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk have long attracted scholarly attention, the decision to dissolve the Caliphate has too often been treated as the inevitable and terminal act of a secularizing revolution, a gesture that simply closed the imperial past and inaugurated the modern Turkish nation-state. *The Abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate, 1924: Debates and Implications*, edited by Elisa Giunchi and Nicola Melis, challenges this linear narrative. It invites readers to consider the abolition not as a punctual rupture but as a complex and contested process, embedded in global debates on religion, legitimacy, and sovereignty.

The editors frame the volume within an interdisciplinary dialogue that bridges history, political thought, and Islamic studies. Their shared introduction situates the Caliphate question at the intersection of post-imperial reordering and religious reform, proposing to re-evaluate 1924 as both an endpoint and a constitutive beginning, the moment when competing conceptions of authority, community, and modernity were renegotiated. As the editors note, the abolition of the Caliphate was neither a purely domestic event nor a marginal theological decision. It had far-reaching reverberations across the Muslim world, shaping

debates in Egypt, India, North Africa, and beyond. The volume's central ambition, therefore, is to reassess those implications through a collection of essays that deal with key questions such as the place of the Caliphate within Muslim political theory, the debates surrounding its "spiritual" and secular power, the prerogatives and the methods of choosing of the caliph.

What unites these essays is a shared refusal to read the abolition of the Caliphate as a self-evident or inevitable step toward secular modernity. Instead, the contributors collectively depict 1924 as an arena of negotiation where competing actors - religious scholars, politicians, colonial administrators, tribal chiefs and intellectuals - sought to redefine the terms of legitimacy. The editors' choice to juxtapose local Turkish debates with international receptions underscores the Caliphate's global entanglement. The institution may have been Ottoman in form, but its abolition resonated across multiple Muslim societies struggling to reconcile faith and statehood in the post-imperial order. In this respect, the book offers a welcome corrective both to nationalist (chiefly Turkish and Arab) and Western historiographies that tend to circumscribe the event.

The volume's most evident merit lies in its plurality of perspectives and the capacity to meld together different dimensions of analysis. This aspect also reflects the editors' intention to create a platform for ongoing debate rather than a definitive synthesis. Furthermore, many of the authors are established scholars who pioneered research in the field.

Nonetheless, some limits are clearly observable. The book's aim of framing the implications of the Caliphate on a global scale is only partially successful. A notable absence in the text is a chapter specifically focused on the reactions of Indian Islam, despite numerous references in several essays. It is clear that not all contributions exhibit equivalent analytical depth or methodological rigour. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the limitations in the chapters, the book is well-balanced when considered as a whole. The combination of useful reassessments, micro-histories and chapters that reconstruct complex intellectual debates whose echoes are highly topical renders the text a valuable resource for both non-specialist readers and experts alike.

Fulvio Bertuccelli, Università di Roma La Sapienza, University of Bern

Francesca Decimo, *Lives in Motion: The Transnational Making of Population between Morocco and Italy*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, 154 pp., ISBN 9783031655821

Il lavoro di Francesca Decimo esplora l'intersezione tra migrazione, parentela e riproduzione, traguardata attraverso le comunità marocchine in Italia, principali attori di questa ricerca. Il primo pregio di questo lavoro è cercare di indagare quanto accade nei contesti migratori, sfuggendo alla spuma dell'attualità sul tema dei rifugiati e richiedenti asilo ormai diventata una ortodossia nei migration studies.

Le dinamiche familiari dei migranti non sono un mero effetto secondario della mobilità, ma rappresentano l'elemento motore che modella le traiettorie migratorie e ne determina gli esiti a lungo termine. In questo contesto, il concetto strategico è quello di "creazione transnazionale della popolazione" (Capitolo 3), ovvero un insieme concreto di relazioni, pratiche e valori che rendono il matrimonio, la procreazione e l'educazione della prole sostenibili e praticabili in un contesto migratorio. La riflessione dell'autrice non si appunta su come le famiglie mantengano i legami a distanza (tema tradizionale dell'approccio transnazionale), cerca, piuttosto, di mostrare come gli eventi vitali di riproduzione sociale siano interconnessi e stimolati dalla mobilità tra i luoghi di origine e di arrivo. Tali eventi non solo guidano i percorsi di vita individuali (su cui la riflessione "sociologica" sceglie di non appuntarsi), ma innescano anche profonde trasformazioni demografiche e sociali nei paesi di destinazione.

Nel caso della comunità marocchina, che nasce a prevalente componente maschile, il matrimonio transnazionale, sostenuto da fitte reti di parentela, ha funzionato come il principale motore di una strategia di insediamento di interi nuclei familiari.

Il testo, frutto di una ricerca multisituata che utilizza dati etnografici raccolti tra il 2013 e il 2014, si dipana attraverso una serie di passaggi. In prima istanza, viene esaminata l'evoluzione dei modelli matrimoniali, per poi approfondire il ruolo centrale delle reti di parentela come capitale sociale che sostiene la mobilità. Successivamente, l'autrice si focalizza sulle implicazioni di genere e l'*agency* femminile come perno di questa trasformazione. Il flusso migratorio marocchino in Italia, avviatosi negli anni Settanta e in maniera più significativa nel decennio successivo, ha espresso a lungo la nazionalità straniera più presente in Italia, mantenendo comunque oggi saldamente il terzo posto (dopo

Romania e Albania), anche dopo lo stravolgimento degli arrivi a seguito dell'apertura del sistema migratorio dell'Europa Orientale. La presenza marocchina ha subito una profonda metamorfosi, passando da un modello basato su uomini soli a un progressivo insediamento di nuclei familiari stabili. Si è registrato, infatti, un progressivo riequilibrio del rapporto tra i sessi, passando da circa 4 uomini per ogni donna nel 1995 a un rapporto quasi paritario oggi, creando le premesse per la formazione di famiglie stabili.

L'istituzione del matrimonio transnazionale ha rappresentato il perno strategico di questa evoluzione, diventando il principale motore non solo della formazione di nuove famiglie, ma anche della mobilità stessa, in particolare per le donne. Uno degli elementi di maggior rilievo di questa indagine è proprio quello di sottolineare che, se fosse ancora necessario, bisogna decostruire il ruolo ancillare della componente femminile nei flussi migratori, anche in quelli di matrice arabo-islamica. L'importanza di questi modelli matrimoniali non può essere compresa appieno senza analizzare il ruolo fondamentale svolto dalle reti di parentela, che operano come un vero e proprio motore per facilitare e sostenere questi processi a livello transnazionale. Queste reti operano a cavallo dei due paesi per facilitare l'incontro tra potenziali coniugi, mobilitando legami preesistenti per creare nuove unioni destinate a stabilirsi in Italia. Nel contesto migratorio, dunque, si delinea una "geografia della parentela" (p. 7) che valica i confini nazionali, trasformandosi in un capitale sociale di importanza strategica. Essa può essere definita come la mappatura dei parenti che costituiscono gli snodi di reti attraverso le quali si accede a informazioni, risorse, elementi di supporto messi a disposizione degli aspiranti migranti (soprattutto delle migranti) per creare personali reti che favoriscano percorsi di mobilità. Decimo insiste molto sull'idea che non si tratti solo di una rete che svolge il ruolo di "agenzia matrimoniale", ma piuttosto di un tessuto connettivo che lega le comunità di origine a quelle di destinazione, rendendo possibile e sostenendo l'intero progetto di riproduzione sociale.

Le pratiche matrimoniali analizzate rivelano una distinzione tra unioni "tradizionali" (combinare dalle famiglie) e "moderne" (frutto di una scelta individuale). Tuttavia, le testimonianze raccolte dimostrano che non si tratta di una dicotomia netta, ma di un continuum di possibilità in cui il coinvolgimento familiare rimane un elemento significativo. In questo senso, pur nel coinvolgimento delle reti familiari, un ruolo lo assumono anche le scelte delle donne: il desiderio di "venire in Europa" e "avere una famiglia" sono due facce della stessa medaglia, un'opportunità di miglioramento socioeconomico e di co-

stituzione di un nucleo familiare autonomo, lontano dalle tradizionali norme patrilocali. La scelta di sposare un uomo emigrato in Italia non rappresenta dunque una passiva accettazione di un destino, ma una strategia attiva per realizzare le proprie aspirazioni personali e familiari. L'intera rete parentale, estesa oltre il nucleo stretto, viene mobilitata per creare connessioni altrimenti impossibili a causa della distanza e non sono infrequenti matrimoni endogamici che permettono di sposare cugini, rafforzando una rete che viene percepita così più sicura e protetta. Il consenso sociale dettato dalla rete familiare continua ad avere un ruolo significativo anche nella costituzione di coppie secondo registri "moderni": quando l'incontro è spontaneo, la relazione deve essere comunque legittimata all'interno della sfera familiare. Le donne che vivono in Italia non riescono mai a troncare i legami familiari e il peso della tradizione è sempre presente, nondimeno il rapporto e i ruoli di genere sono rinegoziati attraverso rimesse e comunicazioni continue in cambio di ambiti di indipendenza. Appare evidente che la solidità della coppia non si costruisce in isolamento ma viene rafforzata all'interno di un tessuto di responsabilità e legami familiari che alimenta la capacità di navigare insieme non solo il nuovo contesto (spesso ostile) ma, in generale, le complessità della vita transnazionale. In tal senso, la nascita dei figli non è un evento posticipato a momenti migliori, ma un passo che consolida e rafforza il progetto migratorio. L'analisi dei percorsi di vita delle persone intervistate mostra una chiara interrelazione temporale tra matrimonio, migrazione e prima nascita, eventi che si verificano spesso in meno di due anni. La nascita del primo figlio avviene in una fase di incertezza, ma serve a contrastare le difficoltà dell'insediamento. In generale, pur nella consapevolezza delle pratiche abortive, le donne sono propense ad accettare con favore anche i figli inattesi (*doni di Allah*, p. 63): le famiglie più numerose rappresentano spesso una "celebrazione" del benessere raggiunto. Queste nascite avvengono tipicamente in una fase di stabilità coniugale ed economica, riflettendo un consapevole scostamento dal modello a bassa natalità italiano. Per queste coppie, i figli non sono un peso, ma la principale fonte di ricchezza. La loro scelta è un'affermazione deliberata di un modello familiare diverso da quello italiano.

Le ripercussioni sui luoghi di arrivo, pertanto, si giocano sulle dinamiche di fertilità che portano alla nascita dei "figli della migrazione" (p. 59). Diventa dunque di grande attualità il tema dell'impatto di queste scelte riproduttive sulla demografia italiana in una stagione politica in cui vengono pericolosamente riesumati termini come "sostituzione etnica" e vengono lanciati periodici al-

larmi sul crollo del tasso di fertilità. Si conferma il ruolo di sostegno che, in generale, le comunità migranti hanno avuto negli ultimi decenni per mantenere stabile la popolazione complessiva in Italia, grazie ad altri tassi di natalità, in forte contrasto con quelli degli autoctoni. In linea generale, bisogna ricordare che le scelte riproduttive delle comunità migranti nel medio e lungo periodo sono di un progressivo adeguamento agli standard di natalità del paese di arrivo, ma le comunità marocchine non sembrano adeguarsi a questa tendenza: Tra le comunità non europee, quella marocchina registra il numero più alto di nascite con almeno un genitore straniero, superate da quelle bangladesi e nigeriane come numero di nascite da entrambi i genitori stranieri.

Le linee di accesso in Italia per motivi di lavoro sono ormai una quota minima per le comunità straniere, per parecchio tempo anche i decreti flussi sono stati interrotti: pertanto in Italia si arriva prevalentemente attraverso gli accidentati e drammatici percorsi emergenziali oppure attraverso ricongiungimento familiare. La migrazione marocchina, pur non essendo del tutto esente da percorsi di accesso illegali, dimostra la maturità del suo percorso proprio trasformandosi da un fenomeno prevalentemente lavorativo a una migrazione di popolamento. E in questo processo la partecipazione femminile assume un ruolo chiave. A fronte di questo assetto demografico, impossibile non stabilire una relazione con le restrittive politiche italiane di cittadinanza per evidenziare le tensioni tra la società reale e la nazione “immaginata”. L’Italia, nonostante il processo di trasformazione demografica che la attraversa da cinquant’anni, è bloccata a un sistema di accesso alla cittadinanza (Legge 91 del 1992) fondata sullo *ius sanguinis*, una eredità della storia di emigrazione. Una scelta che inchioda i figli degli immigrati allo status di stranieri nonostante siano nati e cresciuti nel paese, costringendoli tra il diciottesimo e il diciannovesimo anno di vita a richiedere esplicitamente l’accesso alla cittadinanza, pena l’esclusione scaduti i tempi. Questo taglia fuori, di fatto, intere generazioni dal corpo nazionale, generando una profonda frattura sociale e politica. La crescente divergenza tra la società formale e quella di fatto pone urgenti interrogativi sulla coesione sociale e sui meccanismi di inclusione. Le “vite in movimento” delle famiglie marocchine in Italia, in sintesi, non solo raccontano storie di resilienza, ma pongono anche una sfida fondamentale al futuro del paese.

Fabio Amato, Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”

Carlos Lopes, *The Self-Deception Trap. Exploring the Economic Dimensions of Charity Dependency within Africa-Europe Relations*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, 252 pp., ISBN 9783031575907

The author, Carlos Lopes, is a Professor at the Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Since 2013, he has collaborated with the African Union and contributed to the process that led to the drafting of the AU Agenda 2063. In 2018, he was appointed High Representative of the African Union Commission, with the mandate to lead the AU in negotiations defining post-2020 trade relations between the European Union and the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries.

The book stems from this professional experience, which the author undertakes with an ambitious, though ultimately unfulfilled, objective: to foster a structural partnership between Africa and Europe, moving away from the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific framework envisioned by the Post-Cotonou Agreement. For the author, Africa's inclusion within the group of ACP countries represents a disadvantage that penalizes African states in several respects. For instance, trade agreements are not aligned with the African Union's Agenda 2063, launched in 2015 to promote the continent's economic development. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), one of the key initiatives of Agenda 2063, has been undermined in its implementation by the proliferation of the various trade agreements that Europe has negotiated individually with African states. These bilateral arrangements preclude the possibility of adopting a unified, continent-to-continent perspective. Lopes calls for a renewed role of the African Union as a direct interlocutor to the European Union so to re-shape a partnership that could serve Africa's collective aspirations.

From the outset, Lopes' book conveys a profound sense of frustration, stemming from the failure to overcome the European Commission's resistance to the African Union's attempt to propose a more balanced model of negotiation with Europe. Chapter 8 (*The Free Trade Fantasy*) offers a detailed account of the history of trade relations between Europe and Africa, tracing developments from the Lomé Convention onwards and providing concrete examples. In the sugar sector, for instance, protocols designed to guarantee African sugar access to European markets were repeatedly revised in accordance with European Union pricing policies. This framework, characterized by non-reciprocal preferential trade, disadvantaged ACP countries and reinforced their economic vulnerability.

The subsequent Cotonou Agreement formally represented a step forward, departing from the non-reciprocity principle of the Lomé Convention. Nevertheless, the Convention's principle of differentiating countries according to their level of development meant that the least developed countries continued to receive non-reciprocal trade preferences, including fiscal benefits for accessing all European markets. Conversely, European countries were granted trade protocols limited to specific commodities, particularly minerals and tropical timber. When this asymmetrical relationship was challenged by the World Trade Organization, which objected that African trade preferences were detrimental to other Southern countries such as the Philippines, fragile African economies faced the added risk of losing duty-free access to European markets.

Lopes openly argues that the EU's historic extraction of mineral resources from Africa has contributed to the continent's structural underdevelopment. This remains true today, as evidenced by the enduring asymmetries of power that characterize relations between the two continents, particularly in trade, finance, knowledge production, and conditional aid.

Africa, Lopes seems to assert emphatically, is not only still bound by colonial legacies but is also embedded in a dynamic of political and cultural reproduction of neo-colonial practices, which seek to control the development trajectories of African countries. This is achieved through the age-old strategy of "divide and rule" which has consistently prevented the African Union from establishing a unified and strong political voice in negotiations with the wider world.

The theme of neo-colonialism runs throughout Lopes' text and serves as the central thread of his argument. It should be noted that there has been a noticeable resurgence of colonial discourse in Africa in recent years, reflected both in political rhetoric and in the framing of the continent's relations with the rest of the world. This renewed colonial imaginary manifests in subtle but pervasive ways, through persistent narratives portraying Africa as a space of deficiency, crisis, and dependency, and through policies that reproduce hierarchical power relations between Africa and its former colonial powers. Indeed, it is precisely within this neo-colonial framework that Lopes situates the origins of Africa-Europe relations.

To understand the colonial legacies that continue to shape relations between African states and Europe, Lopes suggests revisiting authors such as Amílcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon, who as early as the 1960s demonstrated how the cultural, historical, and linguistic suppression imposed by colonial powers in

Africa served a process of dehumanization of Africans. This dehumanization, in turn, helped to justify atrocities committed under the guise of a civilizing mission, including land confiscation, slavery, and genocide.

A narrative of open racism toward the African continent, disparaging and reductionist, persists to this day, as discussed in Chapter 2, iconically titled *Empires of the Mind*. The chapter opens with a shocking and almost unbelievable quote from the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, who, in a speech delivered in 2022 to the new generation of European diplomats, likened Europe to a garden and the rest of the world to a jungle. This garden-jungle analogy could have been drawn in the 19th century, or even earlier, when the inner regions of Central Africa were unknown to European explorers and marked with the exotic inscription *hic sunt leones* (here be lions) to denote unexplored and dangerous territories. Yet, Borrell's statement was made only a few years ago and was contextualized as a warning to young diplomats to prevent the "jungle" from encroaching on the "garden," with clear implications for migration policies.

Regarding migration, Lopes observes in Chapter 7 that, contrary to the common perception of Africa as a continent experiencing mass exodus toward wealthy Europe, data show that none of the ten countries with the highest number of departing migrants are African. Only 14% of the world's migrant population originates from African countries, 70% of whom remain within the continent. Moreover, what Lopes terms the "mass hysteria around migration" (p. 137) tends to obscure the central role that migrants play in the economic growth of both destination countries and countries of origin, through the migration-development nexus highlighted by the World Bank as early as 2003. Paradoxically, the alledged mass exodus toward the European "garden" coexists with the continent's growing economic and political assertiveness, generating a tension between Africa's struggle for epistemic and economic sovereignty and the persistence of Eurocentric modes of representation and governance.

In this context, European development aid to Africa plays a central role in perpetuating dependency and hindering structural transformation. Lopes devotes several chapters to the subject of development aid, tracing its history as one marked by both vertical and horizontal asymmetries, imbalances between donor and recipient countries, as well as within recipient countries themselves. Development aid, Lopes notes, citing former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, must be considered "tried and failed" (p. 39), as it more often acts as a disincentive to development.

In this regard, Lopes' perspective aligns with a broader African critique of development aid, which is seen as reinforcing structural subordination, weakening domestic initiative, empowering elites and external actors over local accountability, and framing Africa as perpetually needy, thus reproducing colonial paternalism. Notable proponents of this critique include Dambisa Moyo (2009) and, earlier, Ali Mazrui (1980).

Lopes further argues that the prevailing narratives and institutions governing Africa-Europe relations have fallen into what he terms a "self-deception trap." This trap is characterized by the dominance of charity and aid dependency in the relationship, resulting in Africa remaining marginal in the global economy despite decades of aid, trade agreements, and international cooperation. It stems from European actors' preference for providing aid, a form of charity according to Lopes, rather than fostering genuine economic transformation and development in Africa. Simultaneously, African leaders compete for aid in ways that perpetuate dependency rather than autonomy. This dynamic reinforces stigmatized narratives about Africa: its poverty rather than its richness, its incapacity rather than its potential, and its passivity rather than its agency in effecting structural change.

Several influential scholars at the turn of the century explicitly framed persistent development gaps as "traps". These are self-reinforcing mechanisms that render inequalities enduring but potentially addressable through policy interventions and external aid. Perhaps the most notable of these is Jeffrey Sachs (2005), whose work underpinned the United Nations' Millennium Development Project. Sachs argues that poor African countries remain trapped in poverty due to deficits in health, education, infrastructure, and markets, and that breaking the trap requires a "big push" through external investment and aid.

To Lopes, who does not explicitly engage with the mainstream poverty trap literature (Sachs 2005; Collier 2007; Acemoglu & Robinson 2012), the poverty trap in which the African continent finds itself is *self-deceptive*, as both Europe and Africa are caught in a mutual illusion. Europe's deception lies in equating charity and development assistance with generosity or moral responsibility, whereas African leaders are deceived into accepting aid as pragmatic or unavoidable. In reality, Lopes contends, this "self-deception trap" allows the status quo to persist, masking structural inequalities behind rhetoric of partnership and solidarity.

How can the trap described by Lopes be overcome? In this regard, the text

is less exhaustive and convincing. Lopes calls for greater control by African states over their own policies, emphasizing the exercise of agency in setting priorities, building capacities, and ensuring that ownership of development processes rests firmly with them. The author conveys a strong conviction that the African Union can play a decisive role in redefining power relations with the European Union and other global actors, particularly in light of its recent success in securing permanent membership in the G20, which underscores Africa's rising strategic importance on the global stage.

Several global policies need to be reframed in a more equitable manner, including trade and migration, to name but a few. However, to achieve genuine structural reform, reconsidering comparative advantages, rethinking aid paradigms that move beyond mere charity, and renegotiating trade agreements, African countries must act in concert under the leadership of the African Union.

The Self-Deception Trap is an interesting book because it offers an alternative vision to the current post-Cotonou partnership agreement. At present, the African Union does not yet possess the institutional mechanisms required to articulate a unified position that truly represents all its member states. Therefore, the path envisioned by Lopes remains long and arduous, but it is likely the only viable one for rebalancing relations with the European Union and other major international players.

Valeria Saggiomo, Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"

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Ben Jackson, *The Africa Cup of Nations. The History of an Underappreciated Tournament*, Chichester, Pitch Publishing, 2024, 320 pp., ISBN 1801506604

Il volume *The Africa Cup of Nations. The History of an Underappreciated Tournament*, primo libro di Ben Jackson – giornalista e laureato in African Studies presso la SOAS di Londra – rappresenta un contributo utile per approfondire una competizione che, nel contesto africano, assume un significato che va ben oltre la dimensione meramente sportiva. L'obiettivo dichiarato dell'autore è quello di contribuire alla valorizzazione storica della Coppa d'Africa, una manifestazione che non si conforma ai canoni dominanti del calcio globale e che può aiutare un pubblico generalista a comprendere come “non esistano due paesi del continente africano uguali e come il calcio, in diversi modi, rifletta questa pluralità” (pp. 9-10).

A seguito di un'Introduzione in cui riflessioni di carattere personale si intrecciano con un inquadramento della storia recente del torneo, Jackson struttura il volume in undici capitoli nei quali eventi sportivi e snodi politico-istituzionali della storia africana vengono costantemente messi in relazione. Il primo capitolo, significativamente intitolato *The First AFCON* (Africa Cup of Nations), consente di comprendere il processo di costruzione della competizione nel contesto del primo ciclo di decolonizzazione. La prima edizione del 1957 si colloca infatti all'interno di un momento di profonda trasformazione politica, segnato dalla nascita della Confederation of African Football (CAF) a Khartoum nel 1956, fondata da Sudan, Etiopia, Egitto e Sudafrica. La CAF rappresentò la prima istituzione – seppur sportiva – con l'ambizione di rappresentare l'intero continente africano, ma fu fin da subito attraversata da tensioni politiche, come dimostrano la successiva esclusione del Sudafrica a causa delle politiche segregazioniste del National Party e lo spostamento della sede della prima Coppa d'Africa dall'Egitto al Sudan in seguito alla crisi di Suez (pp. 13-14).

Nel corso del volume, la ricostruzione degli eventi storici e politici è intervallata dalla cronaca delle partite più rilevanti, scelta narrativa che consente al lettore di familiarizzare con figure di calciatori che, oltre al ruolo sportivo, hanno assunto una funzione simbolica nei processi di costruzione delle identità nazionali. Questa impostazione emerge con particolare chiarezza nel secondo capitolo, dedicato alle *Black Stars* del Ghana, protagonisti dei successi del 1963 e del 1965. Jackson mostra come la nazionale ghanese sia stata utilizzata dal presidente Kwame Nkrumah sia sul piano interno, come strumento di *nation-building*, sia sul piano della politica estera, nel tentativo di sostenere e diffondere la propria agenda panafricanista.

Oltre al caso ghanese, il volume dedica ampio spazio ad altri contesti nazionali, tra cui la Repubblica Democratica del Congo, il Camerun, il Sudafrica, l'Egitto, lo Zambia, la Nigeria, la Costa d'Avorio, l'Algeria e il Senegal. Questi casi studio, pur nella loro eterogeneità, rispondono a una medesima logica narrativa, volta a mostrare come la Coppa d'Africa abbia funzionato come laboratorio politico e simbolico a geometria variabile.

Pur privilegiando alcuni casi studio, l'autore non trascura l'importanza di altre realtà calcistiche emergenti, soffermandosi anche sui percorsi di qualificazione alla competizione. Questo approccio consente di offrire una rappresentazione relativamente ampia del panorama calcistico africano e di suggerire la pervasività di una passione che, nel continente, assume una valenza storica, sociale e culturale di primo piano, trovando nella Coppa d'Africa la sua massima espressione.

Dal punto di vista dell'interesse storico-politico, il volume mette in luce in modo efficace la stretta relazione tra calcio e potere in Africa. Ne sono esempi il rapporto tra Mobutu Sese Seko e la selezione nazionale congolese negli anni Settanta, accompagnato da consistenti investimenti statali nel settore calcistico, così come il legame tra Kenneth Kaunda e la nazionale zambiana, nota come "KK11" prima di assumere il nome di *Chipolopolo* (pp. 140-141). Particolarmente significativa è anche la ricostruzione della vicinanza del presidente sudafricano Nelson Mandela alla nazionale dei *Bafana Bafana* nell'edizione del 1996, ospitata e vinta dal Sudafrica, evento che segnò un passaggio simbolico importante nel processo di riconciliazione post-apartheid. Un'edizione segnata tuttavia anche dall'assenza della Nigeria, dovuta alla crisi diplomatica con Pretoria seguita all'esecuzione di nove attivisti nigeriani, tra cui Ken Saro-Wiwa (pp. 83-84).

Non meno rilevanti sono il racconto dell'attentato contro la nazionale del Togo durante l'edizione del 2010 in Angola, quando il pullman della squadra fu attaccato da ribelli nella regione di Cabinda (p. 131), inserito all'interno della narrazione dedicata all'Egitto – unica nazionale ad aver vinto tre Coppe d'Africa consecutive – e l'analisi dei tentativi della selezione ivoriana di contribuire al processo di pacificazione nazionale negli anni del conflitto civile (p. 203). Attraverso questi esempi, Jackson evidenzia come la Coppa d'Africa abbia spesso rappresentato uno spazio di condensazione di tensioni politiche e sociali ben più ampie rispetto al terreno di gioco.

Sotto il profilo metodologico e stilistico, *The Africa Cup of Nations* si configura come un lavoro di taglio prevalentemente divulgativo, nel quale l'esperienza giornalistica dell'autore e l'impianto narrativo prevalgono su una costru-

zione analitica di tipo accademico. L'intreccio costante tra cronaca sportiva, contesto politico e osservazioni personali rende il volume scorrevole e accessibile, ma al tempo stesso limita la problematizzazione teorica e il confronto sistematico con le fonti e con il dibattito storiografico. In particolare, categorie analitiche centrali per la storiografia sullo sport in Africa – quali il nazionalismo, la costruzione della memoria collettiva, le forme di *soft power* o la *governance* calcistica transnazionale – restano perlopiù implicite, affidate alla forza evocativa del racconto più che a un'esplicita elaborazione concettuale.

Il libro si rivolge dunque principalmente a un pubblico ampio e non specialistico, interessato a cogliere il significato storico e politico della Coppa d'Africa senza il filtro di un apparato concettuale complesso.

Il volume di Jackson si colloca in un ambito di studi ormai consolidato che ha indagato il ruolo del calcio nel continente africano come fenomeno storico, sociale e politico, ma lo fa adottando una prospettiva e un registro nettamente distinti rispetto ai principali contributi accademici sul tema. Laddove lavori come quelli di Paul Dietschy (2008), Peter Alegi (2010) e Paul Darby (2002) si fondano su un impianto analitico strutturato, su un uso sistematico delle fonti e su un confronto esplicito con il dibattito storiografico e teorico, Jackson privilegia una narrazione di taglio giornalistico, centrata su episodi, figure emblematiche e snodi simbolici della storia della Coppa d'Africa. In questo senso, *The Africa Cup of Nations* non introduce categorie interpretative nuove né si propone di intervenire direttamente nel dibattito scientifico, ma si distingue per la capacità di rendere accessibili a un pubblico più ampio temi e dinamiche che la letteratura accademica ha affrontato in modo più analitico. Il volume si pone dunque in una posizione complementare rispetto a questi studi, fungendo da ponte tra la ricerca specialistica e una narrazione divulgativa colta, piuttosto che come un contributo originale sul piano storiografico. Proprio in questa capacità di restituire la complessità storica e politica di un torneo a lungo marginalizzato dallo sguardo eurocentrico sul calcio globale risiede il principale merito del lavoro di Jackson.

Matteo Cardia, Università di Cagliari

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